



## The Manager's Answer Book

Powerful Tools to Build Trust and Teams, Maximize Your Impact and Influence, and Respond to Challenges

Barbara Mitchell and Cornelia Gamlem

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## Rating

8 <sup>9</sup> Applicability  
<sup>7</sup> Innovation  
<sup>7</sup> Style

## Focus

Leadership & Management

Strategy

Sales & Marketing

Finance

Human Resources

IT, Production & Logistics

Career & Self-Development

Small Business

Economics & Politics

Industries

Global Business

Concepts & Trends

## Take-Aways

- Managing people is tough. A million and one things can easily go wrong.
- New managers must get to know the people on their teams.
- Never micromanage team members. People hate that.
- Constantly upgrade your own management knowledge and skills.
- An excess of meetings is counterproductive. Communicate with team members by email or phone instead.
- Bring new employees up to speed with a quality onboarding program.
- Your personal brand is an invaluable asset.
- Be a role model for your team members. Never shrink from doing the right thing.
- Quality managers understand how their departments work, and how all other departments in their organizations work as well.
- Managers can learn a lot from advisers, coaches, mentors and the people they supervise.

# Relevance

## What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) What strategies will help you identify and cope with a new manager's primary considerations and concerns, 2) How managers should communicate with people on their teams, and 3) What legal and regulatory issues managers should understand.

## Recommendation

In this practical, useful question-and-answer guidebook, consultants Barbara Mitchell and Cornelia Gamlem discuss many of the hidden difficulties managers face and how they can cope with them effectively. Managers can err in many ways and not even know it. Agree to meet a vendor for lunch, and you could be in violation of an organizational rule that prohibits accepting such a gratuity. Speak to someone you supervise in the wrong way – in that person's estimation – and you could get slapped with a civil suit that charges harassment. If someone you hire injures someone else, you could be named as a party to a negligent-hiring claim. Fail to pass pertinent medical information from an employee to HR or senior management and you could run afoul of the Americans with Disabilities Act. This manual will be equally helpful to new managers, experienced managers facing new challenges, and managers joining new firms that function differently from their previous employers.

# Summary

*"Getting started as a manager, either a first-time manager or a manager in a new organization, can be daunting."*

*"You need to delegate, motivate, coach and counsel, mediate, negotiate and facilitate...and then some."*

## The Human Challenges of Managing People

Managing people is difficult. All the work managers must do to supervise people and projects can become overwhelming. The number of difficult situations, oddball events and challenging circumstances that might arise – all seasoned with myriad bewildering personality issues – can baffle even the most experienced manager. New supervisors can be caught unawares and trip over themselves a dozen times a day. If you wonder how to handle perplexing personnel situations or put out workplace wildfires, turn to the experience of managers who field-tested their tactics and who offer helpful insights and solid advice.

### "You're a New Manager, Now What?"

New managers may face an onslaught of unfamiliar people issues and project challenges. Consider this advice:

- **As a brand-new manager, how can I win over the people I will lead?** – Your first job is to get to know the people on your team. Find out who they are, what makes them tick, and what special talents and expertise each team member offers. Since your people may have been working for your organization for some time, they will have valuable institutional knowledge you may not yet possess. Learn from them. Don't micromanage the people on your team – that will turn them off. Allow team members plenty of time to adjust to you and to your personal management style.
- **I'm replacing a manager who had a problem-causing "anything goes" style. How will my team members react if I'm strict?** – Establish clear expectations with your employees about what you want from them and why. Inform them that their situation is about to change. Assure them you will solicit their input regarding the coming changes, but that you and the firm's leaders will make the final decisions.
- **In my new role, I will manage friends and former peers. Will this cause tension?** – Managing buddies and former colleagues is always complicated. Expect the news of

your promotion to management to unsettle your former peers. Give them a few days to adjust to this new alignment. Don't schedule your first meeting with your new team right away. When you do meet, communicate with everyone that you won't interfere with them doing their jobs as they always have.

