MARK HORSTMAN
KATE BRAUN | SARAH SENTES

THE EFFECTIVE MANAGER

SECOND EDITION

COMPLETELY REVISED AND UPDATED

WILEY

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Introduction

Who This Book Is for, What It's About, and Why

IF YOU'RE A MANAGER, this book was written for you. That sounds reasonable, of course, but you couldn't tell that from the crop of management books published every year. We know—we read them.

The Effective Manager, Second Edition, isn't like most management books, **because it isn't written for your CEO**.

Why are management books written for CEOs? **Because that's where the money is.** Most management books are essentially paid marketing tools. Authors who are also consultants want to catch the eye of a CEO or EVPHR. The "target market" will read the book *and hire the author and his consulting firm to come in and completely revamp their structure, or processes, to the tune of millions of dollars.*

This is why, if you've read other management books, at the end of the book you're left with a vague sense of wondering what you're now supposed *to do*. Oh, there were a few really trenchant lines. And a story or two really resonated. But did you learn something you can actually put in practice right away?

Nope.

Because those management books weren't written for you.

This one is.

This book is going to tell you exactly what to do, in detail. We'll tell you what to say and how to say it. We'll tell you how to introduce your ideas to your team and how to counter their concerns.

Why? *Because this is the book we wanted to read when we were managers, but nobody had written it.* We wanted someone we trusted to tell us what to do. Not to tell us how to be—"be empathetic," "be strategic," "be candid." That kind of guidance is always wrong. It's not your state of being that makes you an effective manager. It's what *you do.*

To be clear: this book isn't about "management" the way most business publications talk about it. To them, management means big organizational stuff like strategy, finance, or organizational change. If you scan the Management section of the *Wall Street Journal,* you'll see articles like that.

That's not this book. Frankly, if you're just a front-line manager, or maybe even a director, you don't need to know a lot about that kind of "management" just yet. What you do need to know about is how to manage people.

This book is about managing people. It's about getting the most out of your direct reports. And it's about that for two reasons: *because most managers are pretty bad at that part of their jobs* **and that's the most valuable thing you do as a manager.**

Isn't that sad? Most managers are terrible at the most important thing they're supposed to be doing. We're supposed to be getting top performance out of the people we are managing. But most of us aren't.

Please, though, before you get down on yourself, forgive yourself. Stop beating yourself up about how you were a good engineer, and you wanted to be a manager, and then when you became one, you were terrible at it. Maybe you were a salesperson, and they promoted you because you were good at it, and now you realize you don't know what you're doing.

Forgive yourself. *Every other manager went through the same thing.* They may not look like they did, but we've been doing this

collectively for 50 years, and trust us, they did. Most managers *still don't know what they're doing.*

You have our word: if you read this book and do your best to implement our guidance, we *guarantee* you will get better results, have better relationships with your team members, and have a much greater chance at getting promoted. And if you don't, we'll give you your money back, even if you didn't spend it with us.

This second edition came about because the first edition sold well *and because the world of management has changed since then.*

We're going to be blunt: managing remote workers is MUCH harder than managing them when they're collocated with you. We know of several large organizations whose culture imploded due to COVID-19-driven workforce rules. Their managers weren't effective to begin with, and the separation of work from home (WFH) destroyed communication, relationships, and trust. Whether we like it or not, those are the foundations of management success.

==**Working from home makes managing much harder.**==

But it doesn't matter where you are or where your directs are. You're still obligated to be effective as a manager. In this edition, we will tell you what to do to manage your team members when you're collocated and what to do when they're remote.

About Manager Tools

Manager Tools is a management consultancy. We coach and train managers and executives at firms all around the world. In 2022, we provided all-day training sessions to more than 10,000 managers at our corporate clients worldwide. We also hosted more than 100 training conferences all over the world where we trained thousands of individual managers.

We're also known for our podcasts, where you can learn everything in this book for free. All told, our guidance has been downloaded over a quarter of a billion times. You'll find this book's

guidance in our Manager Tools feed (Free). We also have a Career Tools podcast (Also free), and Executive Tools, which is available to paying licensees. You can find all of them where you look for podcasts and also at www.manager-tools.com.

A Note About Data

For the past 30 years, we've been testing various managerial behaviors and tools, to see which work and which don't. We used to hate it when the manager training we got, or the books we read, were clearly just filled with someone's opinion.

We have tested and refined all of the four primary recommendations in this book. We have tested more than 950,000 managers at various times, for various behaviors, responses, and outcomes over the past 30 years.

In many tests, we track results and retention of managers in both a test group, and an unchanged control group. This is especially true of the Manager Tools Trinity, featured in this book. We have also tested many of the *phrases* we recommend you use.

A Note About Gender

You'll notice that throughout this book, we'll use different genders for managers. Sometimes male, sometimes female. All of our content at Manager Tools—all the audio guidance in podcasts, all the show notes—uses a nearly perfect balance of male-to-female examples.

The reason for that is that all of our data show that men and women make equally good managers, and for that matter, executives. If you're a female manager, we're glad you're here, and we're here to help.

Now: let's find out what it takes to be a good manager in our ever-changing modern world, and *how to do it.*

1

What Is An Effective Manager?

THERE'S A LOT OF TALK about good management. When someone tells you they know how to manage, or what it takes to "be" a good manager, ask them: "How do you measure what a good manager is, or does?" If you don't get a crisp answer (like the one we outline next), don't take what they tell you very seriously.

We suspect you've seen good and bad managers. What makes them so? Is it what they do? How they think? Their personality? What they feel? Where they went to school?

Think about it for a minute. *How do you know someone is a good manager?* Literally, *what is the definition of being a Good Manager?*

When we ask this at our public Effective Manager conferences, we get all kinds of answers.

- *Their people like them.*
- *They communicate a lot.*
- *They're smart.*
- *They CARE.*
- *They listen well.*
- *They are respected.*

1

These are good efforts, but they're still wrong.

Suppose a manager reported to you who did or embodied all of the traits just listed and, for the past 3 years, *had never achieved a single objective the organization had set for him.* Would you describe him as a good manager? Of course you wouldn't.

Your first responsibility as a manager is to achieve results.

This may be the most important concept related to being a manager. And we here at Manager Tools didn't invent it. A lot of business books reverse-engineer a rubric to define what managers are supposed to do in order to support what they teach to managers. But they don't have data to support it.

But management science has known for 70+ years what a manager's two responsibilities are—the dataset is huge. And the first thing the data say is: achieve results. Get your job done. Meet your numbers.

So, despite how nice it sounds, and how good it *feels* to be loved by your team, your first responsibility is NOT to your team of directs. It's NOT to your people. You do NOT worry about them first. It's popular to be a manager who is loved by her team, because, well, it's nice to be popular. But a manager who is loved by her team but doesn't achieve her goals isn't doing her job.

The military has a phrase that captures the connection between results and people beautifully: *Mission First, People Always.*

Your first responsibility is to deliver whatever results your organization expects from you. Whether you're a sales manager and you have to "meet your number," an accounting manager who has to "prepare the quarterlies," or a project manager who has to "deliver, on time, on budget, in scope," the thing that really matters is that you do what your company expects you to do.

For many managers, this first responsibility casts into sharp relief something you've known was wrong but probably didn't want to think about. You probably couldn't name your top three to five key results that you owe your organization this year. You couldn't

tick off on your fingers, *with ease*, the key things for which you're responsible. You might be able to say, "My boss wants me to focus in these areas," but that's not enough because you couldn't quantify what was expected of you.

How does this work if our first responsibility is to deliver results, but our boss hasn't been specific with us? Well, it doesn't.

About the only way to really feel good about what your responsibilities are is to have quantified goals. Numbers. Percentages. "Higher than 92% call quality each week." "Achieve 1.6 MM in sales." "Maintain gross margins above 38%." "Reduce shipping losses by 2.7% cumulatively year over year." If not having these kinds of goals frustrates or worries you, perhaps you think that everyone else has clear goals. But don't worry—they probably don't either. Lack of objective goals is a huge problem in management all over the world, and it has been for 50 years.

The problem with not having clearly delineated responsibilities is that you can't make intelligent choices about where to focus. You begin to feel that "everything is important." You begin to "try to get everything done." But of course, you can't. And you probably know that already because you're working long hours and you never get everything done. You're not alone.

If you can't list your goals almost off the top of your head, make a note somewhere to go to your boss in the near future. Ask her: *What results do you expect of me? What are the measures you're going to compare me against? What are the objective standards? What subjective things do you look at to round out your evaluation of me?* (If you want to know more details about how to have this conversation, There's a Cast for That.™)

Take notes, and go back to your desk and figure out what actions you're going to take to deliver those results.

A lot of managers fear this conversation. The thinking goes, *if there are no measures, they can't use them against me.* But that's shortsighted. There are always measures. If you don't know what they

are, they may be being used against you. Your boss is privately and subjectively evaluating you. That's not what the marketplace does to your company—the marketplace is public and objective—so it oughtn't to be done to you.

So results come first. Managers who produce great results have more successful careers than those who produce average results. But even reading that statement probably bothers you a little because you've met at least one manager who gets great results and does well and *whom you despise*. There are managers who put results so far in front of everything else that they can justify all sorts of behaviors to achieve those results. There are even industries—Wall Street comes to mind—that are more likely to tolerate this kind of behavior from managers. When the ends justify the means for managers, bad things happen to the workers who report to them.

A focus *only* on results far too often leads to abuse of workers. The worldwide labor movement—unions—in fact traces its beginnings to soon after the beginning of. . .management. Managers were told, "Just get results," and they did so, at the expense of the health and safety of their employees. And pretty soon, the workers joined forces.

Your second responsibility as a manager is to retain your people.

Effectively managed modern organizations now measure **retention** in addition to results when evaluating a manager. It's intended to be a brake against an unrelenting results focus. They want to ensure that your team members don't leave your organization.

Replacing employees is expensive. There's the lost institutional memory, the loss of the value of individual goodwill, the costs of interviewing in both money and time, the likely higher salary, the training time and expense, and the cost of less productivity until the new person can match the quality and quantity of work of the person who left.

For today's manager, ==it's not enough to get results. You must do so *sustainably*, by retaining your team.==

> **The definition of an effective manager is one who gets results and keeps her people.**

In the best companies in the world, when executives get together to review the talent of their managers, the managers' results and retention are always at the heart of the discussion. When there's a discussion about who's best, who deserves a promotion, who is "ready now" or going to be "ready next," these two metrics come up over and over. *How well did this manager do her job, as shown in her results, and how well did she keep her people?*

In case you're wondering, no, you don't have to keep everyone on your team, all the time, forever. The retention standard you have to meet is not 100%, no errors. Generally speaking the standard to be considered effective in retaining your team is to have a higher retention rate than your fellow department managers, and the overall organization.

Alas, you may find it hard to know what those numbers are: that's competitive information and usually closely held by HR. But ask anyway, and track your own success.

How Does This Change in a Remote or Hybrid Environment?

It doesn't. At least, the standards don't change. It doesn't matter if your team is all collocated, all remote, some remote and some not, or everyone remote part of the time and everyone in the office some of the time.

Think about it: Doesn't your company do the same thing it used to do, before the widespread advent of remote work? Sure it does. Do customers say, "It's okay, ship late, and ship poor quality, and

don't bill us on time, and don't give us accurate sales and service quotes"? Nope, they don't.

