A NEW MANAGER’S GUIDE TO AVOIDING TOTAL DISASTER

KATY TYNAN
More Praise for

*How Did I Not See This Coming?*

“What lessons does a new manager need to learn to lead her team effectively? Katy Tynan shares the story of a young leader gaining insights through her own experiences and those of her colleagues.”

—Jerry Davis
Professor of Management, Michigan Ross School of Business

“Katy Tynan’s *How Did I Not See This Coming?* fulfills the promise of providing a useful—and entertaining—management book that tells the story about what managers need to learn and do to be great.”

—David Grebow
CEO, KnowledgeStar

“Through an engaging story about a fictional employee who learns to be an effective manager, Katy Tynan lifts the veil on insecurities and self-doubt that every new manager feels, and then gives us the perspective and tools that help managers be successful. In the vein of *One Minute Manager*, the book uses storytelling to convey management concepts in an entertaining way that is a must-read for all new (and experienced) managers.”

—Stephen Gill
Co-Founder, Learning to Be Great

“Written in the format of a novel, *How Did I Not See This Coming?* carries us from very bad days in the life of a manager to thankfully brighter and lighter days when the protagonist of the book can finally experience a career that makes sense. This book can carry YOU there too!”

—Ken Lizotte
Chief Imaginative Officer, emerson consulting group
“If you want to become a better manager, then you should read this book!”
—Jacob Morgan
Bestselling Author, Speaker, and Futurist

“A refreshing and engaging take on the transition to management that’s
both interesting to read and full of useful concepts for new leaders.”
—Jeff Wald
Founder, WorkMarket

“In contrast to the countless jargon filled management guides, Katy
Tynan provides clear, practical, and sage advice for any new or soon to be
manager and those who help to develop them. The storytelling format is
refreshingly entertaining and very effective.”
—Daniel Lovely
Chief Learning Officer, AIG
HOW DID I NOT SEE THIS COMING?

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KATY TYNAN
To the many leaders I have had the privilege of meeting over the course of my career, for modeling these truths so that I could see them for myself.
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Managers have a terrible reputation. The article “Think Your Friends Have Horrible Bosses, Too? You’re Probably Right” cites a survey by monster.com in which 38 percent of employees rated their boss as “horrible,” and more than 50 percent rated their boss a 1 or 2 on a scale of 1 to 5. Gallup’s 2015 State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders noted that nearly half of people who quit their jobs do so to get away from their managers.

You might be tempted to assume that management, as a profession, attracts annoying people. Or perhaps the nature of the role brings out the worst in otherwise kind, generous, and reasonable folks? There are more than 2 million managers in the United States, according to the latest data. Surely not all of them are horrible people. In fact, out of all the managers I have met through training programs, interviewed for articles and books, or worked with throughout my career, not one was actually trying to be a bad boss.

Most managers want to do a great job.

But obviously not all of them are succeeding.

OK, you say, maybe it’s their employer’s fault. Maybe they aren’t trained or taught how to manage. U.S. companies spent a staggering $15.5 billion on leadership training in 2013, and that number has been growing every year since. That sounds like a lot, but when we
divide it by those 2 million managers, it comes out to just over $7,000 per person.

Clearly the problem isn’t that employers aren’t investing at all, or that the people in management roles don’t care. There’s something else at work here that we need to dig a bit deeper to understand. There are some fundamental truths about management that make it hard to simply shift from a role without leadership responsibilities to one that has them—management requires different skills and habits.

In many organizations, but most notably in the IT industry, senior leadership or HR will identify someone who is a great programmer or network administrator, and put them on the management track. Here’s a great contributor, they say. We need to keep her on the team. Let’s give her a development plan and some incentives to become a team leader.

Think about it: What would you do if you were given the choice between taking on a leadership role or staying where you are? Most people take the promotion, even if they don’t really want to be a leader. In fact, about a third of employees aspire to become managers, which is quite a substantial number. They see management as a major career achievement—the path to a higher salary and more responsibility. Some approach their promotion as if it will come with a box full of the tools they need to succeed. But when they get the new job, many don’t enjoy it initially. They want to be successful, and are just as frustrated as their team members when they don’t feel like they are doing it right. Studies show that less than half of managers say they feel comfortable in their roles.