*"Managing people is challenging work, and no one can do everything well. Find some trusted colleagues or a mentor to help you."*

### "Developing Your Management Skills"

Because management challenges and required skills continually change, managers must constantly upgrade their knowledge base and abilities. Seek the advice of trusted colleagues and other managers. What worked for them may – and probably will – work for you. Regularly seek professional development. To fine-tune your skills, heed these answers:

- **Our firm wastes time on long meetings. How can I cut the number of meetings and make them more efficient?** – To reduce the number of meetings, use email or phone calls to communicate information a meeting might cover. To keep meetings short, set firm start and stop times. Make sure everyone understands and agrees to work within these parameters.
- **Our organization is in the midst of sweeping economic change. How do I keep everyone informed?** – Keeping your team up to speed on change is a top priority. Never fear leading a discussion on change. Helping your team members stay well-informed will energize them. Discuss all business drivers and any new work expectations or job responsibilities with them.
- **My CEO wants me to present to the executive committee. This is a golden opportunity. How I can shine?** – The basic rule for presentations is: "Tell them what you're going to tell them. Tell them. Then tell them what you told them." Some inexperienced presenters think they should open with a joke. That's a beginner's mistake. Audiences don't want to waste time. Get right to the point.

*"In choosing advisers, you want people who are not afraid to challenge your ideas, argue and debate about them with you and even slow you down in order to make you rethink some things."*

### "Building and Managing Your Team"

Supervising teams is a manager's primary responsibility. Make a regular habit of providing quality feedback and recognizing people individually for their good work. Reward your team members when they do something special. Managing employees becomes much easier when you can hire your own team members. When you personally select people, you know their backgrounds and strengths. Consider how to address these questions:

- **I want to hire only people with strong leadership skills. How can I be sure I hire the right people?** – To spot potential leaders, ask the right questions: What values do you have that inform and exhibit your leadership abilities? Have you ever faced resistance to a fresh idea you wanted to make into a new project? How did you turn things around? Have you ever made a decision that people hated? How did you explain it to them? What was the result?
- **My organization stresses the importance of inclusivity and diversity. What's the best way to achieve these qualities?** – Pay attention to online job boards that promote diversity, such as [diversityjobs.com](http://diversityjobs.com), [hirediversity.com](http://hirediversity.com) and [minorityjobsite.com](http://minorityjobsite.com). Your staff members may provide worthwhile leads.
- **How can I quickly bring new hires up to speed?** – Establish and maintain an effective, efficient and thorough onboarding process. Communicate to all new hires that they chose wisely when they decided to become part of your organization. As soon as they join your team, email them any essential information, such as "arrival time, where to park or available commuting options...whom to ask for when they arrive," and so on. Assign an experienced employee to be available to guide any new hires for a few days and to answer their questions. "Be ready for a new employee's first day. Have their workspace

*"Beyond understanding the organization, which is important, you have to develop political savvy."*

*"It's almost impossible to think strategically if you're constantly busy, so set aside time to research and dream."*

ready with all of the tools and equipment needed to do their job.” Spend a lot of quality time with new people on their first day.

### “Creating Your Personal Brand”

Being a manager is a high-profile position. The people in your organization will study you, listen to you and want to learn about you. Prepare to be under a microscope every day. How you carry yourself, how you present yourself, how you communicate and how you do your job will be of supreme importance to your team members. How you manage and promote your personal brand – a valuable asset – will affect your success as a manager. To handle the spotlight, heed these questions and answers:

- **What’s the best way to promote my personal brand?** – Protect and preserve your personal brand by being a high-quality role model to everyone. Demonstrate your honesty and integrity. Treat your colleagues with civility and respect. Make sure your decisions embody and support your values and those of your organization. Hire people whose values reflect your own.
- **Managers are supposed to be admirable, upstanding and stalwart. How do I demonstrate courage?** – It’s important to show team members that you will do the right thing, no matter how tough. That’s true courage – and that’s what the people you lead want to see. Show your team members that you will stand up for them. Never take the easy way out. Don’t abide wrongdoing or unethical or immoral actions. Work to become a beacon of strength, courage and noble purpose for everyone in your organization. Never shrink from doing the right thing.
- **How can I get my team members to respect me?** – Work hard to learn everything about your team members. Listen to them. Learn from them. When things go wrong, never scream and yell. Maintain your cool and learn from your and your team members’ mistakes. Don’t be a know-it-all. Help the people on your team move up.

