

Successful Software Management: Fifteen Lessons Learned

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The Technical Manager's Lament

- Started as an individual contributor
- No training
- “The people stuff is hard to do”
 - “the Management stuff isn't easy either”

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The Manager's Job is...

- Managers exist to organize purposefully (paraphrase of Drucker)
- Obtain business results by
 - Get the best work out of your people
 - Create an environment that enables people to work
 - Increase your team's capacity
- Create value for the customers by working effectively, balancing the needs of the business, the people, and the environment you create
- Think about how you're going to do this

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1. Know What They Pay You to Do

- What's your mission—the reason they hired you? Some possibilities are:
 - Keep clients happy
 - Release on time
 - Quality products in a timely manner within budget
 - Develop team members
 - See to the care and feeding of the developers/testers/writers/whomever
 - Understand the state of the product at any time and report on it
 - Find the Big Bad Bugs before the customers do
- Are you working on things that should be on your Not-To-Do list?

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2. Plan the Work: Portfolio Management

- Plan what you (your group) can do
 - If you want to do more, plan how
- Identify and manage your project portfolio
- Develop strategies for each product
 - How little can you do?
- Know what done means for each project
- Avoid context-switching

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3. Accept Only One #1 Priority at a Time

- How many of you are context switching between several #1 priorities?
- Do you confuse urgent and important?
- You can only do one (important) thing at a time
- Choose what it is

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4. Commit to Projects After Asking Your Staff

- “Can we have this next month?”
- Even if you’ve already considered the request, the answer is “No”
 - In the moment, you might confuse this request with another request
 - There may be other implications you haven’t considered, since it’s no longer the same time you first considered this request.
- Don’t train your management to ask you for an answer
 - Your staff will know that you think:
 - I want to know what it will really take you to do this work
 - I’m not afraid to tell my management what it will take

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5. Hire the Best People for the Job

- A manager’s greatest point of leverage is in hiring appropriate staff
- “Best” is not necessarily synonymous with “Similar”
- Develop a hiring strategy
- Learn to interview successfully, so you can hire people who can do the job well (stars)

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6. Preserve Good Teams

- How do you create teams now?
 - Do you keep teams together who work well together?
 - Do you keep pairs together who work well together?
- Recognize when you have a team un-jeller
 - Find another place for that person (not necessarily in your company)
- Do you have people who like to work together and are successful working together? Do you keep them together?
- Don't disrupt teams just because you think it's time to break up a team
 - Every time you re-create a team, there's a team startup cost

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7. Avoid Micromanaging or Inflicting Help

- Assume each person knows how to perform his or her job
- You *used* to know how to do the job
 - Do you really still know how?
- You hired the people because you thought they could do the work. Let them...
 - Give them assignments
 - Ask if they need help
 - Don't interfere
 - Sneak up behind them and ask "How's it going?"
 - Micromanagement
 - Inflicting advice
- Choose a metric to know when you are stuck
 - This works for you too...

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Successful (and Helpful) Managers

- Assign the work
 - Do they understand the work to do?
 - Do they have the tools required?
- Decide when to check in
- Supply help when requested, and not before

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8. Treat People Individually and With Respect

- Adapt your management style to each person
- Everyone likes different projects
 - Specific tasks vs. general information
 - New complex problems vs. immediate success
- Your staff's relationship with you is more significant than rewards
 - Ask your staff what they want from work
 - Provide opportunities to do new or different work
 - Treat people with respect
 - Clarify each person's contribution to the organization (in a one-on-one)
 - Hire candidates they respect
 - Treat people as individuals

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9. Meet Weekly with Each Person

- You need to know what your organization or project is doing
- You need to know what the people are doing, so you can create performance reviews
 - With everyone at a regular uninterrupted time
 - We talk about
 - Their accomplishments: Showing progress, not just talking about progress
 - Their issues
 - If they need my help
 - Career development
 - Anything else they want to discuss
 - After we've done this for a while, they can set the agenda

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But, I Don't Have Time to Meet With Everyone...

- You already are
- If you plan time, you can reduce the number of unplanned interruptions
- How will you give timely feedback on performance?

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10. Plan Training Time in the Workweek

- Technical work is constantly changing
- People generally like getting training
- Many inexpensive ways
 - Brown bag lunches
 - Periodic talks from other groups
 - Present projects across the company
 - In-house tool “user group” meeting
 - Outside experts
 - ♦ Professional consultants or speakers
 - ♦ Knowledgeable friend or colleague

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11. Fire People Who Can't Do the Work

- If you've tried to hire the appropriate people, and you've given them feedback, and they're not working out, fire them
 - Part of your job as a manager is to assess peoples' work, and give them feedback
 - If they can't work the way you need them to, your job is done
 - Work with your HR group to handle the situation with humanity and persistence. I follow this checklist:
 - ♦ Verbal feedback and coaching in our one-on-ones. How many times do I have to say the same thing?
 - ♦ Written feedback and more coaching. Start a 4-8 week get-well plan with defined outcomes
 - ♦ Continue weekly feedback until end of get-well plan.
- Keeping people around who can't perform is expensive in time, project budget and morale

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12. Emphasize Results, Not Time

- Hours working do not positively correlate with productivity
- Permit (Force?) people to only work 40 hours per week
 - When they work longer, they do non-work things
 - Productivity goes down
 - If you keep people working only 40 hours per week, they work on work things

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Managing in a High-Interruption Environment

- “You can’t get anything done here between 9am and 5pm”
 - Ask your entire group to log their time (you too)
 - Where is the time going?
- Ideas
 - Can you cancel meetings?
 - Can you or your staff reorganize the work?
- Look for obstacles
 - Observe results and obstacles to results
 - Easier to give accurate performance evaluations
- Reward results

- Plan for a 40-hour week, and reward the work completed in that time

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13. Admit Your Mistakes

- Mistakes are embarrassing
- If you admit mistakes, people respect you more
- Don't deny or ignore mistakes

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14. Recognize and Reward Good Work

- Give positive feedback liberally
 - Privately as one-on-ones
 - Publicly in group meetings (if that fits for the person)
 - Publicly to the organization about the group's work or a project's work
- Rewards don't have to cost you money
 - Consider team-generated awards (divorced from money)
 - "Best recursion of the month"
 - "Best problem report of the month"
 - Time off
 - Group activity, but consider whether everyone really enjoys the activity
 - Appreciations
 - Team party
 - Movie tickets
 - Ask the group

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15. Manage Yourself

- Before you can manage other people successfully, you need to know how to manage yourself
 - Organize your work
 - Recognize when you're accomplishing work and when you're stuck
 - Recognize when your reactions are not in synch with the situation
 - Learn from your decision-making, behaviors, and actions

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Great Managers Manage the Management Balancing Act

Deliver Results:
Manage the
Project Portfolio

Develop Capacity:
Assigning People
to Projects

Work through and with other people

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Technical People Can Make Great Managers

- Manage your management career
- Know what you have to do, and develop a strategy to do the work
 - Identify how to manage your staff
 - Observe your own work
 - Make corrections and continue
- You don't have to be perfect
- Do enough right to help people do their best work in an environment they can work in

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- I have a number of articles on my web site, www.jrothman.com and blog, www.jrothman.com/weblog/blogger.html

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