

## PEER TODAY, BOSS TOMORROW

Whether you are in a management position already, or hope to be in the future, chances are you have considered the unique challenges that come with the job of leading others. Once you become a leader not only do your duties and responsibilities change but your workplace relationships, boundaries, and how your value to the organization is measured can also be drastically altered. From the bestselling book *Peer Today, Boss Tomorrow*, this article discusses many of the changes that occur when moving into a leadership position and offers some valuable insight on making a successful transition.

### The words still echo in your memory:

#### “Congratulations ... welcome to management!”

Those words, or others like them, were validation that your past efforts as an individual contributor had paid off. You worked hard, did a good job, kept your nose clean, and you got promoted! As a result – no matter if your title is *Manager, Supervisor, Team Lead, or something similar*.

The good news about your promotion: **things changed**. Now you are calling more of the shots, setting the tone, and directing the work of others. You undoubtedly are more “privy” to information about the business, and you’re probably enjoying more latitude and a few more perks than ever before. The bad news about your promotion: **things changed!** You took on a whole new set of duties and responsibilities (often accompanied by longer hours) that require special skills – ones that are different from the technical know-how you developed in previous jobs and probably helped get you promoted in the first place. But perhaps the biggest change of all is one of workplace *relationships*. The coworkers who used to be your peers are now the employees who report to you. And even if they were happy that “one of us got promoted” when you accepted the job, you’re no longer in that “us.” Now, a lot of things are very different.

### Different Value

Before you were promoted, your value to the organization was measured by what you, as an *individual*, could do successfully. Your contribution came through the quality and quantity of the work you were hired to do – whether that entailed providing services or creating products. You, along with your fellow employees, produced the results by which you were evaluated. As a supervisor, however, your value to the organization is assessed differently. It’s no longer about how successful you are in what you do alone. Now it’s about how successful your people are *because* of what you do. Now, you have a different purpose ... a revised focus ... a new overall goal: getting results *through* others.

### Different Duties

Think about the title “supervisor” for a moment. What is it that supervisors do? The simple answer is *supervise*. And that begs the natural, follow-up question: What or who do supervisors supervise? The answer to that one should be obvious: *people!* So it’s no surprise that, once promoted, a sizable portion of your time will focus on people-management activities.

Accepting a leadership role means understanding that your “to do list” looks much different than it did as a non-management employee. Now, that list includes things like: hiring, coaching, counseling, communicating, directing, developing, evaluating, disciplining, and perhaps even the dreaded “f word”: firing. You need to be adept at these activities, knowledgeable about the policies and procedures that guide them, and willing to do whatever is appropriate whenever it’s called for. And that’s just the *people* side of your job! You also must manage and oversee the *work* that is done by those people as well. So, also included in your to-do’s are activities such as planning, scheduling, implementing, and monitoring.

### **Different Relationships and Allegiances**

By accepting a promotion, you gave up membership in one “club” and took on membership in another. Your old club was comprised of non-management employees ... individual contributors ... the rank and file. These were your coworkers, fellow team members, and in many cases, your friends. Chances are you joked together, took breaks together, looked out for each other, and occasionally complained about management to each other. You were a member in good standing of that peer worker group known as “us.” But all that changed the moment you became a supervisor. You’re no longer one of the guys or girls. Now you’re one of the “them” you used to commiserate about ... now, you’re management. And your primary allegiance must be to the organization and its overall mission.

Joining the ranks of management not only results in changes to old workplace relationships, it also produces many new ones as well. Along with your leadership position came a new group of counterparts ... a different set of peers ... a new “us” that you’ll need to learn about, work with, and rely on for assistance. And, because your leadership role is more pervasive and big picture oriented than it was as an individual contributor, there are many people in other departments and divisions – and some from outside of your organization – with whom you must communicate, coordinate, and cooperate.

### **A Common Concern**

**Question: Does being a Supervisor mean that you must abandon coworker friendships you developed and enjoyed as an employee?**

**Answer: Not at all! It does mean, however, that you and your friends must accept the fact that your relationships are different *at work* ... that you’re the leader. As long as you offer no special treatment, your friends expect none, and you avoid any improprieties, old friendships can and should continue. Just remember that this can become a “slippery slope.” Should you ever find yourself having to choose between doing your job or keeping a friend, your allegiance must be to the job. But then, a *true* friend would never put you in that position to begin with.**

### **Different Accountabilities**

Go back and take a look at the job description or job posting sheet for your leadership position – assuming one existed and you kept a copy. Chances are that: 1) you’ll see a list of duties, tasks, and expectations that are much different than what was required of you as an individual contributor, and 2) you’re responsible and *accountable* for all of the items listed on that document – and more.

What does it mean to be accountable? It means that you must oversee, direct, control, and “answer for” what happens within a specified area of activity. Obviously, you’re accountable for your own performance and conduct. But, as a supervisor, you’re also accountable for the behavior and performance of your direct reports and the results they achieve (or fail to achieve). And your responsibilities don’t end there. More come with the territory such as handling budget issues, managing overtime, maintaining the confidentiality of sensitive information, and protecting the people, facility, equipment, and organizational resources. There are safety issues, legal issues, compliance issues, ethics issues – all of which you’re expected to know about and handle properly.

