FOCUS ON THEM

BECOME THE MANAGER YOUR PEOPLE NEED YOU TO BE

EDITED BY
RYAN CHANGCOCO
MEGAN COLE
AND JACK HARLOW
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To the ideal manager, may you always strive to be your best self.
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Introduction

“Managing people is easy.”
—No one ever

The workplace is changing. Some call it an engagement crisis, and others call it the Millennial takeover. Whatever it is, there’s one thing we all know: The management approaches that we once relied on need to evolve to get in front of the ever-changing workplace. Clearly, it’s time to switch up our approach to management.

For some of us, the goal is to find new and innovative ways to better engage and retain employees. Whether that means holding people accountable, enhancing communication, or engaging staff, we can all stand to improve our methods. For others, it’s about getting back to basics, and that’s what this book is all about. At the Association for Talent Development (ATD), we think it’s important to improve upon the five basic skills all managers need: accountability, communication, collaboration, engagement, and listening and assessing.

Great Managers Make Connections; Bad Managers . . .
Great managers are few and far between. When we came together to edit this book, we immediately began to think about the truly great managers
we’ve had. For Ryan it’s Ed, his boss at a previous stop. Together, they worked on the federal side for a healthcare insurance company. At the time, the team’s function was brand-new, and Ed had a limited amount of experience with the job he was brought in to do; he’d never managed the kind of product that they were tasked with developing. Even so, Ed quickly became a memorable manager with a management style that was trusting, supportive, and transparent.

He used to say, “Work is just one part of life; never forget what the truly important things are to you.” At that moment, Ed connected with Ryan and his other direct reports as people—it was clear that they were more than just cogs he needed to keep the business running. As their work continued, Ed felt pressure from the top to ensure they were performing, and performing well. He and Ryan had many conversations about what was going on, not just to commiserate but to foster an open and honest environment and help Ryan understand the decisions Ed had to make. Ryan found these conversations refreshing, and they cultivated a deeper sense of trust.

Unfortunately, not all managers are great, which is why we’re bringing this book to you. It’s more likely that you’ve come into contact with a bad manager. In fact, most people can come up with many more stories about bad managers than they can good—there’s simply no shortage of bad managers.

Having a bad boss can make an otherwise decent job quickly lose its appeal. There are myriad types of bad bosses, too: The micromanager. The steam roller. The blame shifter. And they wreak havoc on engagement, productivity, and performance. When people like their boss, they ramp up their productivity, become happier on the job, and maintain a better work-life balance. Alternatively, when employees don’t like their boss, they are more likely to leave.

But what about managers who don’t develop their employees? Sometimes managers may seem fine at face value, but don’t do much in the way of developing their direct reports. Nearly every expert on employee engagement agrees there is a single, most impactful means of increasing employee engagement and performance: the manager. Developing
employees is a big part of a manager’s responsibilities, so why are some managers so bad at it?

**The Accidental Manager**

Accidental managers are everywhere. Often, the manager was an individual contributor at the top of their game who was promoted either because the organization didn’t want to lose them or because it seemed like the natural progression. But once they become a manager, it’s a whole different story. A stellar individual contributor doesn’t necessarily translate into an effective manager. Indeed, most companies fail to prepare their employees as they transition into management. When a new manager transitions into the role from an individual contributor position, it becomes less about the work, and more about the people. Less about the “me” and more about the “we.”

Not only is a lack of training and preparation to blame for lousy managers, but oftentimes people don’t know what “good” management even looks like. Consider this: If all you’ve ever had are bad managers, how would you know what to do when you become a manager? It’s likely that you’d emulate what you’ve seen your entire professional life. While some managers consciously abuse their authority, the vast majority of “bad” managers don’t realize that they’re underperforming and underserving the people relying on them to lead. Unfortunately, as is often true in business, ignorance excuses naught.

Developing employees comes with the territory when you’re a manager. And yet, many managers lack the skills and competence to effectively do this part of the job, and their organizations don’t always provide the opportunities to develop them. As such, it’s necessary for frontline managers to learn the skills needed, with or without the help of their talent development function.

But which skills will best serve managers in reaching their full potential at developing their employees? This question led ATD to conduct a little management research.
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The ACCEL Model
In 2015, ATD Research conducted a poll of learning executives, asking them to identify their top skills related to managerial success. Using that research, ATD developed the ACCEL skills model, which outlines the five key skills managers need: accountability, communication, collaboration, engagement, and listening and assessing.

Shortly after its creation, ATD Research used the model in its report *ACCEL: The Skills That Make a Winning Manager* to examine which skills were necessary to successfully develop a manager’s direct reports. This was a natural extension of the model, because developing direct reports is a critical responsibility of the manager role.

The study found that just 46 percent of organizations had identified skills related to managerial success in developing direct reports. Further, a majority of participants indicated that each of the five ACCEL skills contributed to managerial success in developing direct reports, ranging from 75 to 86 percent. Perhaps most surprising was that fewer than a third of respondents indicated that managers at their organization exhibited each of the ACCEL skills when working with their direct reports.

Even though participants believed these five ACCEL skills contributed to managerial success in developing direct reports, they reported that opportunities to cultivate them were relatively rare. Communication was the skill with the largest opportunity for development; 38 percent of respondents said managers were given opportunities to develop communication proficiency to a high or very high extent. Managers were least likely to have the opportunity to develop collaboration skills (30 percent). While these numbers may seem low, consider that manager development isn’t a priority for 43 percent of organizations.

Until organizations and talent development departments fill the void of absent or neglected management development programs, managers and their direct reports will be at a disadvantage. Fortunately, you can take steps to improve your ACCEL skills on your own.
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The Book

We’ve assembled some of the best minds in management and talent development to share their knowledge on the skills you need to excel as a manager. Throughout this book, we and our contributors will illustrate how to implement these skills in your life, while offering actionable tips and best practices. Let’s go over each of the ACCEL skills in turn.

Accountability

When many managers focus on team accountability, it’s often first perceived through the lens of some threat—imposing negative consequences upon a poor performer or implying negative repercussions should a team member not complete their work in a thorough fashion. But this narrow view of accountability—focusing on the negative—can cause fear and become a drain on productivity. The best managers understand that accountability is most effective when team members find motivation within themselves to get their work done.

In the first chapter, ATD Vice President of Content and Digital Marketing Tim Ito introduces FACES, a human-centered approach to accountability that involves focus, apprenticeship, challenge, education, and safety. Managers can instill a culture of accountability within their teams by focusing on organizational goals and day-to-day priorities; offering opportunities to shadow experts and learn continuously; challenging direct reports with meaningful, achievable goals; and ensuring everyone feels safe to succeed and fail.

Communication

Workplace communication no longer occurs just around the watercooler, in meetings, or via email—tasks, responsibilities, and new projects are all discussed in a faster, more informal manner across the organization through emerging technologies. As this information cascades down from manager to direct report, the opportunities for miscommunication skyrocket. That’s why, more than ever, a manager who lacks strong communication skills is unlikely to succeed. Managers who don’t match words with actions, convey
vague versus concrete requests, and shy away from tough conversations will struggle to develop their team.

In his chapter, business communication expert Ken O’Quinn shows how the truly gifted communicators appreciate the power of language and navigate the manager-as-talent-developer dynamic. Only by being transparent and open can managers strengthen their credibility to the point that they can influence their team. This is the foundation that managers need to lay to deliver targeted, actionable feedback. And through this feedback, the manager can communicate the organization’s vision, facilitate change, and connect with their employees.

