

THEY'RE MANAGERS ➤ NOW WHAT?

How to Develop
Blue Collar Managers
and Supervisors



BART GRAGG

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and **Supervisors**

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Dedicated to all managers and business owners
looking for a place to start developing their
management and supervision.

I understand your frustration and your care, and
I hope this book helps.

With special thanks...

It's been said that anyone that ever accomplished
anything of significance had a companion just outside
of the limelight. For me, that person is Beth Mermann.

This book would have taken a decade longer to
complete had it not been for her encouragement. Beth's
companionship, wisdom, intellect, probing questions,
and meaningful conversations have been a great
source of inspiration for me.

Thank you, Beth, from the bottom of my heart.

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› PREFACE ‹

I hesitate to use the terms “white collar” and “blue collar” together, as it feels like I am talking about a class system, which, in fact, our society has created. But that has been divisive, and my goal is to reduce the “us-versus-them” factions created by that system. Please trust that when I use those terms, I am merely using them as descriptors for the two types of work we are discussing.

In writing, it is difficult to balance “he” and “she” and “us” and “them.” I use “he” and “she” interchangeably, with no disrespect intended to either gender.

We don’t need a government study to tell us that there are certain things people really want in life, and especially at work. People want:

- Respect and dignity: to not be shamed, to not be made fun of
- To be asked, not told
- To know the reasons why they are being asked to do something
- Encouragement, even when they fail
- Some control over the decisions that affect their work and future

At work, if not in every other area of life, people also want:

- Clarity about what is required of them
- Accountability for themselves as well as their peers and bosses
- The ability to give input on the products, processes, and production they are involved in

These are all concepts that are easy enough to recognize, but not always easy to carry out.

Management, at its core, is the result of two things: conversations and decisions. In this book I talk about communication being the underpinning of good management; conversations with peers, employees, bosses, vendors, and so forth take communication to a whole new level. Conversations, as opposed to memos and edicts, can be safer, allow for disagreement, and promote agreement. Decisions are the results of those conversations. “What do you see that needs to be done? How do we accomplish that?”

Creating change in people takes effort—more so because if you want someone to change, you are going to have to change first. This is the opposite of the way we view our relationship to subordinates. We think they should change to meet us where we are. But it doesn't work that way. We will need to lead the change by changing first, leading by example, and then teaching managers and supervisors (effectively our students) to follow our example.

Change gets trickier when people move from labor into management (“labor” can mean anything from a heavy equipment operator to a software programmer). Hopefully, this book will help you gain a new perspective of those changes and give you some guidance about how to implement them.

- Change doesn’t happen until someone takes action; it would be better if you were that someone.
- Creating change requires effort up front, reflection, and reinforcement to push through.
- If you want your managers and supervisors to change, you will need to change first.
- Lasting change takes time.

› LESSON 1 ‹

Two Perspectives— Michael's Story

In 2006, the telephone rang, and I could hear the panic in Michael's voice on the other end. He was a young man at the time, and his life to that point hadn't been the greatest. With parents who weren't the best role models, two early marriages that ended in divorce, children from each, and encounters with the law, Michael was now married to the love of his life, with another child to care for, and he had never given up trying to better himself. Michael had worked his way up from laborer to apprentice to journeyman pipe fitter. He was then promoted to manager because he was really good at his job, technically.

Michael said, "I think my boss is going to fire me."

I asked why he thought that.

He said, "I have been the manager of my department for over a year now and just received my first evaluation. Here is what it said: 'Michael has met none of the criteria for being a manager in this company. He has ninety days to get his act together.' That was it. That was all it said."

I asked Michael, "What are the criteria?"

"I don't know the criteria!" he answered. "Can you help me?"

When we met the next day, I asked him, "What do you most want from this job?"

He said, "Respect. Respect for a job well done."

"What does respect look like to you?" I probed.

"I want my boss's boss to come to my office and tell me I am doing a great job."

I then handed Michael a spiral notebook and said, "You know how in the trades you use duct tape to fix things? Management is your new trade—you have to develop it like any other set of skills. And that notebook is the next level of duct tape. Used properly, it will fix many things."

The rules for using the notebook are:

- Document everything as soon as it happens.
- Whenever you have a task to do, a phone call to return, a part to order, or anything that needs to be done at work, you write it down in that notebook.
- Always skip three lines before you write the next task down. Those blanks are for documenting any actions you need to take or that you did take. If it isn't documented, it didn't happen.
- When you complete a task, you draw one line through it or make a mark next to it so you can still read it and reference it in the future.
- That notebook is *always* with you.

The next step was to figure out what the criteria for success were. Like so many of us, Michael didn't want to admit to his boss that he needed help, so this wasn't going to be easy.

The Boss's Perspective

At this point in the story, let's step back and take a look at the situation from the perspective of Michael's boss. We'll call him Tom.