### **A New Action/Results Imperative**

Take any group of employees without supervision, and they will perform at a certain level and accomplish certain things. Now, add a supervisor to the equation. What’s your expectation? Obviously, the team members should perform at higher levels. If they don’t, the boss isn’t needed; he or she is drawing a salary but adding no value; he or she is “dead weight.” That’s why the ultimate criteria for measuring leadership effectiveness is **results!**

Clearly, your job is to help direct reports be more successful in achieving the results your organization wants and needs. But that won’t happen through osmosis. Nor will strong wishes and good intentions make it so.

You must *do* things in order to realize the outcomes you desire. In the final analysis, what makes you a leader is not the title you’re *given*, it’s the action you *take*. But beware: The situations you face, and the many circumstances requiring action on your part, won’t come without challenges. Occasionally, you may find that the path forward is unclear – not to mention a little scary. In some instances, the directions you receive may seem somewhat ambiguous. At other times, you may not have all the information you would like. And, of course, you’ll probably have more than enough on your plate when new issues present themselves. While obstacles like these can be disheartening, they’re not insurmountable. The best way to deal with them is to pause, take a deep breath, focus, and think. You’ll need to analyze the issues, sift through the information that is available to you, and determine the *type* of action that is appropriate.

The actions you will need to take as a supervisor typically fall into some combination of the following three categories:

**1. Problem Solving** – An unexpected, undesirable circumstance arises and it’s your responsibility to get it resolved. This category includes everything from employee performance discrepancies, equipment breakdowns, and schedule overruns – to supplier issues, team member conflicts, and customer complaints.

**2. Implementation/Execution** – A goal, project, or desired end-state is identified by you, or those above you, and it’s your responsibility to make it happen. Included in this category are things like: implementing new work processes and technologies, modifying or improving the work facility, running

special business promotions, launching new products and services, and bringing on additional staff. All of these involve various levels of research, planning, scheduling, and coordination.

**3. Decision Making** – A task, issue, question, or conflict arises within your work unit requiring a decision to be made by you. Whether it's making work assignments, dealing with employee concerns, responding to vacation/leave requests, determining what equipment to purchase, responding to customer complaints – or a myriad of other possibilities – you'll need to analyze each situation, weigh the pro's and con's of the various options available to you, and decide what's best for everyone involved.

### **Setting New Boundaries**

If there's one thing most employees know for sure, it's that no two supervisors are exactly the same. While roles and responsibilities may be similar, each leader comes to the job with his or her own style and personality – and collection of expectations, insecurities, pet peeves, hot buttons, and taboos. So it should be no surprise that team members will want to size you up by answering questions such as: *How strong a leader is he or she? What's important to him or her? What does he or she want from me? How do I stay on his or her good side and out of trouble? Where does he or she "draw the line"?* It can be challenging for everyone as this time of discovery plays itself out. Some of *your* challenges may come from former peers who are testing the waters to see how and where things stand between you and whether or not your past relationship will affect the way you supervise them.

Obviously, your management position necessitates adjustments on the part of employees as well as yours. They must see, through your actions and behaviors, that you are in charge ... that you take your leadership position seriously. So, you'll need to set the tone and redefine your relationship by establishing clear boundaries that help employees understand the ground rules that apply to everyone. The process involves meeting with your direct reports and clearly communicating: 1) What you expect of them – how they should do their jobs and conduct themselves, and 2) What they can expect from you – how you will respond to their behavior and performance.

### **A New Need for Consistency**

Here's one you can take to the bank: rules and guidelines are meaningful only when they are followed and enforced. So, when it comes to setting boundaries, *stating* your expectations of employees is only half the battle. The other half involves "delivering" on what you tell employees to expect from you. You must walk the talk. And the key to doing that is **consistency** – holding all the people accountable for following all the rules (boundaries) all the time.

It's critically important that you address each policy, procedure, or behavioral guideline violation as soon as you become aware of it. The type of meeting you have with the employee, and the resulting consequences, may vary based on the history and severity of the problem. What must not vary, however, is your practice of confronting issues. Let some things or people slide, and you run many risks, including:

- Sending mixed and confusing messages to the people who depend upon you for guidance and direction;
- Creating a workplace where employees decide which rules are important and which ones can be “stretched” or ignored;
- Exposing yourself to charges of favoritism or discrimination;
- Losing the respect of the members of your team;
- Facing negative consequences from *your* boss for not doing your job.

Truth is, in order for your people to see and accept you as the leader, you must *be* the leader. And that means not only talking about boundaries, but consistently enforcing them as well.

### **A New Importance of Communication**

Combine all the time you spend making and returning phone calls, sending and responding to e-mails, writing notes, memos, and reports, meeting with people (e.g., employees, managers, reps from other departments, customers, suppliers), making presentations, and the like, and you’ll probably find that 70-90% of your total working hours involve some form of communication. Clearly, it’s your primary tool for leading people and achieving results. And since the majority of what you do involves communication, the majority of your success and that of your people will be built around how well you do it.