Since the standards demanded of your organization by its customers are the same, the standards of managers are the same: results and retention. Now, it's possible that your organization might cut you some slack on your retention numbers because it has learned that retaining remote workers is much, much harder. But the principle is the same; results and retention drive the manager's world.

This is not to say that the manager's job hasn't changed in a remote/hybrid/work from home (WFH) world. *There's been perhaps no bigger change to the manager's job since the advent of email.*

Managing people remotely is MUCH harder than managing a collocated team. For years, managers have been getting away with poor managerial skills because they're collocated. It's much easier to communicate with a team who's collocated—we'll tell you why later. And it's communication that makes organizations work, not role power and org charts.

It's also much harder to use your role power when your directs are at a distance. And too many managers rely excessively on their role power. In a hybrid/remote world, these managers discover they *literally cannot manage.*

Managing in a remote or hybrid environment is SO much harder that entire corporate cultures have started falling apart because managers have basically stopped managing their directs because they're separated from them. In one fell swoop, tens of thousands of managers have been identified as being unable to do the basic parts of their job. It was predictable—and we predicted it—because they literally didn't know what their job was: results and retention.

Yet, even though the manager's job has changed, the fundamental principles that drive it are the same. How we employ the key behaviors is certainly different, but once you understand the

measures and the principles, you will be able to navigate the hybrid and remote worlds effectively.

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So. If you want to be an effective manager, if you want to maximize your job security (and we would argue your professional satisfaction), you've got to achieve these two metrics, results and retention. You've got to know how your organization measures them, and you've got to choose to spend your time on things that achieve them.

But what are the things you can DO that are most likely to achieve them?

2

The Four Critical Behaviors

Author's Note: If you don't want to learn the fundamental principles that underlie our recommendations, and you think you're ready to dive right in to what to do and how to do it, you can skip this chapter and go right to Chapter 4, about One on Ones. **We don't recommend it**, but if you're dying to get going, go.

—HSB

When you read in the previous chapter about results and retention, you were probably surprised. You're not alone—whenever we teach managers, those objectives are the first content we share, and virtually no one has ever heard it before, unless they've listened to our podcasts.

How is it that that kind of knowledge isn't *common* knowledge among managers? It's a terrible state of affairs, and it's why managers are generally thought to be terrible at their job. Why is there a Pointy-Haired Boss in *Dilbert?* Why does *The Office* (the US version) revolve around Michael's idiocy and ineffectiveness? Because something routinely that bad deserves derision. Because in all humor, there is truth.

Think about it for a second. If you're a software developer, they make you write some pseudo-code or do a regression analysis or debug something to *prove* that you really can do a software developer's job. To become an engineer, they make you build some test bridges before they let you build one someone would drive across. Copy writers have to submit writing samples.

But not so for managerial roles. We're getting better at not just reflexively promoting the best sales representative or the best engineer or marketer, but we still don't teach management. Despite what business schools say, an MBA *will not* make you a good manager. We don't make it clear that managing is different than doing, and therefore we ought to teach folks how to do it. This is why Manager Tools exists: to teach it.

You probably also don't know—we sure didn't when we started managing—that there's been a lot of research done about what works and what doesn't work for managers. Management scientists have been measuring managers for nearly a hundred years, since the advent of large corporate organizations.

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An aside here for those of you in small organizations: the rules for managers are the same at big and small companies alike. Sure, they might feel different, but being effective as a manager requires the same behaviors at big and small companies, and across all industries, *and countries and geographies and races and genders,* and in governmental agencies, and academia as well.

We've gathered data from the largest organizations in the world, like Walmart, and the US government, down to the smallest in the world, like a two-person childcare firm in Brisbane, Australia.

Managing is the same everywhere, for everyone.

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So, what does management science "know" about managing? Keep in mind, it's science, so these scientists would not use "know."

They would say, and have said, "These data are compelling and suggest the following conclusions pretty clearly."

Once management scientists determined—this was the easy part—that results and retention were the top responsibilities of managers everywhere, they asked the exact right question: **What can managers do to achieve those two responsibilities?**

They started measuring various managerial behaviors, trying to determine causal or correlative relationships between certain behaviors and the responsibilities. Over the past 70 years, many, many managerial behaviors have been measured against the responsibilities.

Fifteen managerial behaviors could be correlated to some improvement in results and retention. That seems like a lot, but it's certainly better than having no list at all and essentially having to assume that *anything* might work.

But interestingly, those 15 behaviors were not just ranked, but were also weighted. And the top four behaviors were essentially responsible for 75% of the results and retention value created by the entire list of 15. It's Pareto-like: approximately 80% of the value comes from 20% of the causes.

And what are those top four behaviors? The four critical behaviors most correlated with improved results and retention are the following:

1. **Get to know your people.**
2. **Communicate about performance.**
3. **Ask for more.**
4. **Push work down.**

Managers who get results and keep their people almost always do these four things much better than other managers. (It's "almost always" because there are exceptions. If you're incredibly smart, you can probably get by just being smarter than everyone. But you're probably not that smart.)

1. The Most Effective Behavior Managers Can Engage in Is Getting to Know Their People.

All of our data over the years show that the single most important (and efficient) thing you can do to improve performance and increase retention is to spend time getting to know the strengths and weaknesses of your direct reports. Managers who know how to get the most out of *each individual member of the team* achieve noticeably better results than managers who don't. And the most efficient way to get to know someone is to spend time regularly communicating with them.

Despite the fact that your primary responsibility is getting results, the most important thing you can do isn't strategizing or task assignment or resource planning or priority analysis. It's getting to know the people who have the skills who are going to get the work done.

You *can* increase performance *in the short term* pretty easily by using your role power, threatening, and demanding compliance. But if you try that for too long, your people will quit, right? This is why organizations measure retention—to keep managers from relying only on role power to do their jobs.

Our data over the years suggest that generally, a manager who knows his team members one standard deviation better than the average manager **produces results that are two standard deviations better** *than the average manager's results.*

Every person on the earth expects and deserves to be treated as an individual. Sadly, what most managers do is *manage others the way they would like to be managed.* This is sort of the Golden Rule of non-experienced managers. You do to your directs what would make sense to you if you were one of those directs.

People and their behaviors are what deliver results to your organization. (Not systems, not processes, not computers, not machines.) Results are your primary responsibility. People are all

unique—every one of us. What makes any manager think that one size would *ever* fit all? It might be easier. . .but it's not more effective. And if you're worried that it takes a lot of work, this book will show you that it really doesn't.

If we're going to manage people who are different than us—and we are, as team sizes continue to grow to save costs—we're going to have to learn to manage people who aren't like us. And that means being willing to adjust depending upon the person you're managing. Just like you want your boss to do with you.

At this point, if you're like a goodly percentage of the hundreds of thousands of managers we've trained over the years, you're probably thinking one of two things:

1. *I think I know my people pretty well, actually.*
2. *No need—I talk to my people all the time!*

Let's take each of those ideas in turn. First, "I know my people pretty well." We'd guess you think you do. . .but we'd bet you don't.

Here's a thought experiment to judge your knowledge of your team members. First, what's more important to you, your family or your work?

For almost everyone, the answer is family, and rightfully so.

Now, ask yourself the same question about your directs. What's more important to *them*, their family or their work? Without much thought you realize, it's family first for them as well. And you'd be right—we've asked.

So, for your directs, their family is more important than work. And you say you know your directs pretty well. Here's a test of that knowledge:

What are the first names of all of the children of the people who report directly to you?

If you're like roughly 95% of the managers we ask that, they *don't* know all of the names. A fair portion—maybe 40%—don't

even know *for certain* how many kids all of their directs have! We call this, by the way, the *Direct Relationship Acid Test*. There's a Cast for That.™

This isn't a conclusive exercise, of course. But most folks agree it's a reasonable indicator, a fair proxy. Think about it from the perspective of your personal life: your close friends all know the names of all of your kids. That's part of what makes them close friends. Your less closely held friends know some of your kids. And your acquaintances probably don't know whether you have kids or not.

If you failed the test, consider: What makes you think you can get the last full measure of work devotion out of someone when you don't know the names of the people most precious to them? In our experience, you probably can't. If you're smart, and work hard, you can do okay. . .but you're missing the biggest leverage of all—a trusting relationship with those whom you manage.

For the record, we're not saying that you can just go out and find out the names of your directs' children and that will make things better. The Direct Relationship Acid Test is just a proxy to show you that maybe you don't know your team members all that well. We've been using it for 30+ years, and managers' answers haven't changed.

If you're responding to this by thinking, "I'm not sure I like all the familiarity. I don't want to be friends with my directs," you're not alone. And rest assured, *we don't want you to become friends with your directs*. There's a Cast for That: *"Can I Be Friends with My Directs?"* (The answer is no.)

What about the rejoinder, "No need—I talk to my people all the time!" Many managers say this to us when we recommend they spend focused, scheduled time getting to know their directs. They say that they're constantly in communication with their directs, through email and texts and Zoom calls and plenty of face-to-face conversations. In fact, they feel like they talk to their directs *so* much, they hardly have time for their own work.

But most managers have no idea how (one-sided) their conversations are with their team members. They have no idea how *little* those brief conversations actually build relationships.

Consider this: if you're like a lot of managers, when you're in the office, you sit close to some or all of your team. If that's true, it's very likely that you've been at your desk, in your cubicle/office/space on a given day, and needed to communicate with one of your team. You thought about sending an email, but then realized they were at their desk, and you thought you'd walk over and ask them about whatever it was you needed. You thought it would be good to chat, as well, and see how they're doing.

You walked over and asked, "Got a second?" And what did your direct almost surely answer? "Sure!"

We hate to break it to you, but they don't answer that way because they think you're awesome. Ask yourself, do you sit around all day hoping *your* boss will stop by? Hardly.

No, they answer that way because you're their boss. They know you're probably not there *just* to chat. You're there because you want something. That's not the premise of a conversation that leads to a trusting relationship. It's very likely that whatever chit-chat you engage in with them—*How was your weekend? How's your spouse? What's the latest with the kids?*—is heard by them, to some extent, as *blah-blah-blah-blah-I'm-going-to-get-to-the-real-reason-I'm-here-in-just-a-minute-blah-blah-blah.*

Look: we're not saying that you don't care about their weekend or their spouse or their kids. We know you do, and we encourage you to ask. But there's a difference in their perception of you caring when you generally only ask those questions before you're going to ask them for something.

Further, most managers don't realize the extent to which the chit-chat we engage in with our directs is driven by *us*, by our agenda, and by what we want. It's unlikely for many of our directs,

when we stop by to see them, that they're going to feel comfortable talking to you about just anything.

Here's a rude awakening: *your directs don't see you as a nice person.* We're not saying you're not a nice person—we believe you are, and your directs probably do too. But that's not how your directs *see you.* They see you primarily *as their boss.* It's a hard truth, but one worth remembering: because of your role power, your directs don't see you the way you see yourself.

One way to think about this perception disparity is to imagine that for the vast majority of us as bosses, we have a sign on our forehead. It's visible to all of our directs. And it says, *Watch out. I'm your boss. I could fire you.* When you control someone else's addiction to food, clothing, and shelter, they're going to see you through a different lens than you see yourself.