Collaboration

Why, with the ever-increasing means to communicate and connect with one another, does effective collaboration appear to be out of reach for most managers? For starters, a manager needs to create an environment of teamwork before collaboration is even possible. This is a daunting task for new and even seasoned managers when the demand for short-term wins often triumphs over longer-term culture building. Managers who excel in collaboration nurture relationships between all team members, clarify team roles, and encourage cooperation toward achieving a common goal. By encouraging trust and relationship building between team members, managers position direct reports to share knowledge with and learn from one another.

In his chapter, Winsor Jenkins, founder and president of Winsor Jenkins & Associates, provides a clear path to practicing genuine team collaboration. It all begins with shifting your mindset from lecturing to listening, from controlling to influencing, and from valuing likeness to valuing differences. You also need to assess your self-awareness and check your underlying assumptions to determine how you and your team can best collaborate given the available resources, nature of work, and external demands. By assuming the dual roles of manager and coach, you can create a culture of collaboration that allows your direct reports to grow themselves and produce sustainable results: a win-win.
Engagement
Employee engagement leads the priority list of most executives as they search for solutions to attract new talent while retaining their high performers. While engagement is often defined as the act of motivating, inspiring, and involving employees, organizations still grapple with the “how.” Increasingly, they’re turning to managers, the frontline employee’s main organizational touchpoint, to boost engagement. For most managers this is unchartered territory and just one more responsibility added on to making sure the work gets done on time; some continue to elevate meeting the bottom line over driving engagement. But the best managers focus on both, and they do them well.

In her chapter, organization development and inclusion consultant Hunter Haines tackles the questions of what engages employees, why managers have failed to do their part, and how they can fill this essential role. Engaged employees understand their specific role and its importance, and they feel valued and involved in decision making. Managers who engage their direct reports share important organizational information throughout the employee life cycle, not just once at the beginning and then occasionally in annual feedback sessions. The result? Direct reports who are committed to their work and make positive contributions to their own development and the company.

Listening and Assessing
Because organizations rely more and more on managers to maintain organizational productivity, managers have been led to believe that having all the right answers and always knowing what to say is the only way to succeed. Rarely are managers encouraged to sit back, listen, and then assess. And when they do, managers often fall into typical routines: They listen for what they expect to be true, they listen to demonstrate their own expertise, or they listen impatiently and apathetically. But listening is an essential information-gathering, critical-thinking, and processing tool during interactions with direct reports. By not developing listening skills, managers fail to best serve their organization and often make less
accurate judgments; too many employees believe their managers do not listen to their concerns.

In her chapter, Michele Nevarez, an executive coach and seasoned HR executive, shows how the ability to listen as a manager is directly linked to team performance, engagement, and quality of work. Naturally, this requires emotional intelligence, recognizing your own and others’ emotions, and using emotional information to guide your behavior and assessments. Managers who are skilled at listening and assessing use these abilities to identify areas of strength and improvement in direct reports. In the end, what makes a good listener is also what allows managers to inspire their team to go above and beyond consistently in their work.

**Don’t Worry, You’ll Manage**
The reality of it is that becoming a great manager is not easy, nor will it ever be. It takes time, patience, and a willingness to admit when something is not working. And beyond that, managers who aim to improve must genuinely want to and care about their employees.

For those who are embarking on the journey to improving their management skills, the upside is that there are a ton of resources on how to manage well. Blog after blog, Ted Talk after Ted Talk, expert after expert, and book after book (including this one), there are resources everywhere to help with every single facet of management. It is our hope that with this book we have advanced the conversation and provided the tools you need to truly succeed. If you’re not sure about where to start, sit back and think about all your own experiences with good (and bad) managers, and go from there.

Just remember that becoming a good manager is an ongoing process. When you think you’ve perfected it, something new will come up that you don’t expect. Don’t let this discourage you. Tomorrow is a new day for you to try something new and to learn from yesterday’s mistake.
You might say the most important job I ever had was one that no longer exists today—at least not in the same capacity that it used to. In 1993, I started my professional career as a fact-checker for *U.S. News & World Report*. Fact-checking was a serious business—the responsibility of a separate editorial department that made sure the claims and facts stated in a magazine’s print edition were true. The *New Yorker* had a famed fact-checking department, as did *National Geographic* and other magazines such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. This was before the Internet, when print magazine subscriptions still ruled the day.

In most places, the profession was a deadline-driven business. Every Friday night, fact-checkers, along with the copy editors, top editors, and writers, “put the magazine to bed,” working into the wee hours to send the final copy to the printers. These deadlines often meant working under a lot of pressure; as fact-checkers, we had to verify the accuracy of the sources provided by the writer and do the little things, such as making sure names and places were spelled correctly. We were responsible for confirming any of the details upon which the publication’s integrity hung.
Because of the emphasis placed on accuracy and attention to detail, the role proved to be a great training ground for a job as a writer and reporter, which is the path I eventually took. Perhaps the greatest lesson I learned revolved around the importance of accountability. Not just individual accountability in terms of getting work done accurately under a deadline, but more important, the accountability leaders can instill in their team.

Let me give some perspective on this.

When many leaders focus on team accountability, it’s often first perceived through the lens of some threat, such as imposing negative consequences upon a poor performer or implying negative repercussions should a team member submit incomplete work or fail to meet a deadline.

That’s not necessarily a bad thing. Negative consequences, if applied thoughtfully, can spur team members to finish their work the way a boss wants while also providing a sense of urgency. But when they’re the only tool a leader uses, the work atmosphere often becomes draining because team members can see only the downside, rather than the upside, to the work they do. Also, most leaders understand that accountability is best when it’s intrinsic and an individual team member is motivated on their own to get the work done and get it right.

That latter approach is what I learned from Kathleen Phillips, my boss at *U.S. News & World Report*. By the time I got there, Kathleen had led the fact-checking department for more than a decade. What made her special was that she had not only knowledge, but the wisdom and energy to spread what she knew to others. The atmosphere she created was unique in the sense that her staff seemed to be intrinsically motivated and accountable for their own results. In fact, much of my own management style today is modeled on her approach.

What made it effective?

**FACES: A Human Approach to Accountability**

I’ve often thought about why Kathleen proved to be such a successful manager, particularly around accountability. I believe she understood that
accountability, at its heart, is primarily about understanding that people are the center of team effectiveness. Through studying her methods I’ve come up with a framework of core principles called FACES (focus, apprenticeship, challenge, education, and safety).

First, let’s take a step back and look at the big picture. What do you want your team to accomplish? Around what dates? Remember, it’s not just getting them to finish the work; it’s getting them to finish the right work, the right way, and to prioritize their deliverables because multitasking is the norm in most occupations.

So how do you start approaching accountability? Let’s look at a scenario: You’re a busy manager who is often in meetings with your boss or your colleagues in other divisions. Your team has to accomplish lots of work, so you delegate task after task to your employees. After you assign the tasks, you expect each one to not only be checked off the list, but also be done well and in a timely manner. When the tasks get done, you believe your employees did well. When they aren’t or when they aren’t done well, you look at your employees and ask why. You begin to question their ability to get the job done.

It’s not uncommon.

