



Case Study

Helping an Inexperienced Manager Out of a Deep Hole Toward Success

Jack was a high potential associate with an MBA and was a recent graduate of the company's internal management training program. Little in his background prepared him for his first significant management assignment in his mid 20's. Thrust immediately into the spotlight, he was responsible for a three shift operations department of over 100 people and was expected to create a weekend shift, effectively managing a 7 x 24 production environment.

The department he inherited had poor quality, dissatisfied internal and external clients, a weak management structure, heavy turnover, high overtime and severe processing backlogs. Additionally, pressure to convert to a new processing system was draining many experienced and capable resources from production.

Only months after being named to a newer and more challenging role, my boss asked me to spend three days a week for an indefinite period of time helping Jack. I agreed despite misgivings since I was in a new role myself. Fortunately, my new team was experienced and very capable which made it possible for me to take on this internal consulting role.

So, how do you help an inexperienced manager out of a deep hole, and help him grow and prosper from it?

In his inexperience, Jack initially thought the circumstances he inherited along with the dissatisfaction signals from various constituencies were a normal part of the job and had to be survived. He thought that if he worked as hard as he could he would succeed. In his view, reacting and fire fighting were going to get the job done. He had made up his mind that he was going to make it, "sucking it up" and working long hours.

He acknowledges today that he was naïve. His perspective was fueled in part by his new boss' feedback that he was "doing great" and to "keep it up". As we began to spend time together, Jack began to realize that things in his department were more seriously wrong than he had realized. He also began to see better ways to overcome the significant challenges he faced that would ensure long lasting success for all.

During our times together, I became a sounding board for Jack. I challenged his thinking, assumptions and ideas. I asked questions, helped with priorities and shared stories about basic management, planning, organization, delegation, measurement, staff and self development. Over time, Jack began to see things differently. Several new insights began to come into focus for him:

- The condition of his department was worse than he realized.
- There was a better way to manage than by merely surviving and sucking it up.
- He would not “get out of the ditch running harder”.
- While planning can seem to be keeping you away from the urgent, it is essential to achieve ultimate success.
- Delegation without preparation is a recipe for disaster.
- The value and need for setting priorities.

Over time, Jack implemented many changes. While the changes were positive and well received, it became clear to all that more substantive changes were necessary. A recommendation to his manager and others resulted in a management re-organization and a more suitable yet still challenging role within the new structure for Jack. Coaching sessions with Jack helped to assure him that the changes were not related to his performance. Trust and credibility I earned over time facilitated the discussion and his acceptance of the changes.

Ultimately the new system was implemented and a year and a half later the department was successfully integrated with another similar department as a result of a large regional merger. Jack contributed significantly to these successes and performed very well in subsequent roles including as site manager of the acquiring bank’s largest similar site located in another state.

Because of his initial management experience, Jack adopted several commitments, concepts and processes and that continue to serve him well:

- Most importantly, Jack committed to not putting a person in a similar position. He embraced the concept of a Situation Analysis, a comprehensive tool to allow new managers a brief period of time to investigate key aspects of their new areas of responsibility to help them understand the business before managing it.
- Spending quality up front time on planning and strategy.
- Establishing mini goals and tracking results.
- Leveraging the resources you have at your disposal. Using the resources you have and don’t do everything all at one time.
- Using internal consultants as a resource to get what needed, a vehicle to gain support and help.
- When assessing staffing needs for your department/division, considering a good mixture of human, technical and managerial competencies for the make-up of your team.
- Hiring the right people, blending youth with experience.
- Hiring powerful high potentials.
- The need for focusing on people and people development.

Over the years, Jack continued to advance within the broader merged companies in roles of increasing complexity, responsibility and visibility. Today he is senior human resources executive, which includes coaching and consulting with senior leaders. Part of his job is to help leaders avoid situations like the one he was thrust into years ago. In this role, he plays “a role like the one you played with me... and I get paid for doing what I love doing”.

You may have placed a high potential in a similar untenable situation. You may be that high potential. There is hope and a way out that will help you and/or the high potential grow, prosper and have a very impactful and prosperous career. Doing so will develop leaders that are loyal and committed to the organization and will produce the bench strength your organization needs to succeed long term.

If you would like a free Executive Management Assessment with me to discuss how I can help you achieve the greatest success possible, please call me or email me and we'll get clear about the best immediate next steps for the success of you and your team.

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