If you doubt this, if you think that you're different, that you're loved and not feared at all by your team, think of it this way: *Do you tell your boss EVERYTHING?*

Of course you don't.

And neither do your directs tell you everything. Because you're their boss. Even if you're the nicest person you see in the mirror every morning. Even if they would admit you're a great person. . .to them, you're still the boss and your role power distorts the relationship.

It's pretty likely that when you talk to your directs, you're blind to this effect you have on them. Just because you're "chatting" doesn't mean you're building a relationship. What's happening in the directs' mind is probably closer to, "I'm waiting for a task assignment."

To build a trusting relationship, it takes more than chit-chat, more than "talking to your people all the time." And the trust in this relationship matters, a lot, according to our measures of effective managers. It takes even more trust building in a manager-subordinate

relationship than it does with friends. Our role power as our directs' boss distorts the relationship.

Generally, the more a team trusts its manager, the better the results, and the better the retention as well.

One of the best-ever titles of a business book we've read is _The Speed of Trust,_ by Stephen M. R. Covey. When we trust our directs, we can spend less time telling them all the details, checking their work, and asking for voluminous and frequent reports. Sure, we still have to check, and we still need reports, but we spend a lot less time on either, and so do our directs. More time accomplishing work leads to results.

When I trust my boss, I spend less time worrying about what her intentions are and whether I have to cover myself on all of my work. I don't have to second guess the "why" of a task or delegation or ask my colleagues for political support if I decide to push back on something. More time for results.

Think about you and your "team" of directs. I put quotes on that word team because you and your directs really aren't and can probably never be a true team. That's not a popular thing to say these days because everyone talks about teams all the time. But it's still true.

Think about it: What team were you ever on where one of your teammates could kick you off the team? Could they fire you? You might say, well, my school soccer coach could have kicked me off the team. _But your coach wasn't part of the "team" was he?_

When we give managers an org chart of them and their directs and say draw your team, they generally circle themselves and the team as a whole. But when we give that same instruction to the directs on that team, they circle themselves and their peers. . .and leave the manager out.

And that's okay. Because for all the talk of managers and their directs being a team, you don't actually need to be a pure team. You need the ingredient that makes high-performance teams _high-performing._

Trust

The groundbreaking book *High Performance Teams* taught us years ago that the binding and distinctive element of teams that outperform others is the amount of trust they build among members. To get our group of directs performing more like a team, we've got to develop trusting relationships with our directs, despite the effect of our role power.

Psychologists tell us that building trust starts with communication. When you communicate with someone else, they evaluate your communications with them in two ways: quantity and quality. *Quantity* is the frequency of your communications. Think about it—you talk more with those whom you consider friends and trusted colleagues and less with those with whom you have less of a relationship. Others judge the *quality* of our communications with them by whether or not what we talk about is of interest or benefit *to them*.

If you're going to create trust and trusting relationships with your directs, then, you're going to have to *talk to them frequently about things that are important to them.*

You can probably see the quality and quantity portion of that guidance. You've got to "talk to them frequently": that's quantity. And "about things that are important to them": that's quality. Hopefully you can see that "I talk to my people all the time" isn't enough because you're talking about things that are important to *you*.

Before we move on to *Talk About Performance*, it's important to note that these four critical behaviors are not weighted equally. The four behaviors don't each account for 25% of the total value of the four effective behaviors.

Getting to know your directs accounts for 40% of the total value created by engaging in the four behaviors.

That's right: your relationship with your directs, based on all the work we have done and data we have collected, is by far the most important thing you can do to improve results and retention.

But every time we have tested managers "talking about performance" without having "developed relationships," we got poor results. The data said the same thing every time: the most important thing you can do as a manager is to develop a trusting relationship with the people on your team. If you do, everything else is easier. If you don't, everything else is harder, and your results will be attenuated.

2. The Second Critical Behavior Is Communicating About Performance.

Would your performance improve if you heard more often from your boss about how you're doing? Most professionals, when we ask them that, give a resounding yes.

We also ask this question: *Provided it was done politely and professionally, would you like more feedback/input from your boss/organization about your performance on a more regular basis, regardless of whether it was positive or negative?*

Again, a resounding YES. Many folks actually go further and say, *She doesn't even need to tell me I'm doing good! If she would just professionally talk to me when I make mistakes more often, rather than staying silent, I'd love that!* (Our data show that only giving negative input actually doesn't work very well over time. Directs begin to resent their boss for focusing on the negatives, even if they've asked for it.—HSB)

If you want more performance communications from YOUR boss, you know your directs want the same thing from you. In fact, as a general rule, whatever you're thinking you'd like from your boss, it's likely your directs want the same thing from you. Far too many managers have this unsustainable thought: *Well, I don't get along great with MY boss, but MY people, they LOVE me.*

Sorry to burst your bubble, but that's really unlikely.

Now, if you're like most managers, you don't talk to your team members very much about their performance. You're of the general

mindset that, "they know how they're doing," or "If I have a real problem with them, I'll tell them," or "I don't need to praise them when they do something right! That's just them doing their job!" (We'll talk about praise and punishment later.—HSB)

But yet, when you think about it, everything that's done at a high level is done with mountains of communication about performance. If you've ever paid attention to the advertisements for high-performance cars, they all say (and it's true): you can feel the road as you drive. That feeling is important in high-performance driving, knowing what the car is doing, what the road feels like. You have to adjust. And the input about the road from the car that allows you to adjust is the feedback the car transmits to your hands on the wheel (and according to drivers, your butt in the driver's seat).

Think about professional sports. Football, American football, baseball. All things being equal, if you're like most fans, you'd prefer to watch professional games rather than high school games (unless your child is playing). And the reason is that the caliber of play is much higher. You want to see something done well, done expertly. At times, play at the highest level approaches beauty.

One of the underlying reasons for that beauty is that the athletes who perform at the highest levels of the game are surrounded by feedback about their performance their entire careers. Major League Baseball shortstops and second basemen—the very best in the world at their jobs—still go to spring training every year and practice, practice, practice. They regain their timing and teamwork through repetition: *they take actions and pay attention to the feedback they get*. One once said that he thought he turned 5,000 double plays every spring. 5,000! In a normal season, turning 150 is an outstanding accomplishment! Why that amount of practice? They know that creating and using what feedback tells them will make them better, when it matters.

The National Football League has been a client of ours for many years. How much feedback do NFL players get? So much you'll be

astounded. The NFL video records every game with a special cam-era, the "All 22," which shows every player on the field. It captures every second of every play, in high definition. The night after every game, the video is sent to NFL headquarters, where special software breaks down the video and creates packages of video clips *for each player on the field*. That video package is sent to that player's position coach that night.

And the next day, the day after they played, each player sits down with his coach, and *they go over every single second of every single play that player played*. An NFL coach once told us, "There are three types of players in the NFL. Those that don't want to go over their plays—they're out of the league in a year or two. Those that dutifully come to the session with their coach, and try to learn—they might have a career. And then those who fight for an extra hour or two with their coach, or a second session, going over all of it again, obsessively—those guys are going to the Hall of Fame."

Even the technology we use every day relies on communica-tion about its performance. Every machine you interact with—smartphones, tablets, cars, computers, televisions—all have numerous feedback circuits built into them. They're constantly checking themselves for being within tolerance, checking vari-ances, within normal limits, to avoid a significant failure. (Try not to think of your car's check engine light.)

About the only part of human endeavor where feedback isn't rapid and frequent and timely is. . .management. Just about the only place where feedback isn't given, isn't used, isn't taken for granted, is between managers and their directs. We all say we want it as directs, but it almost never comes. How do we managers get away with desperately wanting feedback from *our* bosses and then deny-ing it to our directs?

Nevertheless, when we've talked to high-performing directs who rate their boss as outstanding, performance communications

come up over and over again as a core reason. "She tells me how I'm doing." "When I do well, he says so." "When I mess up, he quickly tells me and we move on." "I never need to worry about where I stand—she tells me."

And we'll never forget one manager telling us, "I didn't know that communicating about performance was super-important for great results. I just did it because it was what I would have wanted. I didn't like it in the beginning, but it worked, and I got over that."

If you want high performance, you're going to have to talk about it with your directs. It matters more than anything else, other than your relationship with them.

Performance communication accounts for 30% of the total value created by engaging in the four behaviors.

That means that if you build a great relationship with each of your directs, and talk about performance regularly, you're 70% of the way to getting results and retaining your team.

3. The Third Important Behavior Is Asking for More Performance.

Our data show that if you want great results and retention, you have to be willing to constantly raise the bar on performance. It's not enough, based on what we see, to simply be a caretaker. It's not enough to accept from your directs what their "comfort zone" is. It's not enough to let your directs "stay where they are."

We can assure you, executives at your firm don't think anybody should be in their "comfort zone" very often. Executives are in a constant state of stress and expect something similar (and sustainable) from you and your team.

And executives are completely justified in thinking that way. If your company or industry is growing or changing (and "changing" includes "shrinking"), then every job is changing as well. And it's the manager's job to figure out what the external change means for

her group and help her directs perform in ways that satisfy the needs of the organization.

You've probably heard the phrase, "I'm stressed out." You've probably even said it yourself. Well, this may surprise you: as managers, we're *supposed* to create stress for our directs.

How is that possible? Well, what most people don't know about stress is that there are two kinds. There's *distress*: that's the kind you mean when you're "stressed out." It's a level of stress that impedes or hinders your performance. You're overwhelmed, you can't think straight, and you feel fearful, uncreative, frozen.

But think of stress as occurring on a continuum (it does). Below the "stressed out" level of distress is the useful level of stress called *eustress*. It's pronounced *you-stress*, and that *eu-* prefix is like the prefixes on *euphoria*, *euphony*, and *eudemonia*. Eustress is the stress you feel that helps you get ready, get excited, "get up" for the big game. It's that tingly feeling of anticipation, eagerness, sense of fire, and determination that you feel when your team huddles and shouts "Team!" or "Beat Navy!" before a game.

The ideal place for your directs to be for maximum output/ results is right on the line between distress and eustress. *Almost* over the line into fear, but not. Lots of anticipation and energy, but not panic. *And the only way to know where that line is, for each direct, is to push each of your directs into moments of distress and pay attention to where they start to lose effectiveness.* Everyone has their own point of diminishing returns.

The way you do that is to ask for more.

If you're an experienced manager, you've probably dealt with the direct who says, "I'm happy where I am." Lots of new managers have been stumped by the average performer who doesn't want to improve, doesn't want a promotion, and is still "technically doing the job." Not well, mind you, but they are meeting the standards.

But as a manager, we're responsible not just for the status quo, but for *improving* the performance of the whole team. The only way a

team's performance improves is if individual performances improve. If your team's goals are being raised (and if they aren't right now, I promise someone is thinking about raising them sometimes soon), you need to get more out of everyone.

So, the direct who is happy where he is will be fine. . .for now. In a year, though, his job will have changed enough—and the standards will have risen enough because standards are always rising—that *his performance will have declined relative to the needs of the job.* (There's a Cast for That™: My Direct Doesn't Want to Change.)