But that’s a mindset that can get managers into trouble. The responsibility for an employee getting the work done rests not only on the employee but ultimately with you as their manager. And that’s where you can start providing the focus they need.

Focus
There are two aspects of focus worth paying attention to. The first involves the broader sense of the word: What’s the organization’s overall mission? How does the team’s work fit into that? What’s the group’s overall goal? How is it measured? What translates into success?

As a manager, one of your most important roles is to communicate all those things up front to employees. On my first day at *U.S. News & World Report*, Kathleen took me around the building and we discussed the history
of the magazine, its legacy, the role it played in covering important events that happened in history, the famed covers, and the editors of what, at that point, was its almost 60-year history.

Although she never said this to me, I think the reason she gave me this history lesson was to provide context for the work we were doing and help us, as fact-checkers, understand that quality and reputation mattered. Kathleen then followed up the tour with a discussion about our role as fact-checkers in the editorial process. We were the guardians of the magazine’s legacy, she said. We were the last line of defense against errors that would harm its reputation.

In other words, she provided a clear expression of the role fact-checkers played at the magazine.

And this is where a lot of managers often fail their employees. A 2014 Partners in Leadership accountability study sheds some light on this. According to the survey, “only 15% of organizations have clearly defined, cascaded messages of organizational goals. Specifically, 93% of employees don’t understand what their organization is trying to accomplish, 85% of leaders aren’t defining what their people should be working on, and 84% of the workforce describes itself as trying but failing or avoiding accountability.”

That broader focus provides purpose. And purpose is a large part of what drives employee accountability.

If managers—often due to time constraints or their own lack of understanding about the organization’s mission and vision—don’t provide that context, their employees won’t understand why they’re doing what they’re doing. How many managerial peers do you know who basically just throw employees into the work and say: “OK, here’s your first task”?

After you’ve communicated the broader picture to employees, the second aspect of focus involves prioritization. Do you know what your employees are working on every day? Do you care? Do you ask them?

They sound like flippant questions, but a lot of managers don’t know what their employees are doing on a day-to-day basis. While managers might generally understand their employees’ jobs, they often don’t communicate which parts of those jobs are the most important.
At *U.S. News & World Report*, Kathleen, as head of the fact-checking department, would divvy up our weekly assignments often based on our backgrounds. I fact-checked a lot of the articles on Asia, simply because I had lived there and knew a little bit about the countries in the region. But she never handed over the files and sources to check without giving us the background or backstory on the piece. This was especially true for new employees. She would make sure to give us the heads-up on the need to check certain articles more thoroughly because of their litigious nature (or because the writer was often sloppy in sourcing). In other words, she told us which articles had priority in terms of making sure things were right.

As you can imagine, if controversial articles had the wrong facts, it could mean disaster for our reputation—inaccuracy in any part of the article would inevitably lead people to question the rest of the article. (Or worse, sue for libel.)

Kathleen’s guidance provided focus for what we should be working on and paying attention to. So many times, I’ve seen managers make that critical mistake—they delegate, but then let the employees dictate what they work on as a way to give them the freedom to be creative and take their own risks. These managers further justify the practice by saying they “don’t have time” to deal with knowing what tasks employees are working on.

That’s a lousy excuse. And frankly, it’s lazy managing. Part of the role of ensuring accountability involves not just delegating responsibility, but also defining the limits of the figurative sandbox in which employees play. If “anything” is fair game, then the work output will often have no relationship to what the business unit or organization is trying to accomplish. Thus, managers need to define those limits and make the effort to understand and prioritize the work that employees do.

But what about creativity? Won’t setting limits hinder your employees’ ability to develop and create more efficient solutions? Isn’t that why managers delegate work? Where is the line between prioritizing employees’ work and micromanaging?
Part of the art of management is understanding how to harness an employee’s creativity within the scope of the work that they do. Telling them that anything is possible would be neither constructive nor particularly helpful in advancing an organization’s cause. But helping them find or giving them the freedom to innovate within a particular area or context is different. In that way, managers can focus employees on solving the issues that are most pressing.

A good example of this is Spotify, a music and multimedia streaming company with roughly 83 million paid subscribers as of this writing (Steigrad 2018). Spotify takes a unique approach to balance employee creativity with accountability. One way the company does this is to develop alignment without excessive control. As Michael Mankins and Eric Garton (2017) note in *Harvard Business Review*: “The central organization feature that shapes Spotify’s model is the concept of ‘loosely coupled, tightly aligned squads.’ The key belief here is that ‘alignment enables autonomy—the greater the alignment, the more autonomy you can grant.’” A leader’s job is to identify the problem and communicate it. The teams can then collaborate to find the best solution.

And what about time constraints? It’s true, managers are often overworked and spend so much time in so many meetings that they often have to spend evenings catching up on email and staying up-to-date with what their own boss wants, much less what their employees need. But if you think about it in terms of priorities and the big picture, it’s important to ask yourself whether spending extra time guiding your employees, providing context, and helping steer their priorities is worth it. Delegation is fine in theory, but in practice it requires managers to make the extra effort to ensure the delegated tasks are prioritized and done well.

In the end, I would argue there’s actually no question at all. If you ensure your employees succeed in the areas you want them to do well in, then haven’t you succeeded as well? And one tactic to instituting big picture as well as day-to-day focus within your team is pairing your novice employees with the more expert ones, as we’ll discuss in more detail in the next section.
**Apprenticeship**

The proliferation of management practices in the 1970s and 1980s by prominent business schools across the country has undoubtedly made managers more efficient and productive. Indeed, together with technology gains, the productivity of the average worker shot up 74 percent between 1973 and 2013, according to the Economic Policy Institute (Mishel, Gould, and Bivens 2015). However, I think it’s fair to wonder whether a side effect of those practices has been to turn accountability into another word for productivity (which it isn’t), touting results over process.

While the productivity boon was great news for corporations, stocks, and shareholders, it has proved a more complex reality for managers. For one, they are working harder and longer than ever before. According to the latest data available from sources such as Gallup, the average full-time employee now works 47 hours per week, up from 40.3 hours in 1970—that’s almost a full day more (Saad 2014; Whaples 2001).

However, this increased work time hasn’t always translated into more time spent with employees. Alan Patterson, a noted management guru and consultant, said, “It used to be managers could take employees under their wing and develop them steadily, almost like an apprenticeship, giving them feedback, teaching them the ropes.” Today, however, management often amounts to little more than a shortcut, he continues, with pressed-for-time managers simply giving employees task-based and deadline-focused direction—little that inspires, involves, or makes employees feel accountable for results in the greater picture.

This is where an apprenticeship approach can make a difference. One of the things I loved about *U.S. News & World Report* was the fact that our department had experts in several areas, particularly foreign affairs. Two of the fact-checkers who worked at the magazine were retired State Department foreign service officers, Erick and Dan. Having traveled and lived all over the world, they were invaluable to the department and proved to be a wellspring of knowledge about many countries and regions. Erick and Dan would regale us with stories about the places they’d been. In doing
so, we not only heard fascinating stories, but also learned the basics of our craft—what sources to use to check certain facts, how to call sources on the phone, and, most important, when to question the facts in an article based on our own experience and knowledge.