What makes a great leader? Do you have to be born with some magical piece of DNA that gives you an innate ability to make people follow you? While studies have differed on which inborn traits do or don’t lend themselves to leadership success, they are all in agreement that the fundamental skills of management can be learned by anyone. Management is not something you are born knowing how to do.
Bookstores (physical and virtual) are full of resources about management. There are quite literally tens of thousands of titles that offer advice and guidance on how to be a better leader, from the very short (Ken Blanchard’s *The One Minute Manager*) to the very long (all five pounds of Richard Daft’s *Management*, 12th edition).

Beyond the books there are magazines, workshops, blog posts, and a nearly infinite number of experts who offer even more training and resources on management techniques.

And yet. . .

Today’s workforce is the most diverse in history. From the cross-cultural to the multigenerational to the global, teams today are diverse and dispersed, amplifying the challenges for leaders. Raising the bar higher still are the business pressures of cost cutting and competition. Despite the books and the training, despite the very best efforts of so many, the journey from individual contributor to manager remains a rocky road for most.

So why write yet another book about management? If the ones on the market today aren’t doing the job, why add one more?

When I encountered my first management role, I was 18 years old. I had been teaching sailing in a summer program for three years when I was asked to take on the position of head instructor. My team consisted of myself and six others, all in our teens. Among them were my best friend, my cousin, and others I had grown up with over the years.

The program director was a former U.S. Air Force pilot. His first act as we launched the program in the spring was to give special jackets to the assistant head instructor, the racing coach, and me.

“You are my top three,” he said, clapping us each on the back. “You are the leaders.”

I was proud of my new role, and of my new jacket. You can probably guess what happened next.

My cousin and my friends immediately nicknamed themselves the “bottom four,” and spent most of the summer giving me mock salutes.
Rather than being eager and willing to work as a team, they challenged everything I decided.

In response, I did everything wrong. I started issuing orders left and right. I got angry when people didn’t listen. I stomped around and sulked. I was a horrible boss.

We made it through that summer, and I swore I was never going to take on a management role again. I went off to college, got a degree in psychology, and forgot all about any aspirations I might have had about leadership.

Somewhere along the way, as with most people, my career path changed. I ended up in the IT industry because I was the person who wiggled the plugs when my co-workers couldn’t print. I helped people figure out how to fix things that weren’t working. I taught people how to do mail merges. A few years later, I was working as an IT consultant when my manager called me into his office. The company had grown, he said, and there was an opening for a team leader. He thought I would be great.

I immediately broke out in a cold sweat.

It had been nearly a decade since my last disastrous management job. I convinced myself I would be crazy to pass up the opportunity. It can’t be that bad, I thought. I’ve learned a lot since those days. I’ll read some books and take some classes. I’m sure I’ll figure it out.

Here’s where I found the first problem with management training. Most of the books about management are not written by or for first-time managers. They are written by experts—experts with doctorates in motivation theory, or business executives who ran huge companies and now teach in MBA programs. These books are all interesting and valuable, but they don’t get at the core of what management is all about. They are not designed to help the people who are in over their heads, trying to lead a team of their former peers, and trying to balance being a producer as well as a leader.
Over the last 10 years, I’ve gone from being a manager to writing and teaching about management. I do it because I truly believe that managers are the most important people in any organization. They are the ones who have the most influence on how people feel about work. Despite their reputation, almost every manager or aspiring leader I have met wants to help their team do great work.

The truth about management is that it is a skill, like any other. It takes practice to learn the habits of a leader, and to unlearn some of the habits of an individual contributor, even if they made you very successful in your previous role.

The truth about management is that there is no exact set of steps or actions that will work perfectly every time and in every scenario.

This is the story of one person’s quest to become a better manager. We’ll go on a journey with Julie Long as she faces a crisis just three months into her first leadership role and experiences the frustration and self-doubt that is all too common among first-time managers. Coming into her role, Julie, like many new managers, has assumptions of what management is all about. She also has habits and preconceptions about her new job that are not serving her well.