Was it that Tom didn't know the criteria for Michael's success? Was it that he didn't care about Michael's success? Was it that Tom did what so many managers do and took the easy way out during the annual review? If any of those were true, *why* were they true?

My bet: Tom didn't know how to help Michael. It wasn't that Tom was a bad person. It was that Tom wasn't a good boss. Just as Michael's job was to support his people, Tom's job was to support Michael. He wasn't a good boss because he didn't know the criteria for supporting Michael.

With a little coaching, Michael began having conversations with everyone at work who might have an opinion about what his job was. Eventually, he gathered a list of specific items he needed to work on, such as returning phone calls, emails, handling logistics, planning, prioritizing, and getting paperwork and reports done in a timely manner.

Michael has since moved up from department manager to branch manager. He has survived a corporate

buyout and manages a territory serving a quarter of the state of California. He is now training managers, and by the way, he shows them how to use a notebook. No, the notebook wasn't the only thing that changed in his performance as a manager, but it was key to the process.

When asked what the best part of this journey was, Michael answers, "Respect. People respect me now, for what I do and how I do it."

In 2006, I created Blue Collar University to help blue-collar managers and supervisors like Michael be successful. It is extremely difficult for them to do well when they are asked to do it alone and under the pressure to which they are subjected.

I wrote this book to help business owners, executives, and managers at all levels better understand how to prepare, support, and develop blue-collar managers and supervisors. It will also show you how to get rid of the dreaded annual review, how to stop the conflict that comes with "us versus them," and how to be able to manage by fact.

The Shocking, Surprising Statistics

Would it surprise you to know that research shows that as many as 60 percent of managers fail within the first twenty-four months of their having assumed the position?

In proprietary research of nearly 100 organizations that have a blue-collar support component, not one of them knew what percentage of their blue-collar

managers and supervisors were failing. Some of them did sense that failure was an issue which needed to be addressed. This research raised the following flags:

- How many blue-collar managers and supervisors (initially) fail?
- Why do so many blue-collar managers and supervisors fail?
- Why does it take twenty-four months to know they are failing?
- How many managers are Retired in Place (R.I.P.)?
- How can we help these managers understand what success looks like?

A Different Way of Looking at Management

To understand why managers fail and what helps them achieve success, let me share with you this crazy idea: Why don't we treat management as a partnership?

When we look at management as a partnership, then we can talk about the three critical components of any successful partnership:

1. Agreement
2. Accountability
3. Respect

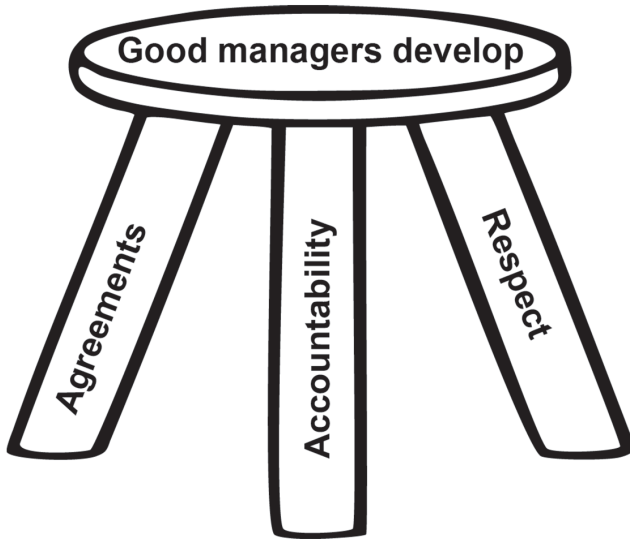
Michael, and others like him, fail because they lack those three cornerstones of success. They don't know management's criteria for success, and just as important, they don't have the opportunity to agree on

those criteria. Having agreement makes it easier to hold people accountable up and down the food chain. When agreement and accountability exist, they foster respect.

What is one of the first signs of the end of a relationship or partnership? When one person shows contempt for the other. What is the opposite of contempt? Respect.

Agreement and accountability foster respect.

Like a three-legged stool, if you cut off any one of these components, the whole thing collapses.



The problems begin with the promotion of labor into management, which is a *really good* strategy when it's executed properly. The top two reasons people are promoted from skilled labor to management are because they are good at their technical level, and someone likes them.

To understand why the transition from labor to management can be such a struggle, we need to talk about who blue-collar managers are and the changes they go through during and after promotion.

- Remember that there are always two perspectives—yours and theirs.
- Unless you take time to think about what success looks like for them, from their perspective, and have a conversation with them about it, their perspectives will not match yours.
- Upper management needs to look at managers and supervisors as partners.
- For best results, create agreements, hold them accountable, and be accountable to them.
- Do all of this with respect.