

# What Great Managers Do

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## Abstract

*What it means to be a great manager differs with varying circumstances as well as changing corporate culture. We review a variety of different management techniques. Great managers should get to know their employees to successfully implement problem solving procedures. Before a procedure is in place, a manager must be sure that the correct problem is found, not just the effects of the problem. A great manager will stop and think before making critical decisions and will stay consistent when it comes to implementing company policy as well as communicating policy clearly among employees and team members. Studies find that good managers are able to analyze and foresee the future impact of their decisions on their company and relevant relations.*

*Great businessmen such as Bill Gates attribute the success of businesses to managers. Joe Hill agrees and says that managers must hold themselves responsible for not just successes but also failures. The ability to fully and clearly communicate a vision to team members and peers is necessary. Many great managing styles are alike but a manager should not be afraid to break company norms to achieve goals. Case studies have shown that the most profitable companies in the world have strong fundamental management techniques as well as innovators and people who are afraid to speak up. The skills to communicate lessons learnt and the ability to stand firm are important characteristics of successful managers. Above all, great managers do the right thing when no one is looking.*

**Keywords:** Great managers, work, success, failure, communication.

## Introduction

When analyzing major corporations and successful businesses, it is clear that strong management plays a crucial role in determining a company's success. Without effective management and successful team and group collaborations, success in today's business environment is nearly impossible. In the following dissertation examples of what great managers do best will be presented and an in depth look at how these managers contribute to the success of corporations will be examined.

Examples of what great managers do best will be presented and the opinions of some of the best and most successful managers in the world will be discussed. Theories and examples of great managers in the eyes of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Ian Bessel, Joe Hill, renowned consultant Marcus Buckingham and many other respected managers will be examined and discussed throughout.

It is evident that the best managers share many of the same qualities and each of them is committed to the long-term success of their respective corporation. Numerous studies will help support the idea that these managers share many of the same qualities and why strong management plays such a key role in organizations. Hundreds of companies have been analyzed to provide readers information on some of the most successful corporations and these studies are aimed to answer the question, what do great managers do best? After reading on, readers will come across major studies done by the Management Research Group, CBS News, Harvard Business Insider and other major news sources and respected journals.

One should be able to have a general idea from this study as to what the best managers share in common and how each of them contributes to the success of their company. Without strong management, a company is nothing and this theory is proved throughout the entire dissertation. What these managers do best is a theme shared throughout today's corporations and corporations of the past. Great managers have been around since the start of corporations and the qualities presented in this dissertation have been around for hundreds of years. A few prominent theories as to what good managers do best that will be portrayed in this dissertation include the ability to self-motivate, the ability to direct a team, being accountable and being decisive. These theories on what managers do best go as far back to the start of huge corporations in the United States.

As a matter of fact Andrew Carnegie is quoted as saying, "People who are unable to motivate themselves must be content with mediocrity, no matter how impressive their other talents." Self-motivation, a key quality shared by great managers will be discussed in this dissertation. The history of what great managers do best can be seen in any successful corporation since the beginning of business and the examples of what great managers do best will be discussed and thoroughly examined.

The theory that all great managers share the same qualities will be looked at and examples will be provided to show that these qualities, shared between all great managers, are in fact crucial to a company's success. It cannot be stated enough, all great managers share similar qualities and stances on how

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to manage successfully and regardless of field of business or management style, these qualities are crucial to a company's success.

### Review of Literature

The key to managing issues effectively is to recognize the problem, not just the implications of the problem – which can prove to be an exceedingly difficult task<sup>2</sup>. When a problem is found and change is needed, there will be resistance. Gerald Blair<sup>2</sup> has found several techniques and characteristics a manager must provide to allow for effectively solving problems. A great manager must have a vision – an idea of what the foreseeable future should be. A manager should communicate the vision he/she has for the future to employees. When a manager effectively communicates the vision he/she sees, the whole team will begin to share that vision, leading to a more productive and exiting workplace<sup>2</sup>.