When I was just starting at the magazine, Kathleen had me work with Erick and Dan, almost in an apprenticeship-type role. I remember once that Dan was fact-checking a story on Turkey and one of our top writers had named a certain market in Istanbul, describing it in vivid detail. Dan, who had lived in Istanbul, sent an email to the writer saying that the market she described wasn’t the one she named, but the Grand Bazaar, which, to this day, remains one of the city’s finest merchant centers. The writer replied that indeed, she had confused the two markets in her sourcing and was grateful to Dan for catching her mistake.

What was remarkable about that exchange wasn’t that he caught the mistake without being on-site with her as she was writing the report—it was that I learned that I could challenge a top writer on something they reported on as being true. That may not seem like a big deal to someone on the outside, but many of these writers at *U.S. News* were national figures at the top of their craft, and a fact-checker wouldn’t generally challenge the validity of their reporting. What I learned from watching Dan, however, was that challenging writers was part of the job—and it was done in the name of making the magazine more reputable.

That’s where the lost art of apprenticeship comes in. When you as an employee can watch someone with more tenure than you do something—handle a situation, carry themselves, or even simply organize something—the experience can be invaluable. An apprenticeship helps employees learn their craft in a way that can’t be replicated.

To me, it’s the primary difference between being productive and being accountable. Accountability is not just finishing a task on time; it means taking true responsibility and buying in to the importance of the work’s quality. It also takes a much longer-term view because it’s not just about the fact that the work is done, but it’s that the work is done well and employees continue to be motivated. Accountability breeds sustainability. That’s why
apprenticeships, whether formal or informal, can be so effective in helping employees build sustainable habits.

Yet despite evidence that apprenticeships improve productivity and accountability, they are rarely used in the United States. In fact, among developed nations, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom all outstrip the United States in terms of formal apprenticeships on an absolute basis, according to the Center for American Progress (Steinberg and Gurwitz 2014).

And that’s just formal apprenticeships. In the average workplace, informal apprenticeships have all but disappeared. It’s not surprising because managers lack the time to facilitate an apprenticeship-like atmosphere or pair employees with those they can learn from on the job. When pressed for time, what does the average person do? Well, first, they take shortcuts. For a manager, that often means they delegate tasks they don’t want to handle and turn the management process into a list of things for employees to do. It’s not that they don’t want to do more, but that’s all they have the time to communicate.

How do you get around this when you’re likely in the same situation? Won’t most people simply continue to get busier and have less time?

Part of your journey to being a good manager or executive is understanding the difference between short-term productivity and long-term employee growth. As a manager, giving employees a list of tasks and demanding they get them done may improve short-term productivity, but over the long term, it’s not clear that this is effective in helping people get better at what they do or stay motivated. Your focus must be on both.

If you don’t have time to personally look at how employees learn how to do their jobs well, then you are probably negatively influencing the long-term viability of those employees. Developing accountability in your staff also means that you make time for them. This involves finding ways to motivate, inspire, and challenge them.

**Challenge**

What does it mean to challenge your employees? Every manager will define this differently, but I would separate this phrase into a few different areas,
again with a focus on caring about employee development. In particular, managers should make sure any challenges are achievable, long term, and meaningful.

**Achievable**

Let's start with an achievable challenge. Outside of simply not asking anything from employees, I think one of the biggest mistakes that managers make is that they don't understand when or how much to push an employee's capacity to work. For example, if you think that a poorly performing employee who gives a “2” for effort will somehow turn into a “10” just because you challenge them, you're probably going to be let down. Rather, you need to focus on building capacity in employees over time. And that takes understanding a little bit about the brain and what constitutes an achievable challenge.

To illustrate this, think about a video game, such as Nintendo’s Super Mario Galaxy series. When you load any well-designed game, it starts at a very easy level. It's designed so that anyone who is new to the experience can learn as they go and gradually get better, while those who are already skilled can breeze through. Each level gets slightly harder than the last—the enemies move quicker, the controls require more dexterity—but the game builds on the skills the player has already acquired. As a result, each level poses a greater challenge. It's the reason games are so addictive—even though a player might not complete a particular level, they can see what it takes to reach the goal and become more motivated to get there. If a game started at a level that was too difficult, or neglected to build up a player’s skills effectively, most people would simply give up.

Management follows a similar principle. Your goal is to help your employees become continuously better at what they do. Hence, you have to give them challenges that are achievable so they can build their capacity at their current level. Challenges that are too hard—or too different from the work they do now—will likely overwhelm them, and many workers will simply get frustrated or give up.
How do you determine the appropriate challenge? Part of that comes from understanding the work employees do and how long a task takes. If you don’t understand that, it’s hard to communicate appropriate deadlines, and it becomes even more difficult to create an appropriate challenge. Good managers find out how long a task may take or try it themselves so they can understand the challenges involved. Only at that point can you set dates on deliverables with any reasonable sense of achievability.

And the key phrase here is *setting the dates*. Many managers communicate tasks and deliverables (and even priorities), but they never set an actual date that creates a sense of urgency to get tasks done. The result is that the average employee has neither the goal nor the drive to finish something in a particular timeframe. The bottom line: If you set dates and follow up, your teams will be more accountable for getting things done with a sense of urgency.

**Long Term Versus Short Term**

Next, let’s discuss long-term challenges. After more than 25 years in business, I believe the biggest mistake companies make is neglecting long-term thinking and development in favor of a short-term, quarterly (or annual) results mentality. For example, companies are often slow to move resources from old product lines that still earn revenue to potential new revenue lines because their priorities remain focused on the current year. Business writer and management consultant Peter Drucker (2009) once called this behavior “slaughtering tomorrow’s opportunity on the altar of yesterday.”

Drucker’s admonishment, though, isn’t just about broader company practices. It applies to management as well. How many managers do you know who focus on their team’s immediate needs based on the quarterly or annual results? Probably a lot, right? “We have to hit our numbers” is the rallying cry of so many divisions across so many companies. But part of accountability is also ensuring the financial security of the organization not just this year but next year and the year after as well.

The challenge for you as a manager and one that you must pass along to your employees is how to hit this quarter’s numbers while also develop-
ing the tools, platforms, products, delivery systems, marketing capabilities, and so forth that you need for the future. That’s actually the hardest part about being accountable—putting structures in place to grow the business for the long term.

One thing you can do that I find particularly helpful is to develop pipeline-like structures you can use for product, marketing, or any other type of longer-term initiative. What is it you want to produce next year? The year after? Based on what resources? Think this through and then map out the foundations for deliverables that will allow your team to hit the dates you set. Meet regularly to check on the progress.

For example, for longer-term initiatives, I meet with my team monthly, and in some case biweekly, to discuss development. That helps ensure longer-term initiatives remain top of mind for staff, so they understand that tomorrow’s initiatives can’t be ignored.

Meaningful
Finally, let’s talk about making challenges meaningful. And maybe the best way to illustrate this is with another example from my *U.S. News & World Report* days.

After leaving the fact-checking department and becoming a reporter, I remember once working with the managing editor of the business section on a story that I pitched and was approved to go forward. I wrote the first draft of the story, which was about the decline of the horse-racing industry, and sent it to the editor. It was a topic he knew a little bit about.

After reading my article, he said one thing to me: “You know how many times you’re going to write this story before we get it right?”

“How many times?” I asked.

“Four times—until we get it right,” was his reply.

“Couldn’t I get it right on the next try?” I thought to myself, but given that I was simply a junior reporter, I didn’t say anything. After all, he was an experienced editor who had worked at the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. I walked out of his office saying to myself that this was going to be painful.
And I was right.