There's another part of asking for more that your executive leaders would love you to understand: "asking for more" *saves significant costs.*

Most managers, when workloads increase, have a reflexive response of wanting to hire more people. It's natural, but this isn't what your leaders want. They want the output of the organization to increase *without increasing headcount.* Why? Because headcount is expensive, and the reputational risk of layoffs, if they overshoot demand, is enormous.

Now, a lot of managers say, "Well of course the executives want me to get more done so the firm can be more profitable—they don't have to do the work in the trenches." And yes, many executives care very little for the managers in their part of the organization. And many of them just want you to go through what they went through, not being listened to or appreciated when they were managers.

But the principle remains and is a core part of organizational theory: it's better to grow capability by increasing the capability of the people you have, than by hiring more people. It's cheaper, it's more durable, it's faster, it adds goodwill to the firm, it strengthens existing relationships, it strengthens succession planning, and it reduces risk from bad hires.

So, the effective manager is always asking for more, because the organization expects him to.

Asking for more accounts for roughly 15% of the total value created by engaging in the four behaviors.

4. The Fourth Critical Behavior Is Pushing Work Down.

Manager Tools gets asked a lot, "Why are there four parts to your "Management Trinity?" Well, it's not like a couple of engineers (our founders) can't do math. And it's certainly not marketing. (We're horrible at marketing.)

The reason "Push Work Down" is the fourth part of our Management Trinity is that while the first three parts of the Trinity create value for the team, Pushing Work Down creates *capacity for the organization*. Managers are the ones who have to push work down, but it's the organization that benefits. Put differently, you can produce results from your team with only the first three parts of the Trinity, but pushing work down creates growth potential for your entire organization.

What does it mean to "push work down"? Here's a simple way to think about it. Suppose there's a task that both you and one of your directs can do. You do it now, but your directs, at least one of them, COULD do the task. Maybe not as well as you, but close enough that their work quality would be acceptable.

If we were teaching a class in Managerial Economics 101, based on the previous situation, we would give you a quiz: If the above situation is true, *which of the two of you, your direct or you, SHOULD accomplish the task, and why?*

If you don't know the answer immediately, you're normal. But there is, in Managerial Economics, a right answer. *The direct should do the job, not the manager, because the direct is cheaper labor. If we can achieve an acceptable quality level with less cost, for all but the most important things we do, we should do so.*

Why is this true? Because yes, directs are less expensive labor. That's not a rude statement—no insult is implied or should be

inferred. Think of it this way: If you had a choice of hiring two contractors, or workers of any type, and you knew they would provide roughly equal quality, wouldn't you hire the less expensive one? Of course you would.

Now, a lot of individual contributors say here, well, okay, yes, technically I'm cheaper, but that's not the whole story. I have my own work to do! I don't have time for my manager to push work down to me. I'm already fully busy.

They're right. . .but that's not a defense against work being pushed down. Why? Because the question really isn't whether people are busy. *Everyone's* busy, aren't they? By using the defense of busy-ness, no work would ever be transferred to anyone else, and we would all be stuck in a weird productivity stasis. (Which, due to the link between productivity and profitability, and the inevitability of change, is the equivalent of an organizational death spiral.)

The question becomes: In a world where everyone is busy with too much to do, *what work is most valuable to the organization?* That's the work we have to get done, right? And, in a general sense, the more important work of the organization is being done at higher levels. (If you're a software developer, or a former developer, that irritates you, but the data don't support your contention that what you do is the most important thing the company does. We love you, but sorry.—HSB)

What that means for managers is that we have to learn to share our work (that which we can, which is probably most of it), with our directs.

And there's an even more important (though admittedly organizational) reason why we need to learn to push work down. . .but we'll discuss that later.

Pushing work down accounts for roughly 15% of the total value created by engaging in the four behaviors.

And that's the Manager Tools Trinity. Managers can engage in four behaviors to most effectively produce results and retain team members:

1. **Get to know your people.**
2. **Communicate about performance.**
3. **Ask for more.**
4. **Push work down.**

How Does This Change in a Remote or Hybrid Environment?

None of these principles change *at all* in a remote or hybrid environment. They've been tested in person, in remote, and in hybrid situations. Virtually all effective managers engage in these behaviors and do so in a remote environment just like they would in person.

But the distance makes managing and engaging in these critical behaviors much harder.

There are a lot of reasons why "distance" makes managing harder. But the biggest one is only a result of distance, not distance itself: communication.

It's easy to look at an organizational chart and see who works for whom, who reports to whom, who works in which organization, and who outranks whom. **But it is not the lines on an org chart that make organizations work; it's *communication.***

Think about it: If you had an org where all the relationships were clear, and everybody knew who everybody's boss was, but no one communicated with anyone else, *would that organization be effective?* Of course not.

On the other hand, if there were a group of people about whom you didn't know the reporting relationships, but they communicated *a lot*, that organization has a chance to succeed. Because they

communicate, they can figure it out. But all the structure without communication won't lead to results.

Communication is the glue of an organization. It may be even more than that: it may be the blood that runs through an organization giving it life.

And human beings don't communicate well at a distance. Okay, not really. It's actually much, much worse than that: we humans are *horrible* at communicating at a distance.

In the 1970s, Professor Thomas Allen at Massachusetts Institute of Technology wanted to understand how distance between professionals' offices affected communications on a project team. His graphing of the relationship between distance and frequency of communications became widely known as the Allen curve.

The Allen curve tells a devastating story. When the distance is relatively close to zero (1–2 meters), communication, as you might imagine, is the highest the study measured. But before the distance between desks gets to 4 meters—13 feet!—communication has fallen to HALF what it was at 1–2 meters.

Immediately, communication frequency basically falls off a cliff. It doesn't stay relatively stable until it gets to 50 feet (which seems pretty close, right?) or even 30 feet. *Nope, straight down.*

And when you get to 50 meters of distance, communication between the two parties has basically fallen to zero.

If your desk is more than 50 meters from your boss's, your chance at frequent communications (which is a precursor of trust) is marginally zero.

What does this mean for the remote workforce and working from home (WFH)?

When we share the Allen curve with our client audiences, we often hear that the concept is no longer valid in the world of digital communications. In the 1970s, there were really only phones and written documents as communication media. There was no

email, no Slack, no texts, no instant messages, no social media, no Zoom, no Teams.

We thought the same thing when we learned of the connection between distance and communication. *And we were wrong too.*

Professor Allen updated his work in 2007 based on similar comments. And the Allen curve still held as a good measure of the effect of distance on communication frequency. Here are some quotes from the Allen curve Wikipedia page:

> . . .[R]ather than finding that the probability of telephone communication increases with distance, as face-to-face probability decays, *our data show a decay in the use of all communication media with distance* (following a "near-field" rise).
>
> We do not keep separate sets of people, some of whom we communicate with by one medium and some by another. *The more often we see someone face-to-face, the more likely it is that we will also telephone that person or communicate by another medium.*

As we said earlier, it's communication behavior, not an org chart or reporting relationships, that knits organizations into cohesive, powerful entities. Sociologists generally agree that the greatest achievement of humankind is large human organizations. Our ability to band together for a common cause massively magnifies our individual capabilities. *And it's communication that makes an organization work.*

Now think through the four critical behaviors:

1. **Get to know your people.**
2. **Communicate about performance.**
3. **Ask for more.**
4. **Push work down.**

Can we do *any of these* without communicating? No, we can't, or at least, we can't without destroying our relationships and the trust that underlies effectiveness.

So, communication is necessary for effective managers, and distance destroys communication. That's all you need to know to answer the question, what is the effect of remote work on managers' effectiveness: **it's ruinous.**

We will cover how to deal with the challenges of remote directs throughout this book. In Chapter 4, we will address the general problem and make specific recommendations. And then as we talk about rolling out each of the four components of the Manager Tools Trinity, we will tell you in detail what changes and what to do about it.

3

Teachable and Sustainable Tools

You've probably noticed that up until now, we haven't talked much about the core tools that make up the Manager Tools Trinity: One on Ones, Feedback, Coaching, and Delegation. That's because **you don't need to use our tools to become a great manager.**

You don't need to use our One on Ones, Feedback, Coaching, or Delegation Tools in order to achieve great results and retain your team. Our tools, delineated in this book, on our podcasts, and in our work with clients all over the world, *aren't the only way* to achieve the four critical behaviors: get to know your people, talk about performance, ask for more, and push work down.

Put differently, you may be able to achieve the four key behaviors in your own way, with techniques you've developed on your own, or over the course of your career. You don't "have" to use our One on Ones tool to get to know your people. You don't "have" to use our Feedback Tool to talk about performance, etc.

If you've got your own way, and you're achieving the four critical behaviors, leading to great results and team member retention, you're good to go.

Almost.

Unfortunately, it's not quite enough that you use the four critical behaviors and achieve your two fundamental responsibilities.

However you manage, your techniques/behavior/philosophy *must be both teachable to others and sustainable.*

What does that mean? It means that you have to be able to teach others how to do what you do, and you have to be able to continue to apply those same teachable behaviors, those same externally visible skills and abilities, in different roles, in different organizations, through different economic conditions, wherever you are, for long periods of time.

Consider the following scenario, the underpinnings of which are fairly common in organizations everywhere. Suppose you are a process engineering manager in a manufacturing facility. You have four process engineers reporting to you. Your team does analysis of production and fabrication processes throughout the plant, coming up with better, faster, cheaper ways to produce a high-quality final product.

One of your directs is pretty good at his job. He can solve most problems at least as well as anyone else on your team, often better. Unfortunately, he considers himself, "a very private person," especially about his work. When you ask him to come up with a solution to a problem, he will go into his office, close the door, and work by himself for a day or two, depending upon the problem. He won't ask for input, won't collaborate, won't share drafts of his work. He'll just come out later with a solution.

If you have questions about how he got to his solution, he'll say, "I can't really describe it. I just think about it for a while, and the solution comes to me." When you ask him to share concepts at a staff meeting, he'll sort of shrug his shoulders and say, "It's just the way I do things. It won't make much sense to anyone else." When you asked him to train a new team member, he told them, "I don't think I can tell you much about what I do. It's kind of my personality."

You probably wouldn't tolerate this for very long. You know intuitively that it's *really not enough that someone can get their job done*. They have to be able to talk about it, communicate about it, and explain it, even defend it if need be. If something goes wrong, you may have to have them walk through their process step by step as part of a root cause analysis.

This is one of the unwritten rules that make human organizations so effective. We have to be able to communicate about our work. We have to communicate status and help others understand what we do and why it works.

We don't really think about it very often, but the way in which people do their work matters, at some level. We expect people in finance, say, to be able to explain the functions they put into a spreadsheet and why. We expect engineers to be able to walk us through why they chose a particular design, or a material. We expect developers to comment their code, so someone else can debug it. We expect marketing people to explain their rationale for why they chose that data-gathering campaign.

But somehow we don't think we have to hold managers to this standard. Somehow, with all the work being done about people and systems and motivation and pay and benefits and rewards and culture . . . "management" is some sort of inexplicable black art.

For some reason, managers aren't expected to be able to explain how they manage. When we ask them, many just shrug their shoulders and say, "I don't know." The good ones do so and grin about it. The bad ones go on to say, "It's not like anybody ever taught me. The company doesn't really help us out, you know. . . ."

Sometimes in our client work we hear, "Nobody ever taught me. I just learned what to do from previous bosses." When we say, "Oh, good—you had good bosses who set the right example—that's good," their reply is something along the lines of, "I didn't say *that*. . . ."