### “Managing Up, Down and Around”

Your job is to make sure your team gets it work done. You must coordinate and collaborate with colleagues throughout the organization. On an as-needed basis, you will work with external partners and vendors. This requires extensive knowledge of your organization, its goals, operations, culture and priorities. Your team members expect and need you to have a thorough grounding in these and related issues. When your employees request specific information about the organization and its activities, follow these answers:

- **My team members expect me to know everything about “benefits, personal leave, vacation requests, training opportunities, payroll, expense reports, travel arrangements...purchasing new equipment,” and so on. How do I stay current with all this arcana?** – You can’t. But you can know where to find reliable information on these topics and how to direct your team members to secure the answers they need.
- **How do I implement and follow through with formally mentoring people in my organization?** – To set up a mentoring program for your firm’s employees, develop “cross-organizational connections” so executives and managers in different departments can mentor employees from each other’s units. Your mentoring program will need the full-fledged support of senior management.
- **My friend’s a reporter. She often asks me to provide inside information about my industry. Should I? What are the downsides for me or my firm?** – Before you speak to anyone from the media, make sure anything you say correlates with statements by the official spokespeople for your organization. In any public commentary, keep the well-being of your organization uppermost in your mind.

*“A commitment to diversity and inclusion has to come from the top and be embraced and supported by your leadership.”*

*“Meet one-on-one with each person who reports to you and clarify your expectations. Let them know your goals for the department and how you see them contributing to its success.”*

*“Be sure your great employees know how much you value them... reward them with not only recognition but with work that will develop their skills.”*

*“Recognizing good performance should be one of the easiest and most enjoyable things you do as a manager. What could be more fun than acknowledging employees for doing a great job?”*

### “Avoiding Potential Land Mines”

Many managerial decisions must be nuanced. Managing often requires a subtle touch. Astute managers must deliver bad news without unnerving the people on their team. Similarly, they must request background checks on team members. Handling such requests in a heavy-handed manner can undermine morale. To make sure that you’re diplomatic in everything that you say and do, heed these answers:

*“Practice management by walking around, inside and outside of your department. Be observant and ask questions. Pay attention to the people and the action around you.”*

- **A bright, young employee wants me to intercede with her team leader to support her novel “process-improvement” ideas, which he doesn’t like. What should I do?** – Bring both parties together and attempt to mediate their conflict. Your role is not to come down on one side or the other. Promote a discussion between your young employee and her team leader. Help them work out their differences and develop a mutually acceptable solution.
- **With all of the attention on harassment and similar sensitivity issues, our workplace has become more stressful. How can I lighten things up?** – First and foremost, make sure that your workplace practices are free of any taint of harassment or discrimination. To lighten the mood, try dress-up theme days, sponsor a few game days (miniature golf?) and throw some pizza parties.
- **Firing employees is never fun, and it can result in bad publicity. How do I carry out this odious task?** – Always act with dignity, respect, diplomacy and sensitivity. Unless it is totally impractical, handle all terminations on a face-to-face basis.

*“Always treat the organization’s resources as if they were your own. Effectively managing resources, be they internal or external, is a key responsibility for any successful manager.”*

### “Recognizing Legal Pitfalls”

“ADA, EEO, FMLA, ADEA, FLSA” and “NLRA”: These acronyms are an “alphabet soup of laws and regulations.” Expect big trouble if you or your team members fall afoul of any of them. You must acquire and maintain a sound working knowledge of all applicable laws and regulations. When necessary, you must communicate this information to your team. Keep these concepts in mind:

*“Part of being a good manager is understanding the business of business – not just how your department functions, but how others function as well.”*

- **Recently I’ve noticed members of my team congregating to discuss working conditions, wages, assignments and similar issues. How should I react?** – Don’t discuss this with your team members. Immediately refer this new development to senior management. It could indicate discontent or possible union organizing. Let company lawyers handle it, not you.
- **Sometimes, during periods of high-intensity work pressure, one team member works extra hours without extra pay. After things cool down, she asks for some time off to be with her children. Should I grant her request?** – Check the employee’s work status. If she is an exempt-from-overtime employee, grant her this flexibility as long as it doesn’t have a negative impact on your work protocols and progress.
- **A team member told me that a friend of hers in another department is being sexually harassed by her manager. Should I do something?** – Absolutely. This is an extremely serious situation. Notify senior management right away. Knowing what may be going on but failing to act could make you partially liable.

## About the Authors

**Barbara Mitchell** is managing partner of The Mitchell Group, a human resources and organizational development consulting practice. **Cornelia Gamlem**, SPHR, is founder and president of The Gems Group, a management consulting firm that offers human resources and business solutions.