A vision should have no time limit, it should be a goal; the company is constantly working toward fulfilling. If you, as a manager, do not act among the vision, your employees may not respect you as a leader and your vision will be much less meaningful. Once the vision for future success is concrete, a mission should be identified. According to Blair, a mission has two important qualities: 1) It should be tough but achievable given sufficient effort and 2) It must be possible to tell when it has been achieved<sup>2</sup>. The scope of a vision depends on your position in the company, although there should be a time limit so that people will be able to gauge their progress and continually move onward to complete the mission.

A good timeline for a new manager is about one to two years while a higher-level manager may have goals set as long as twenty-five years<sup>2</sup>. Although timelines may vary in different situations, employees should all be moving along parallel paths toward the end goal. Great managers need to get to know their employees so they can properly organize and enable them to meet goals<sup>3</sup>.

To be able to plan effectively for the future, a great manager must have pre-science, or fore-knowledge of the future<sup>2</sup>. To gain knowledge about the future, access to a variety of information is vital. Surveys of decision making in companies reveal that rapid and decisive decisions usually do not come from intuitive leadership but rather from established information covering relevant data<sup>2</sup>. Managers can gain valuable information from a variety of resources including company databases, team members, employees and other managers. The idea is once a manager gathers information, he/she will be able to process it and be aware of its implications and/or consequences<sup>2</sup>.

A great manager must be flexible enough to realize that every employee and situation is unique and there are a multitude of strategies to deal with different situations. The environment is continually changing around a manager and

he/she must adapt with it because solutions that worked in the past do not necessarily work in the future<sup>2</sup>. Even if the established response seems like it may work, you may want to try something different.<sup>3,4</sup>

Before a manager plans any approach, he/she should stop and think about it and once the manager has the plan in place he/she should stop and think about if it is working. As with managing different situations, a great manager finds various techniques in managing progress.<sup>2</sup> Many approaches will not be perfect when analyzing a situation but a great manager will be able to improve upon approaches and choose the approach that fits best. If everyone in the group has a chance to participate in the decision-making process, it is much more likely that a useful decision will come about. If everyone in the group is included, group member's minds are likely to focus on the project at hand and the success of that project<sup>2</sup>.

It does not take a loud and flamboyant manager to be a great manager which is a common misconception. In any company, you will find some quiet, modest and relatable people who are great managers<sup>2</sup>. Great managers are the ones who challenge company norms and who are prepared to lead a team toward a vision. Great managers are the ones who stop to recognize problems and seize the opportunities to solve them – shamelessly setting out to solve problems and work toward team goals<sup>2</sup>.

Buckingham<sup>3,4</sup> takes a different approach to effective management. "There is one quality that sets truly great managers apart from the rest: they discover what is unique about each person then capitalize on it". Great managers know individual characteristics of their employees and coordinate employees accordingly – differing from great leaders who find what is universal. Leaders need to clean cut differences between people and find out what strategy fits them all while managers need to know what their employee's strengths and weaknesses are. Although managers should get to know the strengths and weaknesses of employees, the focus should be on strengths. Great managers focus on strengths because it reinforces self-assurance which motivates employees to overcome weaknesses and challenges to come.<sup>3,4</sup>

If an employee fails, always attribute that failure to a lack of effort, even if it is only partly true. This will motivate the employee to overcome challenges in the future.<sup>3,4</sup> Another option for overcoming weakness is to give the struggling employee a team member that will excel in parts where the other is weak. Giving employees a team member is a very underrated yet effective strategy. If employees do not react well to team members, another option is to insert into the employee's world, a technique that helps accomplish through discipline what the person cannot accomplish through instinct.<sup>3,4</sup> If all strategies prove unsuccessful, rearranging the employees working world in order to make the employee's weaknesses irrelevant may be another

option. That is, find a position where the struggling employee will succeed.<sup>3,4</sup>

Marcus Buckingham<sup>3,4</sup> further explains how great managers get their fellow employees and co-workers to perform beyond expectations and over achieve. He stated that the role of a manager is very catalytic and internally focused. The main goal of a manager is to turn one person's talent into performance. Key questions that have been undervalued for quite some time that are essential for managers to interpret are: "What is this person's unique style of learning? And what must I as a manager do to get the best effort and performance out of this person?" An analogy used for good managers and great managers is good managers play checkers while great managers play chess.