What does it say about the most important systemic behavior in every organization—management—that the majority of us

learned how to do it from somebody *who was never taught it and privately worried that others would discover that they didn't truly know what they were doing?*

When we ask managers, "What's your approach to managing," we get, usually, something that sounds roughly like this: "It's just who I am" or "It's my personality."

Think about what that "personality" answer means in this situation. Suppose you're a relatively reserved technical person who is very good at her job. In fact, you're probably the best QA person on your team. You're methodical, logical, careful, and take great pride in the quality of your work. You're not really very social at work, but you have close friends with whom you spend time at home and are known to them as a good friend and a good listener.

Your boss, on the other hand, is completely the opposite of you. He's "sales-y." He's outgoing, cheerful, chatty, knows everyone, comfortable in front of a crowd. He knows everybody's favorite Starbucks order. And he's a good manager. A little messy at times, sure. Sometimes starts something and doesn't finish it. But he spends time with everybody on the team. He knows their strengths and weaknesses. He's smart. He stays positive and is a pretty good motivator too.

A while back, he told you how well you were doing. He said he was impressed with your professionalism. He liked how you were a team player. He mentioned that his boss thought you might be management material.

You told him that you *had* been thinking about career next steps, but you had questions. You asked him, "What makes you a good manager?"

And he said: "Glad you asked! Basically, I'm pretty sure it's just my personality. I'm outgoing, I like people. I like talking with people. I keep my eye on the big picture. . . I don't know. It's kind of a gift, I guess."

And with his answer, *you were pretty certain you'd never be able to be a manager because you and your boss were polar opposites.* You

didn't have his "gift," and you certainly weren't "outgoing." You weren't thought of as being great with people, except maybe by your friends. Your boss made managing out to be about traits and characteristics, not about behavior, skills, or abilities. He made it seem that you needed to be a person that other people described as "a people person."

We can assure you, if the chief executive officer or vice president of human resources of your firm had known that that conversation had taken place, she would've been angry with your boss. She might have said: *"We need every effective person to think about growing their skills and influencing more people in the firm. We can't create a ghetto of nonmanagers just because they're 'not like you.' Maybe not everybody wants to be a manager. But if somebody wants to or is willing to consider it, we ought not to discourage them. There are all kinds of great managers who are reserved or even shy. Managing is about results and retention, not about smiling and knowing people. Sure, it's a people job, but it's a job that any person can do with the right skills and behaviors! Don't stunt your people's possibilities because they're not you. Our CIO is as different from our CMO as any two people ever in terms of personality, but wow do they both get things done. One's an introvert, and the other is so outgoing it's annoying. And their staffs love working for them both. We can't build on your 'personality.' That's not sustainable."*

And for the record, management is not only NOT about personality; we have ample data that personality has NOTHING to do with managerial effectiveness. It doesn't matter what your personality is; you can be effective as a manager by engaging in the right behaviors.

■ ■ ■

The way effective managers manage is visible to others in their organizations and teachable to others. And they can repeat the core behaviors in any situation, nearly anywhere.

The reasons for this are fundamental to any organization. If we can't teach others how to manage, it's much harder for the organization to grow. We can't teach "personality." And we can't teach, "I don't know."

When your organization's business or service grows, at some point more managers are going to be needed. If the people who are considered for promotion to a newly created managerial role haven't learned how to manage *well* from their own manager, they're not going to be any good at it. And now, just when the organization needs additional effectiveness in order to sustain its growth, it's not there.

To sustain organizational growth, new managers must be created. And the way to create new managers is to teach them *before* they're in the role. Otherwise, they learn the hard way, when they're already in the role. And that means learning from their own mistakes, at a time when the organization doesn't need *new, weak managers*, but actually managers as good as they already had—and frankly, *better*—before the growth. The newer managers have to be better because as organizations grow, growth gets harder, so the same behaviors in a harder situation begets less performance. . .right when more is needed.

■ ■ ■

Knowing that there was the need for teachable and sustainable skills caused us to start creating the foundations for Manager Tools' guidance. We'd been hearing for years that managers didn't feel good about their performance. They wanted to get better but didn't know how.

They would read books, but most were too vague. The books had good ideas, but **managers didn't know what to do when they finished**. And we were tired of hearing from management gurus and consultants who basically shared what THEY did when they were managers (or more likely chief executive officers, which is an

incredibly bad testing ground for managerial behaviors—it's too different).

We had seen in our careers that too many managers couldn't sustain a short-term success, or if the business environment changed, they couldn't adapt. And of those who were thought to be good, too many couldn't explain what they did or how they did it.

Because we knew about the four critical behaviors (not personality, not schooling, not traits, not attributes) we started refining methods and tools that would help managers achieve them. We developed models, tested them, and gathered mountains of scientific data. We paid attention to results from client executives and managers. Over the course of about 7 years, we developed the four tools for the four critical behaviors that we call the Management Trinity. We have been teaching them for nearly 30 years.

We wanted to recommend behaviors to managers—because behaviors are available to everyone—that had DATA associated with them. We didn't want to tell managers to do it "our way." We wanted to *prove* to managers with real numbers, based on real use, that there were specific things any manager could do to become effective.

Here's an example of how Manager Tools' One on Ones took shape working with client managers and executives. A general manager of a large manufacturing organization called us with a request for help. His line of business was beginning to have signs of a struggle. He said that this division of a Fortune 500 firm had grown quickly, and he was working too hard on getting his vision out and struggling to find out how things were going. He was getting surprised by operational misses and delays. He was about to squeak by on his goals for the quarter, after three or four quarters of being certain. He felt his managers—426 in total, through several levels—were overwhelmed by the technical and logistical systems they had to put in place to handle recent volume increases.

In interviewing 30–40 managers, we kept getting bad answers to questions about communications. Lower-level workers weren't hearing about changes until they were forced to deal with them. Managers were not told about potential market changes that led to product changes that would lead to operational changes in their area. There was little knowledge of some cost-cutting efforts that were starting.

We started having managers at all levels do 30-minute weekly one-on-one meetings. We had managers get to know their directs, giving them a regularly scheduled forum for their questions and concerns, and allowing the manager to share what was going on, and perhaps give guidance and feedback.

To make things simple, we decided to split the 30 minutes into two 15-minute segments. And, we set it up so the manager went first. Managers always go first in meetings, right?

It was a disaster. Within 3 months, we stopped the effort. We had been tracking results, and various other factors, and in that little time—roughly 90 days—we were already seeing declines in places we didn't want to see them. Managers actually liked the meetings a little—*but directs absolutely hated them.*

When we asked directs why they didn't like the meetings, most of the answers were variations on a theme: "Just another meeting with my boss." "This isn't a meeting for 'us.'" "Just more work being assigned to me."

We also learned something else that astounded us. Remember one of the two primary reasons managers pushed back on spending focused time with their directs in One on Ones, "I talk to my people all the time"?

Well, apparently that wasn't exactly so. The average length of time that managers talked in this not-necessary meeting with their directs-with-whom-they-were-always-talking was *twenty-eight minutes.* They said they hadn't needed any more time with their directs, and yet they had just talked their ears off!

Why did directs hate the meetings? Because they had been told this was going to be a joint meeting. They had been told this was an opportunity to develop a stronger trusting relationship with their bosses. And this clearly wasn't it. In fact, what do you think most directs did when their manager looked at their watch and said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I've taken 28 minutes. Do you have anything for me?" Of course you know what they said: "Nope." Which meant, "I have no interest in contributing to YOUR meeting."

But some other data were buried in our results. One senior director, who had 24 managers in his organization, had gotten great results. Where the larger group had seen declines, this manager and his subordinate managers had improved performance metrics and were loving their One on Ones.

When we interviewed him and some of his managers, we discovered that he had changed the organizational guidance slightly. He had basically said, I'm kind of lazy and don't want to prep for another meeting, *so I'll just let the directs go first rather than me*. All of his managers followed suit.

The directs loved it. They rated their relationships with their managers better within 3 months, while the other group, with the managers going first, described a decline. Managers loved it too because they still got to cover whatever they wanted to cover, every week.

But here's what might surprise you again: the directs, going first in the 30-minute meeting, *also talked on average 28 minutes*. The same amount as the managers did when they went first in the other group.

There's no way either side of a meeting can logically sustain saying "we already talk enough" if, when you give them a chance to talk in an already busy schedule, they fill up the agenda and then some.

So, when we talk about One on Ones, you'll note that the direct goes first. ;-)

We shortly thereafter expanded our work with One on Ones at an even bigger corporate client. A large division, 1,100 managers, several layers. We tested a rough equivalent of our current guidance.

We had 700 managers in the test group conduct One on Ones (some weekly, some biweekly, some monthly). We had 400 managers in a control group who continued to manage the way they always had. They were forbidden from doing One on Ones (which managers in our community have come to call O3s).

The study was scheduled to run for 30 months. Unfortunately, and frustratingly, we had to stop the test after only 19 months. Why? Because 18 months into our test, unrelated to the test, a corporate document came out showing which managers had been promoted to which roles in the past 12 months. *Of the 43 managers promoted, 42 of them came from the test group, and only 1 from the control group.*

While you might think this was validation and justification for continuing or even expanding the effort, a month later we had to shut down the study. Why? Because the managers in the control group, who were forbidden from doing O3s *but who also wanted to get promoted just like all those managers who were doing O3s,* started doing O3s as well. They basically cheated on the test, and who could blame them? Even if they pretty much ruined the science involved in our study.

Nevertheless, 18 months was long enough to capture some of the outcomes we had hoped to track. Results and retention among managers in the test group rose by 9% and 8%, respectively. (We had measured every manager's previous results and retention before we started the trial.) Results and retention among the control group rose slightly, by 1%.

But it gets even better. Remember that in the test group there were different periodicities? Weekly, biweekly, and monthly? We also broke out that data.

Here's the rank ordering of results and retention improvements by periodicity:

1. Weekly—Biggest improvement in both results and retention
2. Biweekly—Slightly less than half the improvement seen by weekly O3s
3. Control—Slight improvement in results and retention
4. Monthly—*Decrease in results and retention*

The monthly test group's results and retention scores were included in the test group's averages because they were part of the test group, even though they dragged down the improvement.

If we hadn't tested monthly One on Ones, the results and retention improvement shown by the test group would have been even higher. We tested monthly O3s twice more, in similar tests of similar size, and in both cases, *monthly O3s reduced results and retention scores.* We stopped testing monthly O3s after those three tests, and not only don't recommend them, we are blunt in telling managers, "Whatever you do, don't do monthly O3s."

After many years of testing all the tools the way we did One on Ones, we crafted four specific tools to address the four critical behaviors:

Critical Behavior	Manager Tool
Get to Know Your People	One on Ones
Communicate About Performance	Feedback
Ask for More	Coaching
Push Work Down	Delegation

As we've said before, these tools aren't the only way to be an effective manager. You may have your own tools, your own way. If you're getting results, retaining your team, and your methods are

teachable and sustainable, well done. We suspect you know by now you're pretty rare as a manager.

But

- If you don't really feel like you know what you're doing
- If you don't have your own technique
- If your technique is your personality
- If you can't teach others your technique
- If you can't write down your methods
- If you're not certain you could replicate it in a different company/industry

here is Manager Tools' guarantee to you:

Use the Manager Tools as described here, and we guarantee that you will become an effective manager, one who gets results and retains his team.

