



Work in Progress

*Career talk for women*

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## Five Things Great Managers Do Every Day



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When you hear the term inspirational leader, you may get images of someone who's achieved considerable success, or is a brilliant strategist able to amass a personal fortune. Or perhaps you consider someone who gives rousing motivational speeches worthy of a TED talk – an iconoclast who changes the national dialogue. While at first blush we may think of inspiring leaders as those that perform grandiose actions, more than five years of research into what really inspires others has led me to believe the opposite.

What truly inspires people is actually in reach of your average manager in any organization: a personal, authentic, one-on-one connection.

A [study](#) by Dale Carnegie Training revealed that nearly three-quarters of employees are not fully engaged at work. Of those who are, the number one factor that contributes to employee engagement is their relationship with their immediate supervisor. This mirrors what Gallup research has shown for decades – personal relationships matter the most. (In the Carnegie study, belief in senior management and pride in the company also topped the list, which are driven by similar concepts of connection and communication.)

If you want to be a great manager who inspires others to greatness, you don't have to don a new outsized personality or break a mold. You simply have to choose to communicate, connect, and bring your full presence to those you lead.

Here are five strategies that continually come up in my research for how to be a leader others want to follow:

### **Be straightforward.**

Trust is the gatekeeper to connection. A great manager doesn't sugarcoat bad news, evade the facts, or attempt to spin. She respects her employees enough to give them the truth, even if it's not the most palatable thing to hear on a Monday morning. Great managers inspire their team by being authentic, direct, and honest.

Not only does being honest foster trust, it also encourages an open culture that's good for business. According to a [2010 study by the Corporate Executive Board \(CEB\)](#), "firms whose culture encourages open communication outperform peers by more than 270% in terms of long-term (10 year) total shareholder return."

A straightforward style also leads to efficiency, as it decreases rumor and misinterpretation which thwart productivity.

### **Exhibit leadership maturity.**

When you get to a leadership level, you lose your ability to gripe – especially to those at lower levels. You become a representative of the company. The company's policies need to be aligned with your own personal values.

You can't just pay lip service to management decisions but must actually believe the value in what you're proposing. This means being reflective and aligning yourself behind the corporate direction, and finding a way to credibly and honestly represent it.

The opposite – so often on exhibit in companies – is a cancer. If a manager constantly complains about corporate policies, they lose followership and their employees lose hope.

### **Put the right people in the right jobs.**

Writing about the thesis of his bestselling book, *Good to Great*, author Jim Collins [argues](#) that leaders of successful companies differentiate themselves by starting "not with where but with who. They start by getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats."

Gallup research shows that people are happiest and most engaged when they apply their strengths to their job. Instead of changing people to fit the job, great managers try to put the right people in the jobs in which they can perform well.

### **Hold regular, meaningful one-to-ones.**

Most managers know the importance of scheduling regular one-on-ones with direct reports – some companies even require it. Yet, these are often poorly organized, frequently rescheduled, and largely ineffective.

Great managers prioritize their meetings with directs and honor the importance of that time. As Susan Scott says, "the conversation is the relationship." Schedule one-to-ones with your direct reports weekly or biweekly and keep to your established schedule. Have a format to optimize each meeting as I discuss [here](#).

If you use these meetings well, the upfront time investment will more than pay off with increased efficiencies.

### **Actively manage conflict.**

Successful managers don't avoid the issues—they face them, head on.

The reality is that sometimes employees don't work out, projects fail, turf wars launch, and tough decisions have to be made. When you're able to successfully manage during these trying situations, you serve as a role model for your team, thereby inspiring accountability and decision making in your employees.

If you're a manager who hates conflict, figure out how to manage it. Conflict is a constant when people are involved, and it's simply impossible to avoid it without damaging your leadership capability. Employees want a leader who stands up for them, clears a path, and makes it easier to do their jobs. Avoiding conflict is no longer an option.

What have your great managers done to be successful? Comment here or @kristihedges.

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