Do you know how many times I rewrote that piece? I rewrote it exactly four times. And when he did his final edit on the last version, it was probably one he had planned out from my first version of the story. Over the course of those edits, I added some additional details, but the essential story basically remained the same.

So, what was the point of writing that piece three additional times? The editor wanted to show me that he was in charge. Was it challenging? It certainly was. But the larger point is that the information he made me fix and the extra work he made me do had no effect on the end product, aside from conveying the lesson he wanted to teach me. To this day, I remember this experience as an example of behavior that serves no purpose other than to reinforce the idea that as a manager, you have a certain control over an employee. And in the end, he lost many writers due to this behavior.

The point is, managers must make the challenges meaningful—both as they relate to the overall unit goals and the company at large. If you challenge employees to perform a task without any meaningful goal in mind, you’ll end up wasting both your time and the employee’s time. In many cases, you also risk creating a dispiriting environment where employees begin to think they are being picked on for no reason. That’s why the challenge should be put into the context of moving the needle for the company. This not only helps motivate employees, but pushes the intrinsic accountability they feel in their jobs.

So, what’s the trick to understanding whether challenges are meaningful? Ask yourself: Does the task align with the overall goals of the unit or the company? Does it help them get better at something? Finally, does the challenge have an impact on the end product? If you can’t answer yes to any of those questions, you might have to ask what your true motivation is.

In the end, managers should challenge their employees with development opportunities that are achievable, long-term oriented, and meaningful. To gain buy-in, managers must also embed a culture of lifelong learning in their teams.
Appendix

Templates and Resources

The following section contains templates and resources for you to use as you implement the ACCEL model.

• FACES of Accountability
• Creating Fun Environments
• The Collaboration Operating Platform
• Your Preference for Collaboration?
• What Does Collaboration Look Like for You?
• Theory X—Theory Y
• Rate Your Proficiency With the Collaboration Competencies
• Manager Engagement Worksheet
• Listening and Assessment Styles and Habits Self-Assessment
APPENDIX

FACES of Accountability
Managers are responsible (and accountable) for continuing to develop their staff. Use this job aid as a quarterly accountability checklist for your direct reports. Fill out the activity, outcome, and next steps for each activity related to this pillar of the ACCEL framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarterly Activity</th>
<th>Outcome?</th>
<th>Next Steps?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
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<td>A</td>
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<td>S</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Creating Fun Environments
To find out if your team is fun, answer the questions below. Three or more yeses means your team is having a good time!

Is Your Team Fun?
Are your direct reports regularly smiling or laughing?
  Yes  No
Does your team or organization regularly have fun activities?
  Yes  No
Do you or your team acknowledge when something is funny?
  Yes  No
Are members of your team friends?
  Yes  No
Do your team members talk about non-work-related topics?
  Yes  No

Create a Culture of Fun
Define what is (and is not) acceptable
  • Pranks, sexual humor, and any other jokes that are offensive should be avoided
Ask about their lives
  • Ask about their weekend
  • Ask about family (spouse, kids, etc.) and friends
Add fun to meetings
  • Share fun stories and good news
  • Celebrate meeting goals
Encourage friendships
  • Suggest joining employee social groups and/or clubs
  • Suggest joining professional associations and networking groups
Plan fun activities, outings, and breaks
  • Celebrate birthdays, work anniversaries, or holidays
  • Create contests and challenges
  • Volunteer for a local charity during a workday
Do You Distinguish Yourself as a Communicator?

Here are seven steps many managers overlook, but ones you should keep in mind:

1. **Know your people.** How do you stay in touch with them? Do you talk to them individually to understand what their challenges are, what they worry about, what questions they have, and what rumors are circulating, if any?

2. **Make organizational information relevant.** When you discuss the company’s strategy and tactics, in person or in writing, do you clarify to employees how your points are relevant to what they do every day?

3. **Find the root of a problem.** When communicating about a problem, do you go beyond focusing on the immediate issue to look at what caused it?

4. **Craft compelling arguments.** Do you go overboard by explaining in abundant detail why something is a problem without focusing on actions and solutions?

5. **Communicate with a collaborative style.** Do you seek to build relationships and help others across the organization, sometimes when it’s not related to delivering results?

6. **Show empathy.** Do you listen when a direct report is experiencing a problem? Or is your “go-to” to analyze the problem and overlook the individual who is affected by it?

7. **Communicate as if you care.** Do you offer praise and compliment people for a job well done? Do you champion team successes elsewhere in the organization?

*Adapted from O’Quinn (2017).*
The Collaboration Operating Platform

Operating Principles

• **Focus on team—not position:** Addresses the need to focus on results produced when all positions effectively interact on the business field.

• **Understand that everyone can play:** Recognizes that technology is the great enabler, allowing people everywhere to play and collaborate in business.

• **Embrace diversity:** Represents the prerequisite for partnering in global business and serves as a springboard for establishing trust. Diversity brings strength to teams.

• **Rely on one another:** Reinforces the team orientation and minimizes the silo mindset recognizing a “mutual” dependency between people and promoting genuine collaboration.

• **Promote both individual and team values:** Deals with managing values in a never-ending cycle to help ensure that the process for producing team results is working.

• **Seek skillful, adaptable players:** Promotes the need for flexibility for managing change; requires people and teams who can quickly assimilate and use new skills, information, and the like; and recognizes that multiple skills are needed to play the game of business.

• **Charge the team to perform the work:** Recognizes the self-directed nature of the team charged with performing the work and recognizes that the team’s performance during the game (business) is left up to the team.

• **Empower players to win:** Speaks to the commitment to develop all employees so they are able to provide continuous feedback, all to help position people to make better decisions.

• **Coach teams to respond to changing conditions on their own:** Reinforces the application of a real team, self-directed, operating on a real-time basis responding to changing conditions.
• **Develop partners on the field:** Recognizes that all players on the business field are viewed as leaders and views every opportunity as a leadership development step.

• **Achieve cross-cultural agility:** Calls for leveraging relationships in business to achieve results and transcends technique in dealing with people across cultures.

**Competencies**

• **Communicativeness:** Effective performers recognize the essential value of continuous information exchange and the competitive advantage it brings. They actively seek information from a variety of sources and disseminate it in a variety of ways. They use modern technologies to access and circulate information, even across great distances. They take responsibility for ensuring that their people have the current and accurate information they need for success.

• **Problem solving and decision making:** Effective performers identify problems, solve them, act decisively, and show good judgment. They isolate causes from symptoms, and compile information and alternatives to illuminate problems or issues. They involve others as appropriate and gather information from a variety of sources. They find a balance between studying the problem and solving it. They readily commit to action and make decisions that reflect sound judgment.

• **Learning agility:** Effective performers continuously seek new knowledge. They are curious and want to know why. They learn quickly and use new information effectively. They create and foster a culture of interest, curiosity, and learning.

• **Customer orientation:** Effective performers stay close to customers and consumers. They view the organization through the eyes of the customer and go out of their way to anticipate and meet customer needs. They continually seek information and understanding regarding market trends.

• **Functional and technical expertise:** Effective performers are
knowledgeable and skilled in a functional specialty (such as finance, marketing, operations, information technologies, and human resources). They add organizational value through unique expertise in a functional specialty area. They remain current in their area of expertise and serve as a resource in that area for the organization.