Communication is actually a two-part process ... a two-way street. There are the messages you send to others and the messages others send (or *try* to send) to you. While the first part tends to get the lion’s share of attention and focus, both parts are equally important to your leadership effectiveness. As a supervisor, you regularly will have thoughts, information, and/or concerns that you need to share with your direct reports and others within the organization. Obviously, it’s important that people hear and understand what you’re saying. The messages they receive must be the same as the ones that you send. And just as you have a need to be heard, so do your team members and others within the organization. Your colleagues and direct reports will be sharing many things with you – from ideas, suggestions, and explanations, to problems, concerns, and questions. So it’s critically important that you understand the messages that are sent your way. In order to lead effectively, you must be able to listen effectively.

The key is remembering that the goal of communication is understanding – “I want to hear what you have to say” ... “I want to know what you are thinking and feeling” ... “I want to understand what the issues look like through your eyes.” You don’t have to agree with a person’s position in order to understand where they’re coming from and why they feel as they do. And once you have that knowledge, you’ll be better able to work constructively with the person and establish a mutually beneficial relationship of success.

### **A New Tool: Delegation**

One of the most common mistakes made by supervisors – especially those who are new to leadership – is taking on unnecessary tasks ... trying to do everything by themselves. As a result, they can easily find themselves buried under a ton of work. Things move slower, not as much gets done, and job satisfaction is reduced. What's the best way to avoid that trap? Delegation! You need to pass along certain duties and responsibilities to your direct reports so that: a) more actions are being performed by more people, more of the time, and b) you can focus on – and accomplish – those important tasks that really must be done by you.

### **A New Set of Guidelines**

Regardless of what they sometimes say or how they sometimes may act, your employees want and need strong leadership. And they're looking at you to provide it. Here are 10 ways to be the kind of leader that your former peers will want to follow:

- 1. Treat Everyone with Dignity, Courtesy, and Respect.** Value the inherent worth of each person you have contact with. Appreciate the fact that others' dreams, goals, and feelings of self-worth are as important to them as yours are to you. Adopt the mindset that being "a superior" does not mean that you *are* superior, and behave accordingly!
- 2. Lead By Example.** Model the work performance, attendance, and conduct that you expect from others. Show people, through your daily behaviors, what it means to have integrity, a strong work ethic, and an unyielding commitment to your organization's mission and values. Practice what you preach ... walk the talk!
- 3. Be Firm, Fair, and Consistent.** Avoid playing favorites. Hold everyone – including yourself – equally accountable for following all rules and regulations, exhibiting appropriate behavior, meeting all job responsibilities, and achieving desired results.
- 4. "Own Up" to Your Shortcomings.** Avoid cover ups. If you make a mistake, admit it and then fix it! If you don't know something, admit it and then find out about it! And, if you're holding an employee accountable for a wrong doing that you, yourself, committed in the past – and he or she calls you on it – respond with: "That's true. I did do that. And I was wrong back then just like you're wrong now."
- 5. Focus on *Their* Success.** Provide everyone on your team with the information, direction, resources, feedback, and support they need to be successful. Create/seize opportunities for team members to learn, grow, and develop. Be a teacher and a coach.
- 6. Get Them Involved.** Whenever practical and appropriate, involve direct reports in decision making, plan development, and problem solving. Solicit their suggestions, ideas, and opinions. Delegate tasks and responsibilities – along with the commensurate authority.
- 7. Listen.** Hone your listening skills. Focus on understanding the messages people send to you. Demonstrate, by your listening behaviors, that you care what others think, feel, and have to say.

**8. Show Your Appreciation.** Acknowledge and thank employees for their efforts and contributions. Let people know that good work is important – and that good workers are valued and appreciated. Celebrate achievement!

**9. Respect Their Time.** Remember that your team members have important and often difficult jobs to do and priorities to manage. Don't expect them to drop whatever they're doing every time you want something or feel the need for a meeting. Be a help, rather than a hindrance, when it comes to employee time management.

**10. Do What Needs to Be Done.** When you see or hear of something that requires attention, jump in and deal with it. Don't procrastinate or latch on to excuses for not handling issues – especially those that are difficult or distasteful. No one wants to follow a leader who shies away from the tough stuff and fails to take care of business.

### **A Closing Thought**

In the past, organizations placed primary importance on technical expertise when it came to promotions. Typically, the best nurse became the nursing supervisor; the super salesperson was named sales manager; the top-notch welder moved up to shift lead, and so forth. For these folks, it was presumed that knowing employees' jobs better than the employees themselves was the key to management success. In *today's* complex and competitive business arena, however, the requirements have changed and intensified – and so has the transition from peer to supervisor. As a result, “bosses” must provide a lot less technical knowledge and a lot more leadership. The *trade* has changed – and so have the *tools of the trade*.

As a supervisor, it's imperative that you accept the fact that your duties and accountabilities, your workplace relationships, and the way your value to the organization is measured all became different the moment you were promoted. Now you are the leader, and that reality must be reflected in your attitude, your approach, and – most importantly – your behaviors