

# The Advisor

Resources for Supervisors, Managers, and Human Resources Personnel

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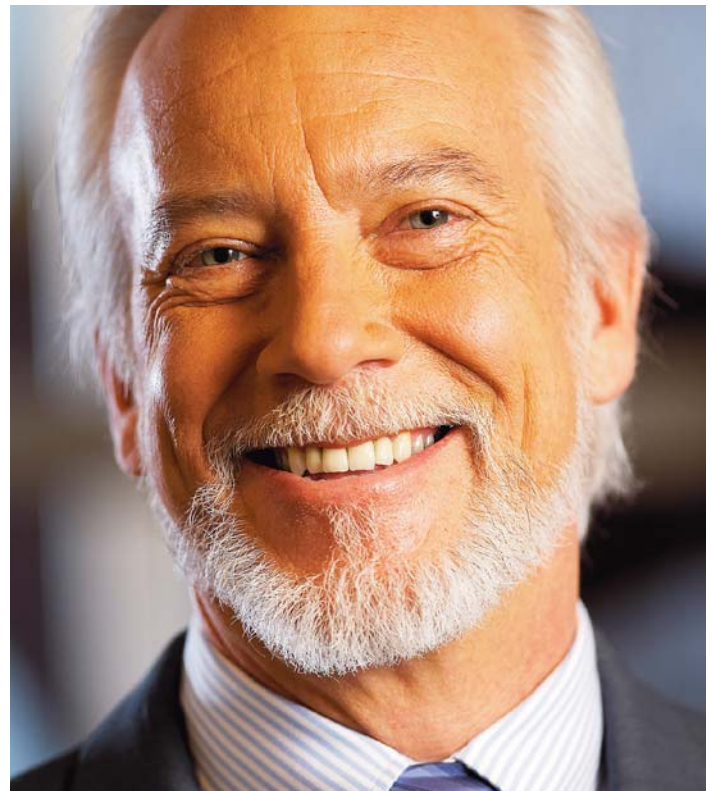
## Taking a Management Inventory

For many managers, the day-to-day whirlwind of responsibilities and decisions leaves little time for self-evaluation. Meetings, staff reviews, scheduling, and trying to anticipate the next crisis often take precedence over considering one's managerial challenges and strengths. But to improve as a manager — and to help your team succeed in achieving its goals — it's important to periodically assess your own performance.

One way to do this is by conducting a management inventory. By taking a methodical look at how you function as a manager, you can determine areas for improvement and set your goals accordingly. Some management questions to consider when creating your own personal inventory include:

### Delegating

- **Do I delegate tasks when appropriate?** It's easy to get overly involved in the details of day-to-day operations, especially if you're the sort of person who likes to do everything yourself. If you're performing a task that a staff member could handle just as well (or better), hand it off so that your time is free to focus on other priorities.
- **Are the tasks I assign balanced fairly so all employees get opportunities to grow and expand their skills?** An important aspect of delegating is creating opportunities for employees to improve their skill sets. Some employees may have more advanced capabilities than others, and it's appropriate that they are assigned more complex tasks. However,



it's important that less experienced employees get opportunities to grow as well. Be careful not to "play favorites" when assigning tasks.

### Strategic thinking

- **Do I focus on the big picture?** It's easy for the big picture to slip out of focus when you're dealing with the details of keeping your team on track. On a regular basis, make sure you take a step back, critically examine all the different aspects of your team's functioning, and consider what changes you could implement to streamline workflow or improve operational methods.

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- **Have I planned ahead for different contingencies?** What would you do if a key contributor were to suddenly fall ill? Have you crosstrained team members on different responsibilities so that someone can “pinch hit” if a staff member resigns, transfers to a different department, or takes a vacation? Thinking about the “what ifs” for your team and identifying where you need to put contingency plans in place will help ensure that priority tasks are covered.
- **Am I staying up-to-date on trends and technologies that may lead to improvements in team efficiency?** Technology changes fast, and the methods you implemented a year ago may be obsolete next month. Staying abreast of the latest trends in your team’s area of expertise may help you find ways to increase efficiency — and could lead to new ideas for products or services.