4

Get to Know Your People—
One on Ones

THE MOST IMPORTANT BEHAVIOR a manager can engage in is getting to know her people. Manager Tools recommends you hold One on Ones (O3s) with each of your directs to get to know them.

We recommend O3s because we have never found any other behavioral tool that improves trust faster than our present form of them. Every time we compared Manager Tools O3s (MTO3s) against any other managerial behavior, MTO3s have won soundly. No matter how much you talk to your people, no matter how much you think you know them, no matter how many team meetings you have, or electronic surveys you conduct, we have never found a faster, more robust tool for building trust than MTO3s.

Many managers (including us, before we learned about the power of MTO3s) don't like this recommendation. Managers already have too much to do, and too many meetings, to be adding more meetings and more time on their calendar. But the trust you build with your directs more than makes up for the time you'll spend in your MTO3s. You'll be interrupted less, you won't have to check up on

as much, you'll see problems coming before they blow up, and you'll make changes proactively rather than reactively.

We've seen this ourselves and heard this from so many thousands of managers over the years, we have a standing guarantee: if you follow our guidance on how to do them, **you will get more time back in your calendar than you spend in your MTO3s.** Whether you have two directs or 15, once you have established a pattern of MTO3s, you will find yourself with more free time, more time to do your own work, and more time to plan your future initiatives and projects. We guarantee it or your money back.

It seems counterintuitive, but spending more time on your people actually saves you time. It's why Horstman's First Law is *It's All About People*. And that's from some experienced managers who are not naturally people persons.

Okay, so what ARE MTO3s? **They are scheduled, weekly, 30-minute meetings with each of your directs, where your direct goes first, and you take notes.**

- **Scheduled**
- **Weekly**
- **30-Minute Meeting**
- **With Each of Your Directs**
- **Where the Direct's Issues Are Primary**
- **Where the Manager Takes Notes**

Let's take each one of these components in turn, and discuss why we recommend them.

Scheduled

Scheduling O3s means setting up a recurring appointment with each of your directs, so that each of them is set to have their

O3 with you at the same time every week. (If you're thinking your calendar is too dynamic to allow this, rest easy; it's not what you think.—HSB)

Scheduling your O3s is actually more important than having them weekly. That's why it's first on the list. In fact, a manager who schedules her MTO3s but only does them every other week (all things being equal) will outperform a manager who does *not* schedule his MTO3s even if he does his weekly.

When we first taught O3s, we didn't know the primary value of scheduling. So, we didn't make it first on our list, and didn't control for it. What happened was that some managers would do weekly O3s without scheduling them, and some would schedule them. They all got performance increases, but with wide variation.

We learned at about that same time that some managers who *said* they were doing weekly O3s were actually doing them every other week, but they were also getting some improvement.

We wanted to compare the effectiveness of two groups of similar managers, testing scheduled versus unscheduled O3s. (We also tested a control group of roughly 100 managers who were not allowed to do O3s.)

Table 4.1 captures what our research showed. (We've repeated similar results three times.) If we compare two groups of roughly 100 managers who actually conduct MTO3s, the managers who schedule their MTO3s outperform (relative to results and retention) the unscheduled managers by significant margins (as much as three to four times).

TABLE 4.1   Scheduled Versus Unscheduled O3s

	Control	Scheduled	Unscheduled
Managers Tested	≈100	≈100	≈100
Results and Retention Improvement	≈0%	+8%	+2%

Why does this happen? Why is scheduling so important? We didn't know. The data in the table don't tell us—data rarely tell us the "why" of things.

But before we get to the "why" of the value of scheduling, we want to show you one other result of this testing (which was also repeated when we tested this twice more, in different organizations).

In Table 4.2, there's an extra line at the top of the chart, showing how many managers we had to include in our tests to end up with a test group of roughly 100 managers.

In order to find 100 managers who schedule their O3s and then do them, we had to test roughly 120. Basically, only about 80%–85% of the managers who said they would schedule and complete their O3s actually did them.

But the story was very different for those managers who agreed to not schedule them and still do them. While it only took us 120 "scheduled" managers to end up with a test bed of 100, we had to test more than 500 "unscheduled" managers to end up with a test bed of roughly 100.

The lesson here is clear: **if you don't schedule your O3s, the data suggest you're only about 20% likely to do them.** This ought to ring true with most modern managers' busy schedules. If it's not on your calendar, it's unlikely to get done.

But again, even if you DO your O3s, not having scheduled them, you get nowhere near the improvement you would if you were to schedule them and stick to your schedule.

TABLE 4.2   Scheduled Versus Unscheduled O3s with Managers Surveyed

	Control	Scheduled	Unscheduled
Managers Surveyed	≈100	119	520
Managers Tested	≈100	≈100	≈100
Results and Retention Improvement	≈0%	+8%	+2%

Now, what about the "why"? Why is scheduling so important? Directs whose managers have started O3s told us two key things when we interviewed them:

1. **"My boss is saying I'm important."** Your directs struggle to get time with you, much like you struggle to get time with your own boss. The reason you give your directs is often because you're in meetings all day, which, while regrettable, is true. They get that your calendar matters, but to them it's an impediment to them getting their questions answered, their problems solved, their ideas heard. But when you tell them they're going to have time on your calendar every week, no matter what, *you elevate them to the level of the rest of your calendar, making them important as well.*

2. **"I have time to prepare."** Whether we managers realize it or not, we set the agenda in virtually all of our conversations with our directs. When we stop by their desks during the day or when we visit with them after a Zoom call, there may be some chit chat, and then we cover whatever we intended to cover. While that may feel like a time where you would be happy to hear from them about concerns or questions, that's not what directs tell us about those interactions.

Even if you make an impromptu discussion about them—"How's it going? Anything for me?"—directs tell us they never know when that is coming. They don't know how much time they have. They don't know how much you have to cover. And as busy as you are, you're probably comfortable leaving pretty quickly. Directs tell us they just don't see impromptu moments as good times to bring up their own agenda.

And by the way, speaking of "stopping by," or pinging someone for a brief Zoom check in, what do your directs almost always say when you ask, "Do you have a minute?" They say yes. We can assure

you—because they've told us—they don't say yes because you're awesome. They say yes because *you're the boss*. They're not sitting around waiting for you, thinking, "Oh, I hope he stops by, I hope he stops by!"

Look, we're not saying you're not awesome. We're just reminding you that impromptu conversations, in the minds of your directs, are mostly about your agenda, not theirs. And when it's impromptu, you can't expect your directs to be keeping a list of items they want to run by you or ideas they want to brief you on.

Directs all over the world DO tell us that having scheduled time on your calendar allows them to prepare for that discussion.

What about the dynamism of your schedule? A lot of managers resist our guidance on scheduling their O3s. The first pushback we get is, "Well, that's great, but I can't keep to a schedule—my schedule is always changing." You're right, it is, and we get it. Things change every day.

But here's what our research has shown: *moving an already scheduled O3 to a different time because of a conflict has no statistically significant effect on the manager's results and retention improvements.* Managers who schedule and then move their O3s achieve similar improvements in results and retention as managers whose schedules are more fixed and rarely move their O3s.

Perhaps more importantly, *directs tell us they don't care if you move their meeting.* They understand about schedules. They understand that schedules get stepped on. But they also say that if you use the "my schedule is too fluid" reason to not schedule them, it means the same to them (whether you mean it or not) as, "I'm not going to have these."

You might also be thinking, "I'm too busy." This is a rational response to another meeting in your already busy day, but part of the reason your schedule is so full is because you're not spending enough time communicating with your directs. You're using email too much. And email isn't a good medium for a briefing or a Q&A discussion.

All that said, we know you're busy. Shoe-horning 5 hours of meetings (assuming you have 10 directs) into your schedule this week or next is nearly impossible. You'd probably be right when you said, "It can't be done."

Fair enough. But let's try something. First, look at your calendar for this week. No doubt you're busy with meetings. Now, look at your calendar, but not for this week, or next week, or even the next week. Look at your calendar 3, 4, or 5 weeks from now.

Seriously: go look. Compare this week's busy-ness to your calendar 4 weeks from now. It's mostly empty, isn't it? Your calendar is "always full" because you're generally only looking at the active week, and maybe next week. That's how calendars work: they fill up 1–2 weeks in advance. You're "always busy" because your daily (and current week) calendar is nearly always full.

You don't have time now—understood. But the solution is easy. *Don't start doing your MTO3s until 3–4 weeks from when you decide to start.* Announce them now—we'll cover this in detail in the next chapter—when you can easily fit them into a mostly open calendar.

And finally, if you talk to managers who use MTO3s, they'll tell you they *will never go back to not having them. They're too valuable.*

Weekly

The best frequency to conduct your O3s is weekly. The simplest reason for this is that you probably think about your work life in weekly increments. You think about deadlines that are coming up *this week*. You tend to put off things that are due next week, even if they will take you several hours of work. You probably know what your schedule is this week, and maybe a bit of next week. But the week after next, you have little sense of what your week will be like, in most cases.

Your directs tend to work the same way, for the most part. They think about their week when they're thinking about the work they

need to do. Stuff that's happening next week isn't as important as this week's stuff. Two weeks from now is science fiction fantasy land.

Knowing this, what would it say to them if you had O3s every other week? That they're less important than what you're working on now. (We've asked; that's what they told us. Classic quote: "Meeting with my boss every other week, when everything else runs weekly, feels like he's putting me on the back burner.")

We won't fall on our swords against biweekly O3s. If your results are like our data, you'll get some improvement in results and retention: roughly 40% of what you'd get if you did them weekly. Why would you save only 50% of the time by going biweekly to lose 60% of the value? That doesn't make sense.

You could decide to do an hour every other week, thereby spending "the same amount of time in total." But that doesn't work nearly as well, generally. Our data showed that managers who do this end up with a compliance rate that is even less than that of managers who decide to have hourly O3s every week, and that compliance rate isn't great.

Directs tell us over and over—all over the world—that they prefer weekly O3s. It matches the rhythm of their work. They say that biweekly O3s end up being too general and less relevant.

There's another benefit to weekly O3s that you lose if you go to biweekly: *a significant reduction in interruptions*. If you're not doing O3s now, and you're like a lot of managers, you get interrupted frequently by your directs. They "have a quick question" or "just need a minute." And that minute often turns out to be 10.

Those interruptions will be notably decreased when you start meeting on a weekly scheduled basis with your directs in an O3. (This is part of the reason for our guarantee regarding how much time you'll get back in your calendar.) Directs we've surveyed in every test commented how they started waiting until their O3s to bring up issues or questions or problems. If they have a problem Tuesday, and their O3 is Thursday morning, they can probably wait

to bring it up then. (The reason many interruptions seem urgent to you is that the directs waited as long as they could.)

But if you have your O3s every other week, you lose this benefit. Directs can't wait until next Thursday. In our experience in our O3s, at least half of them, and perhaps as many as three quarters, start with one of our directs saying, "My list is (long or short) this week." That tells us they're keeping a running list. If we weren't having regular weekly O3s, those would all be interruptions or more email to get through.