Over the course of several months, we’ll follow her as she learns the core principles of successful leaders. Some of these truths come from surprising sources, but they all help her craft an authentic, strong management style of her own, as she evolves her skills and changes her approach to leading her team. Whether you are just starting your journey as a new manager, like Julie, or are more experienced as a leader, you’ll likely find some parallels to your own experience.
Julie trudged across the wet street, her small umbrella doing little to keep the pouring rain from soaking her suit. On top of having the worst day of her working life, she now had a long, soggy train ride home to look forward to. Checking the electronic board for her track number, she slogged over to the commuter rail and slumped down onto a wide vinyl seat. Sliding across to the window, she stared out at the rain, hoping that whoever took the seat next to her would not be looking for a chat.

Eight hours earlier, everything seemed completely different. She sighed, wondering how so much could change in just one day.

For five years, Julie had been working as a systems engineer at a large, well-known technology company. She had worked her way up from her first, entry-level position to a more senior role. Three months ago, at long last, she had been promoted to team lead. Her team was small—just three people reporting to her—but it was a big milestone in her career. She had finally made it to management.
That morning, she had gone to work filled with purpose and plans, ready for a full and productive day. Her schedule was blocked out with update meetings with her team, planning time for her own goals, and a webinar on time management. But it didn’t take very long for things to start going off the rails.

Her first inkling that the day was not going to go well came as she got her first cup of coffee from the kitchen. Closing the refrigerator door after pouring in a dollop of cream, Julie found herself face-to-face with Susan, the senior member of her team, and someone who had been a long-time friend.

“All right. Do you have a minute?” asked Susan, looking anxious and a little awkward.

Susan and Julie had met at a coding class a few years ago when they were both working to pick up a new programming language. They had quickly bonded, finding common ground in their similar approach to work. Susan was already working at Midora Systems, and when a position opened up in her group, she had emailed Julie to see if she would be interested.

For the last two years, Julie and Susan had been the senior members of the team, working closely on projects, and collaborating on innovative solutions to their clients’ toughest problems. A few months ago, when the director of their group had decided the team needed a leader, Julie was given the job. Ever since, Julie and Susan’s friendship had been noticeably cooler. She had hoped that things would get better, but as Susan stood in front of her this morning, Julie suddenly had a bad feeling about what was coming next.

In the small conference room next to the kitchen, Susan shuffled awkwardly, looking at the floor. “The thing is. . .,” she paused, and then the words came out in a rush. “I’m giving my notice. I’ve accepted another job offer, and I’ll be leaving in two weeks.”
Julie was floored. Susan had been with the company for nearly a
decade. She was a hard worker, quiet, but always willing to put in the
hours to get the job done. She was a critical part of the team.

“Why are you leaving?” asked Julie. “Is it a better opportunity?
More money?”

Susan looked even more uncomfortable. “Actually it’s a pay cut,
but I think it’s a better fit for me.” She turned abruptly and opened the
door. Looking back over her shoulder, she said, “I’ll go talk to HR.”

Julie walked back to her desk in a daze. A better fit? How could
Susan feel like she didn’t fit after all the years she had been there? She
sat slowly, popping open her email out of habit. She had a new message
from her own manager asking to see Julie in his office.

It was about to get worse.

Julie walked slowly across the hall, still trying to absorb Susan’s
news. As she reached her manager’s office, she paused. The door was
closed, which was rare.

Chuck, the director of the department, was fairly new to the orga-
nization. He had been brought in from a competitor during the last
restructuring, and while he always seemed calm and competent, he
wasn’t the most approachable guy in the world. After her promotion,
Julie had always wished she could get his advice on how to be a better
team leader, but he was often engaged with other people at higher levels
of the organization, and the time just never seemed right. Besides, how
could she ask for help without looking like she wasn’t qualified for her
new role?

Julie knocked; when the door opened, she found Chuck had been
talking to Magda, the director of HR.

“Come in,” said Chuck, waving her over.