What Buckingham is explaining is that in checkers all pieces move the same, or good managers view all employees the same and do not value unique or special abilities in the work place whereas great managers view their employees as chess pieces that all move differently and can help the company out in different individual ways. Another difference brought up between a good and great manager is a great manager speeds up the reaction between the talent of people and the goals of the company. When a specific role is not valued, reactions are slowed down. The qualities of the managers of a company are a large indication on where the company is going in the foreseeable future.

While Marcus Buckingham believes that in order to be a great manager one must "discover what is unique about each person and capitalize on it"<sup>8</sup> and Jill Geisler who is the author of "Work Happy: What Great Bosses Know, believes a good manager possesses "strategic thinking, emotional intelligence and a passion for helping people do their best work, even in the face of diminished resources". There are many differentiated opinions on characteristics that make a great manager. Countless magazine and newspaper articles, books and research papers have been written on favorable attributes of great managers, specifically, Richard Libin's<sup>12</sup> article titled "How Great Managers Do It".

Libin<sup>12</sup> believes a great manager possesses accountability, consistency, communication and comprehension. These four keystone traits formulate the ideal manager. A fitting manager takes accountability when it comes to company operations, whether positive or negative. Managers also utilize accountability to reward and measure performance.

Furthermore, great managers possess consistent behavioral practices. Managers must be consistent with every employee in terms of how they are rewarded and punished for work behavior. Managers must also be consistent when it comes to implementing company policy and not deviate from traditional work practices. According to Libin<sup>12</sup>, optimal managers must also possess good communication skills. Ideally, these managers execute successful communication by being direct, clear, concise and easily understood.

Libin<sup>12</sup> believes a great manager should dedicate 30 minutes each day to a meeting to communicate information on the previous day's performance and results and to identify open issues. Lastly, Libin's<sup>12</sup> final characteristic that efficient managers possess is comprehension. Employees learn in the work environment through hearing, seeing and experiencing. It is up to a manager to establish a high sense of understanding when communicating with employees. Managers can do this by explaining ideas, modeling the behavior and coaching employees in the workplace. Although many experts have differentiated opinions on what it takes to be a great manager, most agree that collaboration and communication between employees and managers are essential for an ideal workplace.

Furthermore, all great managers are good leaders and being a good leader and the skillset that comes with it, is an intangible part of becoming an effective manager. A study of 420 mid to large size companies, done by Management Research Group ([www.mrg.com](http://www.mrg.com))<sup>14</sup>, came up with the factors that characterize exceptional leadership. More than 350 CEOs and 755 vice-presidents participated. They completed self-assessments and were also evaluated by their bosses, peers and direct reports.

This study came up with the key traits that good managers possess and it ranked them in order of importance. The study proclaimed that the trait most important and shared by all good managers, is the ability to analyze the future impact of their decisions and understand the impact of these decisions throughout the organization. Many other traits were examined and portrayed such as the manager's ability to challenge the perceptions and mandates of superiors, use effective persuasion to build commitment to their ideas and initiatives and to maintain a respectful distance from others.

The MRG<sup>14</sup> study gathered information and resources from some of the world's top firms and companies and came to the conclusion that all great managers, regardless of field of expertise or area of business, share many of the same qualities. According to the MRG<sup>14</sup> study, all managers are comfortable being the one in charge and seek out opportunities to be influential; they know and accept the fact they will be under constant scrutiny. This theory and trait is also supported by a renowned consultant in the business world, Marcus Buckingham<sup>3,4</sup> who wrote a piece for the Harvard business insider claiming that managers must be willing to take responsibility and be comfortable taking charge in nearly every situation. Buckingham's<sup>3,4</sup> thoughts about a great manager are in accordance to those very same traits portrayed in great managers in the MRG study.