One more problem with biweekly O3s: if you miss one, you're now having monthly O3s. Not good, as we mentioned earlier.

Mike Auzenne, our Manager Tools cofounder, tried moving from weekly to every other week MTO3s once when he was an executive. Mike was working at MCI when it was acquired by WorldCom and went through bankruptcy. He had 10 directs at the time and was doing O3s for 30 minutes every week. He was spending five hours a week in O3s. Then he started getting heavily involved in the bankruptcy preparation and proceedings.

He needed time in his schedule, so he started having O3s biweekly to get five hours back. He felt like relationships were already established, and so they could tolerate going to every other week. Within a couple of weeks, however, his plan completely fell apart.

Not only did he not get five hours back, he ended up spending more time dealing with more issues because of the lessened communication. When he had his O3s scheduled weekly, people weren't interrupting him all the time. Directs weren't always trying to get his attention. All the time he had gotten back, all the efficiencies, all the deep relationship building that helped—the "grease" that made everything work smoothly—just evaporated. He went quickly back to weekly MTO3s.

A caveat: if you have more than 10 directs, it's okay to start with biweekly O3s. Trying to find, say, 8 hours (16 half hours for

16 directs) in your week may be a bridge too far. Spend 8–12 weeks starting with MTO3s every other week. This allows your schedule to absorb the 4 hours a week. Then, move to weekly MTO3s. (This habit of stressing your calendar will prepare you well for executive life, if you aspire to it.)

Full disclosure: if you're reading all this and your team is much bigger than that—say 20 or 25 directs—our solutions start to weaken in terms of effectiveness. We've had some managers with as many as 30 directs included in some of our research, but we've never broken out data on teams any bigger than 15.

Anecdotally, managers who have as many as 30 directs do get better results and retention when they do O3s even biweekly or triweekly. Those results are not nearly as significant as managers with more "normal" spans of control.

We would argue that you have an organizational structure problem, not a managerial behavior problem. And we know that's not your fault. If you want some help thinking about team size (sorry, there's no ideal), we have some recommendations. There's a Cast for That.™

Finally, regarding frequency, we urge you NOT to do monthly O3s. *We have never seen an outcome where monthly O3s improved performance.* In every instance where we tested monthly frequency, performance improvements *declined*. We finally stopped testing monthly frequency because we felt it was unethical to ask managers to do or test something that we knew would decrease performance.

You might ask why, if meeting "regularly" is a good thing, monthly doesn't seem to work. Think of it this way: suppose someone told you they wanted to build a relationship with you, and then told you, *we should be able to do it in 30 minutes, once a month.* That wouldn't pass your sniff test. It doesn't make any sense to have a goal for a meeting (trusting relationships) the frequency of which (monthly) obviates the goal.

30 Minutes

Our data show that 30 minutes is the sweet spot for scheduling time for O3s. There's no benefit for going longer, and going longer generally causes a reduction in how many O3s actually occur. Managers who schedule O3s longer than 30 minutes mean well, but cancel them more frequently, so much so that directs take note of it.

You just don't need more than 30 minutes—if done weekly—to get value out of your O3s. It might seem you do, but our data say there's not the value you might expect.

Twice when we have tested 45-minute O3s, and even hour-long O3s, we got no more improvement in results and retention than we did with 30-minute meetings. On the other hand, compliance dropped: the likelihood of the meeting being canceled, or significantly shortened, increased notably.

In case you're wondering, we've also tested shorter O3s. Results similarly declined. There were extensive anecdotal comments around "too little time." Both managers and directs commented that when a 20-minute O3 started late, it was of limited value.

Regarding "compliance" (stated as a percentage, the number of O3s that you conduct versus how many were scheduled): our data show that 85% compliance appears to be the demarcation between getting the results you want and something less. Managers who conduct at least 85% of their O3s over a period of months achieve much of the results and retention improvement that having 100% of your O3s would get.

Once you fall below 85%, though, results and retention improvements are less likely. And if you ever fall below 50%, it's better to just stop, in terms of the benefit (more like cost) and the time you're spending.

We've also learned studying meeting behavior that it's better to have a jam-packed meeting of 30 minutes than to have a relaxed

meeting that is scheduled for an hour but for which you only have 40–45 minutes' worth of content. If you overschedule a meeting, attendees gradually begin to underprepare for them, and lose interest. Shorter, more compact, busier 30-minute meetings will cause you and directs to use it fully and never miss it.

And who wants another hour-long meeting that starts late, or finishes late, which causes you to be late to your next back-to-back-to-back-hour-long meeting march?

We support and recommend one exception because we have seen it work well. If you're a senior executive, you can schedule an hour. One of our chief executive officer (CEO) clients (and yes CEO's have a role managing their directs, and need O3s too) told us once, "I need an hour for my One on Ones, and they're still completely full. No way I could do 30 minutes. I just can't finish everything we need to discuss every week with my directs. They all manage 100–300 million USD lines of business for the firm." So he scheduled an hour.

With Each of Your Directs

If you're going to do O3s, you've got to do them with ALL of your directs. This seems obvious, but every once in a while in our work with client managers we hear stories. "Well, I only do them with my top two people." "I do them weekly with one guy, and biweekly for everyone else."

This kind of segregation is anathema to creating the feeling of a team among your directs. Basically, it tells some of your directs, "You're less important than she is." While there may be a case to be made for that (one of your directs has a special role), that's usually not the way directs see it.

If you do have a special case for one or two directs, there's nothing wrong with spending more time with them than with other team members. *Just do it at a time other than your O3*. Schedule a

special 1-hour meeting with those folks to discuss projects or issues or whatever makes their role unique.

O3s are not about differentiating among directs, but rather making time for *each* direct, to develop your relationship with them. Like it or not, your relationship with your directs is a force multiplier. The more you know about everybody—not just your top performers—the more they will trust you, and the better you will be at getting the most out of each of them.

Also, don't do O3s with anyone other than your direct reports. *This means you don't do O3s with people who report to your directs.* We hear stories all the time of managers who are doing biweekly O3s so they "can meet with all 20 of my directs." When we probe, we discover that they really only have four direct reports, and the other 16 folks report to their directs. Those other 16 people are certainly part of their organization and valuable. . .*but they are not directs*. A direct is someone who reports *directly* to you.

When we share this, some managers respond that they want to "stay in touch with the folks I used to manage before I got this latest promotion."

Doing O3s with your "skips" is a very bad idea. (You probably know this, but just in case: "skips" is a large organization term for someone who reports to one of your directs. We call folks "directs" who report *directly* to us, and we call folks "skips" if we have to *skip* a level in the org chart to get to them.)

How DO you "stay in touch" with the rest of your organization who are "below" your directs? First, *insist on your subordinate managers doing O3s with their directs*. Your direct subordinate managers are responsible for their relationships with their directs. The way you maintain your relationship with your skips (and even levels below that, if that applies to you) is by keeping a strong relationship with your directs *and relying on them to maintain relationships with theirs*.

What this means is you won't be able to have the same relationship with people two or more levels down from you. *You won't*

because you're not supposed to. Efforts to do so are a waste of your most precious resource as a manager: your time. Build an organization of effective managers under you. This is how organizations stay healthy and effective as they grow. There's a Cast for That.™

Where the Direct's Issues Are Primary

So now you've got your O3s scheduled—again, more on the details of how shortly—and they're weekly for 30 minutes, with each of your directs. If you're like most managers we train, the question on your mind is: What the heck are we going to talk about?

Manager Tools O3s are business meetings. Yes, they're about building relationships, but the primary purpose of those trusting relationships you're building is results. Since they're a business meeting, they have an agenda. O3s are not just chances to "sit around and talk" or "get to know one another informally" or "just do a quick catch-up."

Managers who try those sorts of unstructured conversations discover pretty quickly that that kind of meeting doesn't make sense in a modern workplace. Without some basic structure to your O3s, you might as well cancel them and go back to chatting your team up in the hallway or the breakroom.

The agenda is simple: first, 10 minutes for your direct, then 10 minutes for you, then 10 minutes to talk about the future. The most important concept in the agenda is "first": the key to the agenda is letting your directs go first. We shared the story before of our very first effort with agendas, letting managers go first: disastrous. If you go first, no matter how important the stuff you want to talk about is, our data show you will not get the value out of MTO3s we've discussed here.

The directs go first, and talk about. . .whatever they want to talk about. There is no agenda past the three 10-minute segments. In the vast majority of the tens of thousands of O3s we've recorded, or

gathered data about, the manager did not know with certainty what the direct was going to want to discuss.

Now, the way the MTO3 will actually "start" is by you making a statement or asking a question. We tried, years ago, to tell managers to say nothing, and just let the direct start talking, but it was awkward, according to both the managers and directs.

So, we recommend you start each MTO3, every time, with every direct, no matter what, with the same first question. It eliminates the need to be creative, it increases the brainpower you put into listening to the answer rather than the question, and it reduces one of the moving parts of every one of our O3s.

Ask the same question every time. Memorize it, and tell your directs, "This is the question/statement I'm going to start every O3 with. I don't really need an answer to it—it's just a way to turn the podium over to you." You don't need to try hard to make EVERY O3 unique. The value of O3s isn't realized because of any single instance of an O3. What's important is the constancy of them. If you memorize it, you don't have to think about it. If your directs know it's coming every week, they know what to expect, and they'll see it as you showing respect for their time on the agenda.

Examples are: How's it going? How are you? How are things? Your agenda. . . What have you been up to? Whaddaya got?

Whatever you do, don't ask a question you expect a real or detailed answer to. A good example of this is a manager thinking, "This is a relationship meeting. Let's keep it casual, a little bit of chit-chat to start. . . ." But now, for the first 2 minutes of the O3, the direct is answering your question. You've just set the agenda, and your direct is talking about what you want to talk about. And 20% of their agenda time is taken up not by issues of interest to them.

This is a 30-minute meeting. You don't have time for chit-chat. That's why it's not on the agenda.

What might your directs want to talk about? On one level, who knows? That's part of the value of the meeting. If we're going to

build a relationship with someone whom we're going to trust to do high-quality work without micromanaging, we're going to have to respect that they're different than us. They have different joys and pains, different issues and successes at home, different ways of thinking about their work than we do. If you never give those differences the opportunity to be voiced, you're not really trying to create a relationship.

We sometimes joke and call this portion of the meeting "Puppies and Rainbows," because if your direct wants to talk about puppies or rainbows—neither of which hold the kind of fascination for you that so many others feel for them—we recommend you listen. Ask questions. Take notes. If it's important to your team member, it's important to you. That's how you build relationships.

(Before you throw away the idea of MTO3s because of the possibility of puppies and rainbows, stand by for a moment. We'll tell you what actually happens in a moment. This was just an outlier of an example.—HSB)

So, don't ask for their list of topics in advance of your MTO3. We know you don't want to be unprepared for whatever they're going to bring up, but now your directs are spending time coming up with their agendas each week to satisfy you. Further, if they have a tough topic they want to discuss, and you see it on the agenda and want to address it immediately, you're doing it on your time, and very likely they won't be prepared when you ask to talk about it before the O3.

Also, don't send a list of topics to a direct that you're going to talk about. In theory this makes good sense: they get to prepare, and the meeting will be more efficient. But what actually happens in far too many cases is that your team member will then spend time in their portion of the agenda addressing your list. It has been our experience that managers sharing a list of topics in advance steps on the direct's agenda, reducing the direct's satisfaction with the meeting.

