

HOW TO BE A GREAT MANAGER

How Successful Managers Use 2 Simple Skills to Get Outstanding Results from Their People

By Nick Petrie

You've probably had older ones and younger ones, males and females, perhaps even managers from different industries. But what was the difference between the great ones and the terrible ones? What was it about the great manager that made it so good to work for them? What was their attitude toward you? How did they communicate with you? What were their expectations for your performance?

Who was that Manager?

Over the past five years I've asked thousands of people in New Zealand workplaces to describe two groups of people - their worst-ever managers and their best-ever managers. The results have shown that while New Zealand managers have found dozens of ways to manage poorly, all the great managers do it the same way.

It is likely that when you thought of your best manager you would have come up with a variety of attributes. However, chances are those attributes would have grouped into two distinct themes - just as they did for everyone else who undertook the exercise. The themes?

In the late 1990's the Centre for Creative Leadership carried out research into what makes a good Manager. In it they asked people to rate the quality of their managers. One of the most surprising results to come out of the study was the relationship between two management attributes - Listening ('Relating') and Drive for Results ('Requiring').

Relating - Listening, caring for direct reports and encouraging.

Requiring - Setting high standards for others, driving hard for results and holding people accountable.

Take a minute to ask yourself, which of those 2 attributed do you think was found to be the most important?

Let's find out. Managers who were rated as being strong on only 'Relating' were rated as being in the 15th percentile by their reports (ranked out of 100 managers they would be 15th from the bottom). Managers who were rated strong at only 'Requiring' were also rated at the 15th Percentile. But something extra-ordinary happened when you put those two strengths together in a manager.

Managers whose strengths were that they were very Requiring of the people and Related well to them were rated in the 90th percentile. In other words, their staff said they were in the top 10 percent of all leaders in the organisation.

These people came to be known as '2 R Managers'

But why such an alarming jump in effectiveness when you put the '2 R's' together?

Consider your own past experience with managers. How would you describe the ones who were very hard at pushing for results but never listened to you or anyone else? The most common responses given are; cold, selfish, uncaring. How about a manager you have had who was very good at listening but never pushed very hard for results or high performance? Common answers; soft, timid, caring but weak.

A manager who uses only one or the other is like a chef who uses only her left or right hand to cook a meal.

However managers who both Relate and Require are like a chef who uses both hands to cook the meal. These managers are highly rated by their people and often described as 'They helped me to be my best'; 'They pushed me hard because they wanted me to succeed'; 'They were driven but always fair'.

Which takes us back to the YOUR best-ever manager. If you are like the thousands of other who have described your best ever manager you will have described someone who:

1) Required: Pushed you hard to get good results

and

2) Related: Listened and encouraged you.

David Maister, considered to be the world's top Leadership consultant to Law and Accounting firms believes that the attitude of the very best Managers he sees can be summed up into 1 phrase;

"C'mon..... you can do it..... I'll help"

If you read it carefully you will notice the clever blending of Requiring and Relating used in each of the 3 parts.

If it really is as simple as this how come we don't have more 2 R Managers using both of their Leadership 'hands'? The main reason is that most managers see those two attributes as opposite ends of a scale i.e. I am either going to drive my people hard for results or I am going to listen and care about them. The top ten percent have worked out that it is not an either/or choice. The only way to really get long-term sustained performance from your people is not to choose one or the other. It is to get really good at doing both.

Many Managers have asked whether helping their Managers to become '2 R Managers' would boost their bottom line. I can't tell you conclusively but I can point you to an example of a company who decided to find out.

Twenty years ago the new CEO Peter Friedes looked around his organisation and decided that he wanted his Managers to improve. He had just taken over as CEO of International HR Consulting firm Hewitt Associates. He saw that some of them were great at Requiring, they would push their people hard to get results, but they would often burn their people out and keep rubbing them up the wrong way. On the other side he had Managers who were good 'Relaters'. They would listen to their people, encourage them and support them but were often too soft when they needed to push their people for results.

What is a new CEO to do? He took a decision. He rounded up his top Managers and told them he wanted the Managers in the company to become '2R'Managers. They would learn "when to require, when to relate and how to do both effectively. He then designed a programme himself which he taught to over 1,000 managers over the next decade. Did it work? During his tenure as CEO their annual income grew at an average rate of 23%. In addition Hewitt was noted as one of the 100 Best Companies to work for in America during the 12 years of his tenure.

We all know from our own experience that 2 R Managers get the best out of us. The only question left is how good are we at knowing 'how to relate, how to require and when to do either'. Management is a tough job, but once you accept the role you have a responsibility to those you manage to do continually strive to be a 2 R Manager. Just like your best ever Manager once did.

I will leave you with the comment of a senior manager of a large organisation, who perhaps summed up the situation best.

"It's easy to find a manager who can come in, run over everyone and get the job done but leave everybody feeling badly burned. Equally it is easy to find someone who can come in, build good relationships with the staff but fail to get any outcomes. What you really want is someone who cannot only get the job done, but who actually builds respect from the people every time they interact with them. Those managers are like diamonds. They are the ones you cannot afford to lose."

If you want to discuss how you can help Managers in your company to think more like 2R Managers call Nick on (09) 354 3249 or email nick@performanceatwork.co.nz with your enquiry.