



The Under-Management Epidemic

Are you part of the under management epidemic, or are you a truly engaged manager?

You may think you're a good boss, but a recent survey reports 9 out of 10 managers are providing insufficient oversight—a problem that consultant Bruce Tulgan calls the “under-management epidemic.”

Ten years ago, research from Rainmaker Thinking, Inc., confirmed an epidemic of workplace under-management. The firm's ongoing study reveals that under-managing remains rampant. A full 90% of all leaders and managers do not provide direct reports with sufficient guidance, support and coaching.

Under-managing occurs when leaders with supervisory authority fail to regularly and consistently provide employees with five vital management basics:

1. Clear statements of broad performance requirements and specific expectations
2. Support and guidance regarding resources necessary to meet requirements and expectations
3. Accurate monitoring, measurement and documentation of individuals' actual performance
4. Regular candid feedback about actual performance
5. Rewards and penalties distributed in proportion to actual performance

What makes the problem worse is that most managers are unaware of their deficient administration:

- Fifty percent think they're doing an “excellent” or “very good” job of managing direct reports.
- Twenty percent believe they're doing a “reasonably good” job.
- Only 10% provide the necessary management basics at least once a week.
- Only 20% provide all of the basics at least once every two weeks.
- Only 30% provide all management basics at least once a month.

A Message from Nancy...

I have a couple of questions to ask you:

1. Is your business as successful as you think it should be?
2. Are you and your team able to pinpoint the solutions necessary to create positive changes to get where you need to go?



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- Nearly 50% fail to provide all of the management basics to every direct report even once a year.

Costs and Causes

Research from numerous sources continues to highlight the importance of employees' relationships with their immediate supervisors. Under-management is the common denominator in most cases of poor workplace performance:

The key factor affecting employee engagement was and remains the relationship employees have with their immediate supervisors. That's why we had been asking a different question of business leaders: "Are your MANAGERS 'engaged' or not?"

~ The Under-Management Epidemic Report 2014:
...Ten Years Later

The costs and lost opportunities caused by insufficient management are incalculably high and have remained consistent over the last 10 years. Direct reports are more likely to feel resource-constrained, uninformed and frustrated by team/interdepartmental relationships.

Organizations can ill afford poor management in the post-recession era. Lean and flexible workplaces require finely tuned HR management, as there are simply fewer employees and managers. Yet, employees still rely on their immediate supervisors more than any other individuals for meeting basic needs.

Managers report several reasons for failing to provide consistent management basics (in decreasing order):

1. Lack of time (largely due to nonmanagerial responsibilities and increased spans of control)
2. Lack of sufficient training in the best practices, tools and techniques of effective supervision, management and leadership
3. Lack of sufficient resources and support—a function of increased productivity requirements and tight budgets
4. Constantly changing priorities
5. Logistical constraints (i.e., remote locations, different schedules, language or cultural barriers)

Some managers have gone overboard when providing greater autonomy and empowerment. Perhaps they fear accusations of micromanagement. As the Rainmaker report notes:

We also find another less straightforward set of causes of under-management that are more psychological or philosophical in nature. This is a combination of what we refer to as:

- *"False empowerment thinking" (the belief that managers should refrain from asserting authority by being strictly directive or punitive)*
- *Plus "false nice-guy syndrome" (the belief that being strong is tantamount to being unfriendly or will lead to negative interactions or conflict)*
- *Plus fear of other various potential negative repercussions (such as complaints, bad-mouthing, foot-dragging, sabotage, lawsuits, etc.)*

Some managers say they could be stronger and better engaged, but they choose to avoid doing so, citing one of the aforementioned reasons.

The Cure for Under-Managing

By definition, engaged managers:

- Get the most out of their people
- Foster good relationships
- Meet their goals with fewer problems

Unfortunately, managers spend much of their time handling personnel conflicts and "putting out fires." After crises are averted, there's less time for quality management conversations and effective leadership.

Many of today's leaders operate on autopilot, communicating with direct reports in low-substance conversations, mediocre meetings and too many emails. Consequently, far too many problems go unnoticed and grow more serious—until yet another fire breaks out.