### Communication

- **Do I establish clear expectations for individual employees?** Ask each of your employees to list their top three workplace priorities. If their answers surprise you, it may be time to clarify each team member’s responsibilities. Understanding what you expect will help an employee focus on the tasks that most benefit your team, while improving his or her confidence and the team’s overall morale.
- **Do I articulate team goals?** Are your team members all on the same page? Do they understand how their different tasks interact to achieve team goals?

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Periodically meet to review the goals you’ve set for your team, allowing time for questions and brainstorming.

- **Have I articulated a shared vision for my team’s mission?** Give your team a glimpse of the big picture and how their contributions fit into the organization’s overall objectives.

### Coaching

- **Do I take time to learn about my direct reports?** While prying into an employee’s personal life is inappropriate, learning about her or his work background can be helpful. Knowing about employees builds rapport and may reveal useful skills that could benefit your team.
- **Do I create opportunities for team members to grow in their fields of expertise?** Encourage employees to improve by taking advantage of training opportunities. If an employee is pursuing an advanced degree that may benefit the organization, do your best to make reasonable accommodations (switching schedules, etc.) that will assist him or her with achieving this goal.

- **Do I use mistakes as learning opportunities?** An angry reaction rarely fixes a mistake. Instead, critically examine errors (both those you make and those made by employees). Focus on learning from mistakes and what they reveal about the need for additional training or a change in team procedures.
- **Am I training my replacement?** If you aren't training your replacement, you're not putting the needs of the organization first. Pinpointing talent that could take over if you were to step into another role is a valuable leadership trait.

### Work/Life Balance

- **Do I get sufficient rest, exercise, and eat well?** Taking care of yourself is an essential aspect of being a good manager. People who have healthy lifestyles tend to be more resilient and more adept at making good decisions in stressful situations. As the adage goes, the first person you lead is yourself.
- **Do I use vacation appropriately as an opportunity to wind down and recharge?** If you haven't had a vacation in some time, you may be overdue. Research demonstrates that using one's allotted vacation time actually increases productivity and overall workplace satisfaction,

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## How Do I Say That

In some instances, you may realize that a direct report knows more about a particular area than you do. Here's how to approach asking a team member to mentor you.

1. **Acknowledge the employee's skills.** Take the time to compliment the employee's mastery of the skill you would like to learn. *"I've noticed you seem to have a better handle on the new software than I do."*
2. **Ask the employee for assistance in learning the new skill.** Be polite and respectful when making this request. *"I would like to schedule some time for us to review the software so I could improve my skills."*
3. **Be respectful of the employee's workload.** Do your best to minimize the impact of your training request on the employee's regular responsibilities. Rearrange due dates on projects to accommodate your training time or pitch in to assist with her or his tasks in return for the training assistance. *"I realize this will take time away from your usual duties. I'm glad to offer some assistance to make up for the time you spend training me."*
4. **Place the employee at ease.** Mentoring one's boss may be intimidating, especially for a newer employee who doesn't know you well. Do your best to set the employee at ease by paying attention, asking questions, and expressing your appreciation for his or her mastery of the task you're learning. *"Thank you for taking the time to help me. I really appreciate it."*

For additional suggestions on how to learn from your employees, contact **LifeMatters®**.

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while also decreasing stress-related ailments and health insurance claims. While “checking in” is appropriate, keep it to a minimum. Spending all your time on work calls, emails, and texts defeats the purpose of taking time off.

- **Do I have outside interests that help me grow as a person and contribute to my professional development?** Activities that contribute to a well-rounded existence — hobbies, spending time with friends, enjoying the arts — not only help relieve stress, but can inspire creative thinking. If you haven’t invested time in your own personal development, now is a good time to take a class, spend time with nature, or investigate that hobby you always wanted to try.

For more suggestions on how to assess your management skills, contact the **LifeMatters**<sup>®</sup> Management Consultation Service.

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