

WHAT MANAGERS WISHED THEY KNEW



Moving into a people management role often has a steep learning curve. Many leaders realize that the technical skills that got them promoted are different from the emotional and organizational skills required to lead. Experienced managers frequently look back and identify core lessons they wish they had known sooner in their leadership journey.



1 You don't have to know all the answers

New managers often feel pressure to be the "smartest person in the room." However, teams don't expect omniscience; they expect support. Saying "I don't know, but I'll find out" builds trust and models healthy curiosity.



2 What got you here won't keep you here

As an individual contributor, your success was measured by your personal output. As a manager, your success is measured by the achievements of your team. Failing to adapt from "doing the work" to "coaching others to do the work" quickly leads to micromanagement and burnout.



3 Clear expectations prevent many performance issues

Unclear expectations are the root cause of many workplace frustrations. Managers often wish they had realized sooner that success must be explicitly defined, including what a great job looks like, deadlines, and the broader "why" behind a task.



4 Continuous feedback in real time is better than annual reviews alone

Waiting for an annual review to address a performance gap or celebrate a win is a mistake. Embracing small, frequent nuggets of real-time feedback keeps the team aligned, prevents surprises, and reduces anxiety for everyone.



5 You cannot manage everyone the same way

Every person possesses unique motivations, communication styles and learning preferences. Managers wish they had adapted their style earlier — using situational leadership to offer guidance to a newer team member while granting autonomy to a more experienced one.



6 One-on-ones are sacred spaces, not status updates

Using precious one-on-one time with a team member just to catch up on project checklists is a missed opportunity. People managers learn that these meetings should focus on individual career development, removing obstacles, and building rapport.



7 Postponing difficult conversations makes them more difficult

Avoiding toxic behavior or a performance slump in hopes that it will resolve itself is a trap. Addressing tensions head-on and with empathy protects the rest of the team's morale and prevents minor issues from snowballing into crises.



8 Your mood and reactions determine the team's energy

A manager's behavior is magnified. If you react to stress with panic or anger, your team will reflect that anxiety. Learning to maintain a calm demeanor and intentional presence can create a psychologically safe environment where people feel comfortable taking risks.



9 Delegation is an exercise in trust, not abandonment

Many new people managers struggle with delegation because they fear a drop in quality. They wish they had learned sooner that true delegation means handing over ownership of the outcome while remaining available as a safety net, rather than making every decision.



10 Self-care is essential for leadership

You cannot pour from an empty cup. People managers face unique pressures from both senior leadership and their direct reports. Prioritizing mental fitness, boundaries, and stress management is vital to avoid burning out and failing the team.