Much like the CBS study listed above, Bill Gates<sup>7</sup> formulated his own ten qualities that are shared by the best managers. Bill strongly believes that the best managers are those managers who hire carefully and fire willingly. According to Bill<sup>7</sup>, it is the manager's team that will make or break him, so the hiring process is critical and a manager

must be willing to fire if the job is not being completed. Bill also believes that creating a productive environment for the team is a must. Bill<sup>7</sup> is quoted as saying, “When I was building Microsoft, I set out to create an environment where software developers could thrive. I wanted a company where engineers liked to work. I wanted to create a culture that encouraged them to work together, share ideas and remain highly motivated. If I hadn't been a software engineer myself, there's no way I could have achieved my goal. As the company grew, we developed supportive cultures in our international operations and in sales and marketing, too.”

Bill<sup>7</sup> is very keen on teamwork and he believes that it is the management teams that allow Microsoft to thrive. According to Bill<sup>7</sup>, defining success and setting clear and attainable goals was also essential in creating a successful work environment. “At my company, in addition to regular team meetings and one-on-one sessions between managers and employees, we use mass gatherings periodically and e-mail routinely to communicate what we expect from employees.” This email, sent by Gates, shows how communication to management teams and employees clearly stated goals and expectations to be achieved. Other management traits deemed important by Gates include building morale, taking on responsibility and being decisive. In the dissertation, Gates is also quoted as saying, “People hate indecisive leadership, so you have to make choices. However, that doesn't mean you have to decide everything the moment it comes to your attention. Nor that you can't ever reconsider a decision.”

Bill Gates<sup>7</sup> acknowledges that these are not the only things that good managers do best, but they are certainly a start to making a successful and lasting management team. Much like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs shared a similar emphasis on teamwork while he was running the most profitable company in the world, Apple. According to Walter Isaacson<sup>10</sup>, Jobs would take his top 100 employees on a retreat each year and he would question them on where the future of Apple was headed. Jobs proved that a long run company focus and teamwork were essential in maintaining a profitable company. Jobs also believed that all great managers must be focused and ask themselves where they want their company to be in ten years. Jobs, much like Gates believed that the best managers were focused on the future and were able to make key decisions when it came down to it.<sup>10</sup>

Similar to Bill Gates, in Joe Hills “strategies of successful managers” article, he discusses 10 strategies that lead to being successful in the management world. The first way is for a manager to believe that he/she is responsible for the company's successes or failures. The second way Hill suggests is for managers to lower their expectations of others. The thought behind this is that by lowering expectations of others, managers will have a greater tolerance level for mistakes, which will then lead to more pleased employees. Motivation is Hills third key ingredient

in the goal of success as a manager. There are number of ways for a manager to motivate his/her employees. Motivation is key for better performance and is based on job satisfaction, recognition, personal goals and achievement.<sup>1</sup> The fourth way to be successful based on Hill's studies is to help the employees achieve their goals and dreams.

In the book “The Goal”, Alex Rogo is a perfect example of this. Alex Rogo is the manager of a Unico plant that only has three months to improve its operations before shutting down. Alex, after hours of dedicated research in his plant determines what the goal of the plant is. He then meets with his employees and resolves the problem just in time to save the plant and all the jobs of his employees. Successful managers do not allow employees to be lazy or idle. Hill suggests here that laziness of an employee can be triggered by a lack of relationship with their supervisor. According to research done by AGH University of Science and Technology, with a solid relationship between workers and employees, trust will be increased along with the employee's commitment and productivity<sup>11</sup>. Hill found in a small study that “94% of all groups having a motivational speaker on a regular basis increase production and motivation for a period of about three months”.