Magda closed the door and settled back down in her chair. Julie
looked from one to the other, trying to get a sense of what was up.
Chuck folded his hands on the desk in front of him and leaned forward.
“Have you talked to Susan today?” he asked.

Julie said she had, and shared the details of their brief conversation, expressing her confusion and surprise by the announcement.

There was a brief pause as Magda and Chuck looked at each other. Then Chuck sighed and leaned back in his chair.

“I guess there’s no good way to say this, Julie,” he said, looking down at his desk. “Susan is leaving because she doesn’t like working for you. She says ever since you took over the team, you’ve turned into a totally different person, and she just doesn’t see any future for herself here.”

Julie realized her mouth was hanging open and closed it. She looked at Magda and saw her nod in confirmation.

“Listen,” continued Chuck, “we all had high hopes when we recommended you for this role. You’ve been an excellent systems engineer, and we really thought you were prepared to step up and take the lead. I know you were excited when you took on the position. What happened?”

Running her mind back over the last three months, Julie tried to think of what exactly she had done wrong. Had she behaved differently? Of course, but that was what she was supposed to do, right? As a manager, there were all kinds of things she had to do differently.

Chuck and Magda were both looking at her.

“I guess I did what I thought I was supposed to do,” said Julie slowly. “Apparently, I’m not getting it right.”

Magda left, with plans to speak to Susan and see what could be done.

“Julie, I know you know how to be a great engineer,” said Chuck as Julie stood to head back to her office. “But the things that made you great at your old job won’t help you in your new one. Take a little time to think about what’s happening, and let’s talk about making some changes.”
As the train pulled out of the station, Julie let out a slow sigh and wondered if “making some changes” was management speak for “getting busted back down to engineer.” As she was glumly considering the prospect of failing out of her new role, a woman stepped onto the train and began walking back through the car. As she pushed back the hood of her rain jacket, Julie blinked in surprise. It was Sarah, her manager from years ago in her first “real” job. Sarah looked over and a huge smile broke out across her face. Julie found an answering, if not quite full-tilt, smile lighting up her own face, and she quickly moved her bag to the floor so Sarah could sit.

Sarah took in her soggy suit and half-hearted smile and shook her head. “Well it’s been a long time since I’ve seen you, but it looks like this hasn’t been your best day.” She paused, a questioning look in her eyes.

Julie sighed and started to recount her story. She hadn’t been fired, but obviously that couldn’t be far away.

Sarah nodded thoughtfully. “Well you might get fired and you might not,” she said pragmatically, “but if you want to be successful as a manager, it sounds like you’re going to need to learn the truth about management.”

Julie looked over at her, thinking maybe she had misheard. “The truth? What truth?” she asked suspiciously.

Sarah laughed, pulling out her phone to consult her calendar. “Management looks pretty easy when you’re not the one doing it, but it’s actually a lot harder than it seems. You can learn a lot from classes and reading books; knowing you, I’ll be you’ve done both, right?”

Julie nodded. “I took a course last year for ‘emerging leaders’ but I wasn’t actually managing anyone at the time.”

“There are a lot of things you need to do differently as a leader,” said Sarah. “It’s a big transition, and it begins with your mindset about
being a manager. Let’s start by having coffee next week, and I’ll tell you what I know.”

That evening, Julie sat down at her desk and pulled out a well-worn notebook, opening it up to a fresh page. While she had been in the technology industry for her entire career, she found that spending a few minutes each day writing out her thoughts by hand, with a pen and paper, helped her relax and see the bigger picture. Sometimes it was just a few sentences or a quote that captured her mood. She leaned back in her chair, chewing on the end of her pen. It had clearly not been a good day, but she felt surprisingly hopeful. While things may still look bleak, she hadn’t actually lost her job, and after talking with Sarah on the train, she glimpsed the potential of a different outcome.

Sitting forward in her chair, she wrote: The habits I have are keeping me from being successful in my new role. I’m going to need to change, which means I’m probably going to be uncomfortable.

Under that she wrote one of her favorite quotes from Theodore Roosevelt: “Nothing worth having or doing is easy.”