- **Team player:** Effective performers are team oriented and identify with the larger organizational team and their role within it. They share resources, respond to requests from other parts of the organization, and support larger legitimate organizational agendas as more important than local or personal goals.

- **Sensitivity:** Effective performers value and respect the concerns and feelings of others. In the workplace, this compassion translates into behaviors that communicate empathy toward others, respect for the individual, and appreciation of diversity among team members.

- **Conflict management:** Effective performers recognize that conflict can be a valuable part of the decision-making process. They are comfortable with healthy conflict and support and manage differences of opinion. They thwart destructive competition or friction and use consensus and collaboration to debate and resolve issues.

- **Relationship building:** Effective performers understand that a primary factor in success is about establishing and maintaining productive relationships. They like interacting with people and are good at it. They devote appropriate time and energy to establishing and maintaining networks. They initiate contacts readily and maintain them over time. They are able to utilize relationships to facilitate business transactions.

- **Strategic thinking:** Effective performers act with the future in mind. They plan and make decisions within the framework of the enterprise’s strategic intent. They know and understand the factors influencing strategy (such as core competence, customers,
competition, and the organization’s current strengths and limitations). They consider future impact when weighing decisions, and think in terms of expanding the business, always looking for new ways to grow and achieve competitive advantage.

- **Influence:** Effective performers are skilled at directing, persuading, and motivating others. They are able to flex their style to direct, collaborate, or empower, as the situation requires. They have established a personal power base built on mutual trust, fairness, and honesty.

- **Risk taking:** Effective performers have a history of and propensity for taking calculated chances to achieve goals. They find a balance between analysis and action. When they fail, they accept it, learn from it, and move on to the next challenge.

- **Change agility:** Effective performers are adaptable. They embrace change and modify their behavior when appropriate to achieve organizational objectives. They are effective in the face of ambiguity. They understand and use change management techniques to help ensure smooth transitions.

- **Organizing and planning:** Effective performers have strong organizing and planning skills that allow them to be highly productive and efficient. They manage their time wisely, and effectively prioritize multiple competing tasks. They plan, organize, and actively manage meetings for maximum productivity.

- **Team management:** Effective performers create and maintain functional work units. They understand the human dynamics of team formation and maintenance. They formulate team roles and actively recruit and select to build effective work groups. They develop and communicate clear team goals and roles, and provide the level of guidance and management appropriate to the circumstances. They reward team behavior and foster a team atmosphere in the workplace.

- **Talent development:** Effective performers keep a continual eye on the talent pool, monitoring the skills and needs of all
team members. They expand the skills of staff through training, coaching, and development activities related to current and future jobs. They evaluate and articulate present performance and future potential to create opportunities for better use of staff abilities. They identify developmental needs and assist individuals in developing plans to improve themselves. They stay proficient in appropriate talent management processes, including best practices for prospecting, recruiting, selection, orientation, and succession management.

- **Results orientation**: Effective performers maintain appropriate focus on outcomes and accomplishments. They are motivated by achievement and persist until the goal is reached. They convey a sense of urgency to make things happen. They respect the need to balance short- and long-term goals. They are driven by a need for closure.

- **Positive impact**: Effective performers make positive impressions on those around them. They are personable, self-confident, and generally likeable. They are optimistic and enthusiastic about what they do, and their excitement is contagious. They energize those around them.

- **Integrity**: Effective performers think and act ethically and honestly. They apply ethical standards of behavior to their daily work activities and take responsibility for their actions and foster a work environment where integrity is rewarded.

- **Initiative**: Effective performers are proactive and take action without being prompted. They don’t want to be told what to do or when to do it. They see a need, take responsibility, and act on it. They make things happen.

- **Drive and energy**: Effective performers have a high level of energy and the motivation to sustain it over time. They are ambitious and passionate about their role in the organization. They have the stamina and endurance to handle the substantial workload present in today’s organizations. They know that a healthy work-
life balance is important to sustained energy. They are motivated to maintain a fast pace and continue to produce even in exhausting circumstances.

- **Composure:** Effective performers maintain emotional control, even under ambiguous or stressful circumstances. They demonstrate emotions appropriate to the situation and continue performing steadily and effectively.

*Adapted from the Polaris Competency Model with permission from Organization Systems International.*
Your Preference for Collaboration?

To determine if you’re a collaborative manager, score the statements below using the following scoring scale:

5 = Always  
4 = Mostly  
3 = Often  
2 = Occasionally  
1 = Rarely  
0 = Never

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I like to involve and consult with my direct reports about how they can best do their jobs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to learn skills outside my immediate area of responsibility.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I allow direct reports to work without my interference but encourage them to ask for help.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cultivate an environment where direct reports work best and most productively without pressure or threat of losing their jobs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When direct reports leave the company, I conduct an exit interview to ask for their views on the organization.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I incentivize and praise direct reports for working hard and well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I seek out opinions of direct reports to increase their responsibilities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I offer training to direct reports to learn new skills.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to be friendly with my direct reports.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I encourage direct reports to discuss their concerns, worries, or suggestions with me or another manager.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I inform direct reports on what the company's aims and targets are.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I let direct reports know how the company is performing on a regular basis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I give direct reports opportunities to solve problems connected with their work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tell my direct reports what is happening elsewhere in the organization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like to have regular meetings with my direct reports to discuss how they can improve and develop.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total
**Scoring Key:**

60-75 = Strongly Prefers Collaboration

45-59 = Generally Prefers Collaboration

16-44 = Generally Does Not Prefer Collaboration

0-15 = Strongly Does Not Prefer Collaboration
What Does Collaboration Look Like for You?

To determine whether your operating principles are aligned with collaboration’s mindset, check the operating principle(s) that apply to you in your job.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operating Principle</th>
<th>You</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Team, Not Position</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand That Everybody Can Play</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embrace Diversity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rely on One Another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote Both Individual and Team Values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek Skillful, Adaptable Players</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Charge the Team to Perform the Work</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empower Players to Win</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coach Teams to Respond to Changing Conditions on Their Own</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop Partners on the Field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieve Cross-Cultural Agility</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Theory X—Theory Y**

The following Theory X—Theory Y questionnaire was devised by Alan Chapman as a learning aid and broad indicator directly based on McGregor’s X—Y Theory. To determine whether the situation and management style is X or Y, score each of the statements below:

5 = Always  
4 = Mostly  
3 = Often  
2 = Occasionally  
1 = Rarely  
0 = Never

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My boss asks me politely to do things, gives me reasons why, and invites suggestions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am encouraged to learn skills outside my immediate area of responsibility.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am left to work without interference from my boss, but help is available if I want it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am given credit and praise when I do good work or put in extra effort.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People leaving the company are given an exit interview to share their views on the organization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am incentivized to work hard and well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I want extra responsibility my boss will find a way to give it to me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I want extra training my boss will help me find how to get it or will arrange it for me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I call my boss and my boss’s boss by their first names.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My boss is available for me to discuss my concerns, worries, and suggestions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know what the company’s aims and targets are.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am told how the company plans to achieve its aims and targets.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am given an opportunity to solve problems connected with my work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My boss tells me what is happening in the organization.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have regular meetings with my boss to discuss how I can improve and develop.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scoring Key:**
60-75 = Strong Theory Y Management (effective long and short term)
45-59 = Generally Theory Y Management
16-44 = Generally Theory X Management
0-15 = Strong Theory X Management
Rate Your Proficiency With the Collaboration Competencies
Rate yourself on how the following competencies apply to your job. First impressions are usually right—don’t spend a lot of time agonizing over your response. See the Collaboration Operating Principles tool for brief descriptions of each competency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency</th>
<th>Needs Development</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Exceptional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicativeness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving and Decision Making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Agility</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional and Technical Expertise</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Player</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX

Sensitivity
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

Conflict Management
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

Relationship Building
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

Strategic Thinking
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

Influence
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

Risk Taking
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

Change Agility
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

Organizing and Planning
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional
APPENDIX

**Team Management**
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

**Talent Development**
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

**Results Orientation**
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

**Positive Impact**
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

**Integrity**
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

**Initiative**
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

**Drive and Energy**
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional

**Composure**
- Needs Development
- Proficient
- Exceptional
# Manager Engagement Worksheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Create and Sustain Supportive Relationships</th>
<th>Share Organizational Information</th>
<th>Help Employees Feel Valued Through Frequent Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Get to know each employee’s strengths, values, and motivators</td>
<td>✓ Help employees regularly reconnect to the mission and vision and understand how their work contributes to organizational success</td>
<td>✓ Remember, everyone wants to be valued and respected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Ask employees what support they need to be successful</td>
<td>✓ Align daily tasks with strategic goals</td>
<td>✓ Learn how your employees want to be recognized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Encourage questions and suggestions</td>
<td>✓ Communicate key company information</td>
<td>✓ Acknowledge efforts and progress toward goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Support employee development and career growth</td>
<td>✓ Share stories about positive customer results and emphasize how employees contributed to these results</td>
<td>✓ Remember, what gets recognized, gets repeated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How am I creating and sustaining supportive relationships with my employees?

In what ways am I sharing organizational information with my team?

How am I providing regular feedback?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hold Regular One-on-One Meetings</th>
<th>Use a Coaching Approach to Improve Performance</th>
<th>Involve Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>✓ Provide an opportunity for employees to ask for support</td>
<td>✓ Plan ahead for positive, productive conversations</td>
<td>✓ Maximize opportunities for employees to add value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Ask employees to schedule the meetings</td>
<td>✓ Share your positive intent</td>
<td>✓ Encourage employees to provide input and innovate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Avoid canceling one-on-one meetings</td>
<td>✓ Make feedback for improvement future focused</td>
<td>✓ Help employee learn about organizational realities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How am I regularly connecting with each of my team members?

In what ways am I using a coaching approach to improve employee performance?

How am I involving team members in driving our success?
Listening and Assessment Styles and Habits Self-Assessment

Let’s see what kind of listener you are and how well you assess situations. This exercise captures your self-assessment but doesn’t speak to how others perceive you. You can ask those close to you to complete the first three questions of the survey with you in mind; this will give you others’ input on these same points.

8. If you had to characterize what kind of listener you are most of the time, please one or more of the following options that best describes your listening habits:
   - **Attentive listener.** I am a consistently good listener who is able to stay present and fully focused on what the other person is saying.
   - **Intermittent listener.** When I listen, I am a good listener; however, I also tend to get distracted, and in those moments, my listening skills aren’t as good as they could be.
   - **Distracted listener.** I am frequently distracted by what I’m thinking or worried about distractions in the external environment, which in turn causes me not to be a particularly good listener.
   - **Poor listener.** As much as I endeavor to be a good listener, I find that listening is not my strong suit.
   - **Selective listener.** I often find that I am listening for the point I am trying to speak to or refute, tuning out the rest of what is being said.
   - **Opportunistic listener.** I usually find that I tune in to the things I want to hear and tune out those things I don’t want to hear.
   - **Biased listener.** I find I often listen for those points the other person is saying that I agree with or disagree with at the expense of listening well, irrespective of agreement or lack thereof with what is being said.
• **Deficit-based listener.** I listen for gaps or inaccuracies in what someone is saying.

• **Convergent listener.** I listen for points the other person is making that I agree with, and tend not to focus on points of divergence.

• **Divergent listener.** I listen for points the other person is making that I disagree with, and tend not to focus on points of convergence.

9. Do you consider yourself to be a good listener?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Some of the time
   • Most of the time
   • Neutral

10. If you had to rank your top three bad listening habits, what would they be?
   • I will often find myself interrupting others, either out of impatience or because I am eager to assert my own opinion.
   • I regularly have the urge to finish or actually do finish others’ sentences either out of impatience or an eagerness to agree or demonstrate my knowledge of what’s being discussed.
   • I don’t really listen; I am often distracted and am not adequately attending to what the other person is saying.
   • I think about what I am going to say in response versus fully listening to what they are saying.
   • I listen just enough to be able to assert my own point or counterpoint to what the other person is saying.
   • I focus more on my assessment of what the other person is saying than on what they are actually saying. I find it difficult to resist the urge to move to an evaluation of what the other person is saying instead of fully listening and then forming an opinion or response.
• I assert my voice or opinions without really listening to what the other person is saying.
• I make a judgment about what the other person is saying prematurely, thus tuning out before they make their point.
• I lose interest in what the other person is saying and then tune out.

11. Please choose your top three fears as they relate to your interactions with others:
• I have a fear of being judged.
• I have a fear of being misunderstood.
• I have a fear of being wrong.
• I have a fear of being viewed as unintelligent.
• I have a fear of being perceived as uninformed.
• I have a fear of being perceived as unknowledgeable.
• I have a fear of being caught off guard.
• I have a fear of not being able to contribute or make known my point of view.
• I have a fear I will be called upon to contribute my point of view on a topic.
• I have a fear that I won’t get my way.
• I have a fear that I will come off as being arrogant.
• I have a fear that I will be perceived as too dramatic.
• I have a fear of not being liked.
• I have a fear of being too controversial.
• I have a fear of not connecting with others.
• I have a fear of not being accepted by others.
• I have a fear of not fitting in.
• I have a fear of being rejected outright.

12. Please rank, in order, how you most want to be seen or remembered by others:
• It matters to me to be seen as someone who is knowledgeable.
• It matters to me to be seen as someone who is intelligent.
• It matters to me to be seen as someone who is informed.
• It matters to me to be seen as someone who is nimble and capable of pivoting quickly.
• It matters to me to be seen as someone who is a subject matter expert.
• It matters to me to be seen as someone whose views are compelling or inspiring in some way.
• It matters to me to be seen as a good colleague, parent, partner, or friend.
• It matters to me whether I hurt someone else’s feelings.
• It matters to me whether others view me as a good person.
• It matters to me whether others see me as a strong leader, one that others want to follow.
• It matters to me that I reach my personal or professional goals or objectives.
• It matters to me that I am perceived as someone who puts forth their best effort.
• It matters to me that others perceive me as resilient.
• It matters to me that others perceive me as caring and kind.
• It matters to me that others perceive me as an independent thinker.
• I want to be remembered as someone who questions the status quo.
• I want to be known as someone who chooses their words carefully and speaks succinctly.
• It matters to me that I act from my values (my moral compass).
• I want to be remembered as someone who sticks up for others.
• It matters to me that others are pushed a little out of their comfort zone or current boundaries of thought or opinion.
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Chapter 5


Hunter Haines

Hunter Haines, MS, ACC, CPLP, ODCP, is a senior organization development and inclusion consultant at the University of Maryland Medical System and president of People Leading People, a company that provides leadership and team coaching. Hunter is known for her compassionate and results-oriented approach to helping leaders and teams achieve exceptional results. She challenges leaders to be intentional about their leadership practice and to maximize their impact on individual, team, and organizational performance.