## Discussion

Great managers need to be able to implement a broad array of techniques in order to effectively manage problems, people and varying situations. A successful manager must find the problem before being able to solve it which may prove to be the most difficult part of effectively managing a problem. According to Blair, a vision is a key part of being a great manager – not just the vision but being able to communicate that vision to employees. Once a vision is set in, a mission must follow. Being able to effectively implement, the mission depends on the manager's knowledge of group members. A great manager will sort out group members depending on skills and capabilities and then will place group members where most efficient. A manager should not forget to stop and think before taking action; thereby making sure the correct action is taken.

Furthermore, great managers must identify employee strengths and weaknesses. A manager must discover things that are unique about a person and capitalize on them. A great leader differs from a manager in that great leaders find things that are universal which is not as effective as a managing technique. Finding a partner for an employee may prove to be a successful way to get rid of employee weaknesses – good partners will excel at the others weakness. A last technique may be to remove the employee from his/her current position to a position where his/her skills match job demands. A great manager will be able to recognize employee fit before assigning tasks.

The findings from relevant literature indicate that great managers are not all alike, some are introverts, some are extroverts and some follow the typical manager stereotype

while others deviate from traditional managerial behavior. Richard Libin's<sup>12</sup> understanding on what makes a great manager is based on the four cornerstones of accountability, consistency, communication and comprehension – four characteristics that exceptional managers possess. Managers need be accountable and take responsibility for company performance and results whether good or bad. Managers need be consistent with company rules and methods to ensure optimal performance. Managers need be communicative throughout the hierarchy of the work place and listen to employee's opinions and thoughts to ensure collaboration and cohesion amongst managers and employees. Managers need be comprehensible in their behavior to employees. Being easily understood and exhibiting model behavior in the workplace is essential for ideal managerial behavior and healthy employer-employee relationships.

In order to become a successful manager of a company, the relationships that the employer has with their employees must be strong. The manager is required to take full responsibilities over what is being done at the company whether it is effective or not. Managers must be able to work together with employees to set and meet goals. Great managers need to let their employees know that their hard work is acknowledged and appreciated.

### Implications/analysis

- Tracy Wilson, a manager in a small restaurant called Tabla, has had success when implementing techniques similar to Gerard Blair's. Wilson is known for her ability to unite teams while providing exceptional services<sup>19</sup>. Wilson believes that, "Good managers make serving their staff a No. 1 priority"<sup>19</sup>. Getting to know her staff is important to Wilson, as well as providing training and tools needed for them to succeed. These techniques allowed Wilson to improve sales by 20% in a short time, up to nearly 8 million. Wilson had a vision for Tabla, a vision of success that she transferred to her employees.
- Many managers find success when implementing strategies similar to Buckingham's. Ed Berkle, a worker moving his way up through the restaurants of Disney, has implemented these strategies. Ed believes in the 'right fit talent', recognizing team member talents and placing them in the correct positions for them to succeed<sup>19</sup>. Berkle and his team members have improved check averages by 10% while managing to cut prices. Berkle, agreeing with Buckingham, believes you have to slow down and think about issues before implementing a solution<sup>19</sup>.
- Currently, in the real world there are numerous managers exhibiting great managerial behavior in the workplace. As a result, these managers are the owners of very successful companies which is a direct result of their hard work and proper managerial behavior. For example, according to Fisher<sup>6</sup>, a manager currently exhibiting a high sense of communication and comprehension is Brenda Barnes, CEO of Sara Lee. She

firmly believes a key leadership lesson is to listen to your employees and what they have to say. Currently, Barnes is exemplifying proper communication and comprehensibility with her employees. Brenda Barnes is bringing change to Sara Lee and direct interaction and communication, with her employees, will serve her well in the long run.