You can cure any under-management problems by holding regular, highly structured, high-substance conversations with each direct report. Commit to covering the five fundamentals of good management:

1. Clear statements of broad performance requirements and specific expectations
2. Support and guidance regarding resources necessary to meet requirements and expectations
3. Accurate monitoring, measurement and documentation of individuals' actual performance
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Energy and Time Drains

Here's how most managers spend their time:

1. **Attending Too Many Mediocre Meetings.** If you're like most managers, your No. 1 time suck is meetings.

- People fill seats and they sit there, waiting for something to come up that falls within their domain. They'd rather be productively working.
 - Meetings seldom foster accountability. It's too easy to hide in a meeting, shirk responsibility, blame others and divert attention.
 - Poor meeting preparation and agenda planning encourage mediocre meetings.
2. **Dealing with a Tidal Wave of Email.** So much of our email is unnecessary, duplicative and sloppy.
 - Train your people to spot the messages on which you should be copied.
 - Make sure they address an email to you directly when critical information is in play.
 - Until you give them guidelines, people will automatically copy you on every message and generate a ton of useless emails.
 - Never forget that a 15-minute, high-substance personal conversation trumps a barrage of emails.
 3. **Touching Base, Checking in and Chatting.** Limit face-to-face conversations to high-substance content. Stay on topic with questions like:
 - What are you doing? How are you doing it? What steps are you taking?
 - Let me see what you've got so far.
 - What's next?
 - How long will that take?
 4. **Interrupting and Being Interrupted.** When something pops into your head, write it down and save it for your next scheduled conversation. You don't like interruptions; the same applies to your staff.
 5. **Reviewing Dashboard Metrics with Employees and Conducting Formal Reviews.** While most reviews are highly structured, they often focus on outcomes—not on what people can actually control. Provide immediate feedback, whenever possible.
- Prepare in advance. Make sure your direct reports prepare, as well.
 - Follow a regular, yet personalized, format for each employee.
 - Start with top priorities, open questions and any work in progress.
 - Consider holding these conversations while standing or walking, as appropriate. Use a clipboard to make notes and maintain your focus.
 - Don't do all the talking. Recognize the value of listening.
 - Don't let anyone go more than two weeks without meeting.

As for high substance, make sure content is immediately relevant and specific to each person/situation. This is where many managers miss the boat. As stated earlier, preplanning is key. Follow these guidelines:

- Regularly remind each person of broad performance standards.
- Turn best practices into standard operating procedures; teach them to everyone.
- Use plans and step-by-step checklists, whenever possible.
- Focus on concrete actions within each employee's control.
- Monitor, measure and document in writing each individual's performance.
- Follow up. Provide regular, candid, coaching-style feedback.
- Follow through with real consequences and rewards based on how performance relates to expectations.

High-structure/-substance conversations provide a clear window into employee problems before they become crises. Engaged managers use this tool to learn what's really going on. Doing so each day, starting with a minimum of 1 hour, will prevent potential challenges from exploding into fires.

Use these conversations to identify and memorialize any negative behaviors. Be sure to:

1. Pinpoint problem language, tones and gestures.
2. Connect behaviors to tangible work outcomes.
3. Reference performance requirements or best practices from which negative behaviors deviate.
4. Suggest replacement behaviors, and have the employee commit to trying them.
5. Continue to follow up in future conversations.

“High Structure”/“Substance”

We've been discussing more effective management conversations: highly structured, high substance conversations. How can we describe how that plays out?

Tulgan advises managers to set aside an hour a day to hold conversations with three to four employees (about 15 minutes per person). Be sure to have a well-organized agenda. Additionally:

Turn Complaints into Action Plans

If people complain during your meetings, ask them to provide solutions to the problems they see. Have them prepare an executive summary that covers key points:

- Here's the issue.
- These are the options.
- This is the option I propose.
- This is why my option is best for the business.
- Here's what it would cost (money, time, people, other resources).
- This is where we could get the resources.
- This is what the plan would look like.
- Here's the role I propose for myself in executing that plan.

This approach teaches employees to focus, troubleshoot solutions and participate in making changes. You'll boost productivity and overall quality almost immediately.

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