Hunter has worked with (and learned from) leaders and teams at organizations including Exelon, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, and Johns Hopkins University. She is a mentor coach for the Maryland University of Integrative Health and a Certified Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coach. Hunter graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a BS in business, an MS in applied behavioral science, and a graduate certificate in change management.

Hunter holds the Certified Professional in Learning and Performance (CPLP) certification from the Association of Talent Development (ATD) and is a past-president of ATD Maryland. She is an Associate Certified Coach and member of the International Coach Federation (ICF).
supports both ATD and ICF in promoting the professional talent development and coaching communities in Maryland, where she lives with her family. Hunter can be reached at hunter@peopleleadingpeople.com.

**Timothy Ito**

Timothy Ito is currently a vice president at the Association for Talent Development, overseeing the content and digital marketing division of the organization. Previous to ATD, he ran the content marketing group for ASCD, including oversight of the business and revenue strategy for ASCD’s digital properties (website, video content, mobile applications, and e-commerce). Tim’s career has also included stints at America Online and Netscape as the product and strategy lead for AOL e-commerce in careers and real estate, and running the business operations for Netscape Japan and the Netscape International channels.

Tim is a former senior editor and producer at AltaVista and washingtonpost.com, and was a reporter and writer for *U. S. News & World Report* magazine. He began his professional career teaching English at a Japanese High School in Tokyo, Japan.

**Winsor Jenkins**

Winsor Jenkins is president of Winsor Jenkins & Associates, which is based in Portland, Oregon. His company specializes in talent development, including coaching.

Winsor has spent more than 30 years with three publicly traded companies, which has given him the knowledge, insights, and tools to help people and organizations achieve results. As a leader who served in senior human resources positions (including vice president) and contributed to the professional development of business executives at all levels, he brings a deep understanding of what it takes to lead in today’s changing global business world.

Along with holding coaching certifications from the Hudson Institute of Coaching and the International Coach Federation, Winsor is a certified facilitator in several best-in-class leadership development training programs.
including Situational Leadership II, as well as various assessments used in training and coaching such as MBTI and Polaris 360. He has a bachelor of science from Cornell University and an MBA from the University of Idaho.

Winsor is the author of *The Collaborator: Discover Soccer as a Metaphor for Global Business* and also serves as co-designer of the training program The Collaboration Game. He has written articles for the *Soccer Journal* and *The Journal of The Human Resources Planning Society*, along with writing blog posts for the Association for Talent Development.

**Michele Nevarez**

Michele Nevarez, an executive coach and seasoned HR executive, heads up the Daniel Goleman Emotional Intelligence Coaching and Training programs. Leveraging emotional intelligence, she helps leaders tap into their self-efficacy by developing self-awareness, focus, and resilience. She is also an adjunct faculty member for Cultivating Well Being in the Workplace: A Neuroscientific Approach, a program co-developed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Business and the Center for Healthy Minds. Michele brings more than 20 years of HR leadership and C-suite experience working for industry leaders in healthcare, manufacturing, investment management, and management consulting.

**Ken O’Quinn**

Ken O’Quinn is a communications workshop leader, a corporate writing expert, and an author and speaker for ATD. His professional business writing and management communication workshops have helped thousands of business professionals around the globe improve their communication skills.

He started Writing with Clarity following a journalism career with the Associated Press and now conducts workshops for corporations throughout the world. He is the author of *Perfect Phrases for Business Letters* (McGraw-Hill) and *Business Writing for Managers* (ATD Press). His clients include Facebook, GE, Chevron, Dell, KPMG, Cisco, Campbell’s Soup, Oracle, the Gap, SAP (worldwide), Dow Chemical (China), Fidelity Investments, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon, and Reebok.
ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Ken speaks at many business conferences, and his writing has appeared in *Fast Company* magazine, the *New York Times*, the *Harvard Management Communication Letter*, and the *Journal of Employee Communication Management*. 
About the Editors

**Ryan Changcoco**

Ryan Changcoco is an author, blogger, thought leader, and facilitator on the topics of management development and employee engagement. As the senior manager for ATD’s management development and TD industries group, Ryan is responsible for identifying and partnering with subject matter experts from all over the world to develop content in the areas of management development, leadership, and industries training. Ryan is also the program director for the ATD/Yale Management Excellence program. Prior to ATD, Ryan served as a business consultant for several large healthcare organizations, including Blue Cross and Blue Shield. Ryan is also the co-founder of a physician advisory and consulting group called The Physician’s Edge, which is dedicated to helping physicians become more adept at the business side of healthcare.

As an author, Ryan has contributed to a few healthcare publications including *Talent Management in Healthcare—Exploring How the World’s Health Service Organisations Attract, Manage and Develop Talent* (2017) and *Leadership in the World’s Healthcare Sector* (2018), both of which were published by Palgrave Macmillan UK.

When asked what three phrases best describe him, Ryan’s response is: optimist, traveler, and free spirit.
ABOUT THE EDITORS

Megan Cole

Megan Cole, PhD, is a research analyst at the Association for Talent Development (ATD). She regularly writes research reports, blogs, and magazine articles, as well as hosting webcasts. She has authored numerous research reports on talent development topics including *The Science of Learning: Key Strategies for Designing and Delivering Training*, *Needs Assessments: Design and Execution for Success*, and *Change Enablement: Skills for Addressing Change*.

One of her first projects at ATD was creating research around the ACCEL model—published as *ACCEL: The Skills That Make a Winning Manager*—that eventually led to the creation of *Focus on Them*. Megan has since been involved in the development of other ACCEL-related content.

Megan has also worked as a market research analyst and an instructor at Arizona State University. She has published articles in several peer-reviewed journals, including *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, and most recently *Journal of Social Psychology*. Her work has been featured in *Time, Forbes, Huffington Post, PBS News Hour*, and *US News & World Report*.

Megan received bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Central Florida. She earned a doctorate in communication from Arizona State University.

Jack Harlow

Jack Harlow has spent his entire career managing people—writers, that is. As a developmental editor with the Association for Talent Development, Jack works behind the scenes with notable subject matter experts—such as Clark Quinn, Karl M. Kapp, and the *Focus on Them* contributors—to develop book concepts that resonate with readers.

Just like managing direct reports, Jack’s role empowers him to apply ATD’s ACCEL model: He applies a human-centered culture of accountability with authors and other stakeholders. He leverages his experience with language to communicate clearly and build trust. He adopts a collaborative mindset to coach authors through the publication process. He
applies the latest findings around workplace apathy to engage authors. And finally, he listens to authors because their stories are the ones worth telling and he wants to see them all shine.

Before joining ATD, Jack served as an editor for Communications Development Incorporated, an editorial and design house in Washington, D.C. There he filled a jack-of-all-trades role as proofreader, copy editor, content developer, and project manager on economic and development reports for the World Bank and United Nations organizations.

Based in Alexandria, Virginia, Jack lives with his wife, Casey, and three pets Obi-Wan, Wookiee, and Barney. He has a masters in publishing from George Washington University’s College of Professional Studies and a bachelors in English language and literature from the University of Maryland.
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