Another real-world example of a promising manager is Indra Nooyi, CEO of PepsiCo. Unlike Brenda Barnes, Indra possesses more of an extrovert attitude. As noted by Moore<sup>15</sup>, she is very passionate about globalization, a challenge most managers face. Indra is not the stereotypical CEO. Despite heading a soft drink company, Nooyi wants Pepsi to take on the battle against obesity. Through Indra's unique managerial practices, Pepsi has created more healthy products, strengthened its existing products with more vitamins and antioxidants and provided products with calorie-specific serving sizes to prevent overconsumption. Even though Pepsi is famous for soft drinks and salty snacks, Nooyi still promotes healthy changes to the company. Indra is going against the typical managerial stereotype of her company in order to achieve success.

- Furthermore, a recent case study about the Nobelday living center in Chelmsford shows the impact a positive manager can have on a job site compared to a manager that is not focused on their employees and how they can completely ruin an opportunity. The living center was facing many problems such as vandalism, arson, leaky roofs and parts of living spaces that were simply rotting away. When PMS lease holding management stepped in, everything changed. They set a 5-year rescue plan to turn this place around so it was a habitable place that people were excited to call their home. The way that they did this was by managing a team of workers who made drastic changes to the living center and reported to the managers for tasks that needed to be achieved each day. With specific tasks designated to certain people who excelled in that area of work, PMS was able to give Chelmsford a complete restoration and have satisfied leaseholders living there before their 5-year rescue deadline.

The most profitable companies in the world benefit immensely through strong management. Clearly, without solid fundamental managers, many companies would no longer be competitive. Recently, CBS News interviewed top executives from over 20 different American companies to find out what good managers really do and how they benefit the company. Their findings revealed 10 distinct things that all successful managers do. Rather than formulating a generic, outdated and frankly boring list of management traits, CBS sought to provide a truly relevant and real world example of how managers are successful in today's business environment. The following ten traits listed in the table below are the activities that managers do and are those

deemed most important by the recent study done at CBS News.

1. Managers are able to maintain their cool and sense of humor, especially during a crisis.
2. Managers have the ability to act like a boss but to also behave like a peer.
3. Managers must let their guard down and are able to be themselves outside of work.
4. Managers are able to stand behind and make big bets on people they believe in.
5. Managers should be able to compliment subordinate's weaknesses.
6. Managers should be able to compliment employee's strengths.
7. Managers teach the toughest, most painful lessons they have learned.
8. Great managers do the right thing and above all they do what must be done.
9. Managers must be able to tell subordinates they are shooting themselves in the foot.
10. Above all else managers must be willing to do the right thing at all costs.

CBS found these ten things to be the most critical traits in managers today and those managers who possess these qualities are the ones valued most by successful organizations. It is clear that the case studies presented are incredibly similar because they are all consistent in portraying what the best managers accomplish and how they benefit their respective organizations. However, the miniscule differences in the cases acknowledge the fact that different problems require different solutions. For example, the CBS case study emphasizes that managers have very strong interpersonal skills whereas the International Journal of Electronic Business Management emphasizes this point as well as having trust in manager-subordinate relationships to establish methods of problem solving. Each of the studies emphasized in this dissertation seem to resolve the issue of what managers do best and how their unique qualities impact organizations.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, all great managers share similar qualities and stances on how to manage successfully and regardless of field of business or management style, these qualities are crucial to a company's success. Keys to being a successful manager include changing and adapting to a competitive environment, implementing your own teamwork strategies, maintaining positive relationships with subordinates and all good managers are able to bring out the best in their employees to achieve maximum performance. Recommendations from renowned management experts such as Bill Gates and Steve Jobs include; managers must be willing to compromise with subordinates; great managers must also be positive and be able to motivate employees. Other recommendations for managers include realistic goal

setting and helping achieve those goals through compensation, rewards and positive feedback.

Managers must be decisive and willing to accept responsibility in even the most compromising situations. Other recommendations for being a great manager deemed important by Gates and Jobs is the ability to encourage teamwork and strong interpersonal and communication skills. All great managers are an intangible part of corporations and their presence is crucial to the success of any organization.

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