All that said, though, we have data about what your directs want to talk about. Seventy-four percent of directs say that what they want to spend most of their time talking about in their O3s with their boss is. . .work.

And why not? It's the primary link between you and your directs. Do you sit around thinking that if your boss started doing O3s with you, you'd use that time to have rambling conversations about nothing important? Of course not.

A typical direct's portion of an MTO3 includes updates about ongoing work, questions about problems they're having, project status reports, requests for assistance with budgets or communications, requests for guidance about next steps or approaching a problem, verification of rumors they've heard, clarification of what you want or how you want something done, notifications of stuff they've finished, follow-up on pending actions, reminders of stuff they need from you, etc., etc.

If your O3s go like this, and you become worried that they're "too much like status updates," stop worrying. What you're getting from your directs is normal for many directs. Not all directs: some will share more personal information than others. Some will lead with it (but only a small minority and only occasionally). But mostly, it's going to be about work.

But from your direct's perspective, the reason it's a valuable "work" discussion is because it gets to be about "their" work during their portion of the agenda. Not what they do for your work and your agenda (though clearly they're inseparable, for the most part). Their work.

So, the answer to the question, "Are O3s personal or work related?" is "Yes." O3s create a forum for both. Trust your directs to choose to talk about what's important to them.

During your 10 minutes, you, too, get to talk about whatever you want. While 74% of directs say that what they most want to talk about is work, 89% of managers want to talk about work. And that's probably no surprise to you.

So, you're likely going to ask for updates on ongoing work, you will assign new work, ask about problems with existing work, plan for upcoming work, share ideas for potential new. . . .work. That focus on work makes you just like the vast majority of managers.

Can you, too, talk about personal stuff? Yes. You can mention family if you like. But you don't have to. You can share something about your weekend, if you like. You can talk about volunteer work you're doing, television or movies you've recently seen, parties you went to, chores you did, or the weather you're experiencing. Those would be normal conversational topics in any normal relationship, so they're all okay.

But you'll probably talk mostly about work, and that's just fine.

If you want more guidance about work and personal topics in O3s, There's a Cast for That.™

There is one exception to the "dealer's choice" approach to topics for O3s. As a general rule, if there's any information that you need to get out to your entire team, as opposed to just one or two directs, we recommend it go out in what we would call a "waterfall meeting," and not your O3s.

This waterfall meeting is likely to be your weekly staff meeting (There's a Cast for That™) where you're only having to say it once, to all of your directs at the same time rather than seven times, to each of your seven directs, one at a time.

The last 10 minutes of your O3s are there to give you an opportunity, periodically, to talk about the future. You probably will only have time to do so once every 20 sessions because 30 minutes probably isn't long enough to cover everything you and your directs want to. And two or three big picture/future plans discussions a year with your directs is probably about right.

The 10/10/10 agenda is a template and a reminder not to forget about the future, not a requirement that you discuss the big picture/future every week.

An agenda that would be more representative of how O3s actu-ally occur would be 15/15. Direct first, then you. But when we first started teaching O3s, we got some interesting feedback. Many man-agers shared two common themes in their comments: (1) Some-times we run short, what should I do? And (2) I'm way more down in the weeds than I used to be, which is great, but I'd love to have some big-picture discussions every once in a while.

First, the answer to the question what should you do if you run short in any meeting is easy: when you're done, you're done. If an O3's content runs out, you're done. End the MTO3, and be thank-ful for the few extra minutes you get back.

But because we heard about the lack of big picture discussions and running short occasionally, we simply combined the two prob-lems into a solution. The last 10 minutes on the agenda is a reminder to cover the future/big picture when you think the timing is reason-able and you run short. If you don't run short, don't cover the future. If you run short two weeks in a row, no need to cover the future all over again (unless there are worthy issues to discuss) again so soon.

At this point you may be wondering about how most O3s go relative to the agenda. A recent survey of MTO3 behavior showed that the average direct talks for 21 minutes. It would follow that we could then say managers get the final 9 minutes, but that's not exactly true because managers report that they often run over the scheduled end of the meeting, covering their list of items.

What should you do, though, about directs who talk too little? Wouldn't that be awkward?

What's interesting about that is the assumption that directs talk-ing too little will be your biggest problem. Just the opposite is true: directs are far more likely to talk too long than too short. We sur-veyed several hundred managers about the loquacity of their directs, and they told us that roughly 65% of their directs talk "about the right amount," 30% "talk too much," and only 5% "talk too little."

The likely "problem" you'll face is directs who talk way too much, not those that clam up. But let's walk through how to handle both situations.

If a direct talks too much, start by realizing you have an embarrassment of riches. Even when they take the full 30 minutes each week for perhaps several weeks, don't overreact. Think of changing their behavior as a process, to unfold slowly.

Don't practice what we call "agenda fascism" (There's a Cast for That™). Agenda fascism means you've just told your directs that you want to spend time with them and get to know them, you tell them this meeting is for them, and you share that the agenda is 10/10/10. And then, exactly 10 minutes into the first meeting, you say, "OK, time's up. I have to cut you off."

Unfortunately, that's probably not very conducive to building a relationship with your directs. Some of you might be thinking, "Well, but if that's the agenda, we should stick to it, right?"

Well, no. If that's the case, why don't all your meetings have agendas and start on time, and end on time? The agenda of a meeting always serves the purpose of the meeting, not the other way around. The agenda is there to facilitate the purpose. If the agenda is getting in the way of the purpose, you allow the agenda to be flexible to get to the purpose.

In the beginning, let your team member continue to talk. Don't worry about your list, your agenda. You can always seek your direct out later with your topics.

Maybe they're still talking at 15 minutes, and 20, and 25, and 30 minutes. Let them talk. If, during every O3 for their first month of O3s, they take the full 30 minutes, let them.

After 2 months, you can say, "Okay, I'm going to start giving you time hacks at 20 minutes. You've been taking the full 30 minutes, and that was fine as we were starting up. But I have my own stuff to cover." For the next month you give them time hacks at 20 minutes. Not a hard stop, just a reminder: "Hey, it's been 20 minutes."

After a month of giving them a verbal yield sign at 20 minutes, you can start giving them a hard stop at 20 minutes. "Hey, listen, for the last month I've been reminding you of when we've gotten to 20 minutes. But now that reminder that's been a yield sign is going to become a stop sign. I really want to be able to get through my items as well."

Maybe the first time you cut them off will be a little awkward. After that, they'll be fine. We've tested this with hundreds of managers. It worked great.

Now we come to the rarer and more difficult situation: the uncommunicative direct. This team member comes to your first O3 and basically says nothing. When you ask them what's going on, they say, "Nothing." When you ask them how they're doing, they say, "Fine."

What to do? Our first guidance is give them time. Remember that every direct brings to their relationship with you all their previous relationships with their previous bosses. If your team member had a boss (or two) who was unethical, or abusive, don't be surprised if your direct answers your request for dialog and a relationship with relative silence. Don't punish them for not opening up. Don't be rude or demanding. Ask for input, and if they have none, move on to your portion of the O3. You cover your 10-, 15-, 20-minutes worth of stuff, and maybe something on the future, and you're done. Not great, but useful for you.

If the pattern continues, we recommend you start asking three times at the start of each O3. Like this:

Manager: What's on your mind?
Direct: *Nothing.*
M: Well, okay. Understand, this is YOUR O3, and this is your portion of it. This is your 15 minutes. It's for brainstorming, asking for help, questions, discussions, sharing, whatever.

D: *I'm good.*

M: Okay. Just want to make sure you don't have anything. I have some stuff, but you get to go first. Final answer?

D: *Nope.*

You've tried three times—any more will just be annoying. So now you move on to your agenda items. Once you start realizing (2 or 3 weeks of silence?) that there's a problem, we recommend you start asking more questions about their work status, progress, issues, concerns, and needs.

It might sound like:

M: Okay, then. My turn. Hey, I noticed in the staff meeting that you were having some challenges on Project A. There was a deliverable you were going to miss. Tell me more about that. (This is done with a pleasant tone, smiling, making eye contact. Not trying to unearth a failure, just trying to find out if help could be offered.)

D: I'm waiting on Keith. I can't do my status without the status he owes me.

M: Great. When are you going to get it?

D: I don't know. I haven't gotten it yet.

M: What's your plan?

D: I don't know.

M: Have you followed up at all?

D: Yes.

M: How?

D: I sent another email.

M: Okay, but I've had a lot better experience getting stuff from Keith with a phone call. That's especially true since your emails apparently aren't working."

That's how you try hard to make your O3 with a non-communicative direct more useful.

The fact is, though, that this level of resistance is rare. We've never experienced it, nor have most of our friends and colleagues. But it does happen. Give it time, and your direct will gradually open up, over time. If they don't, There's a Cast for That.

The Manager Takes Notes

When we teach O3s at our public conferences and at client sites, we often say: **If you're not taking notes, it's not a Manager Tools One on One.**

One of the more surprising results of our studies of effectiveness of O3s was what we learned about note-taking. We had assumed that because the meeting was about "relationships," there wasn't a need to take notes. We'd just . . . talk. And note taking would be detrimental to our eye contact in our discussion.

We were completely wrong. Directs have told us in every study we've ever done that their manager taking notes actually *elevates* the conversation, making it more important.

Managers who just chatted, but didn't take notes about possible follow-up, were deemed to be less engaged, less interested, and less likely to take action on topics that came up. There was a theme—in O3s without note-taking—that the manager didn't care about what was being said from a professional perspective.

The lack of note taking added to the chance that managers and directs talked less about work. While in some cases that was appreciated, in the majority there was a general dislike. It made the O3 feel like a personal meeting—as *opposed to* a business meeting. The fact is, O3s are both, not one or the other. Trust is both personal and professional.

The problem with an O3 without notes isn't the lack of notes. It's the lack of interest and accountability that no note-taking implies.

Work *will* get done in your O3s. What other work meeting do you go to where you don't take a notebook and a pen? In our other award-winning podcast, *Career Tools*, we have a series called First Job Fundamentals, and one of the casts is titled, *A Notebook and a Pen* (There's a Cast for That).™

The way we recommend note taking is pretty easy. We recommend you get either one larger notebook with tabs separating the notes for each direct or, if you prefer, a number of skinny notebooks, one for each direct.

We recommend you use a document that is easily seen to be an O3 form when you take notes. For most people, a little bit of structure will improve their recall. We have our standard form, and many user-submitted forms which we have tested, on our website, that you can download for free. They're in .doc format, so you can modify them to fit your style and tendencies. Make multiple copies of your "One on One Form" (O3F) to make your notebook(s) ready for your first weeks of O3s.

What you *don't* want to take notes in is what we'll call your normal "go to meeting" notebook. That's the notebook you take with you to all of your other meetings, that you refer to when trying to remember who said what when. If you use that one, all of your O3 notes will be scattered among all your other meeting notes, making prep for your "next" O3 with a given direct nearly impossible. You won't be able to find what you agreed to, what the issues were, what feedback you gave or forgot to give without tearing through tons of other pages.

There are some specific areas we recommend you pay special attention to when you take notes in each O3.

We recommend that you have some distinctive way to capture deliverables. When we say distinctive, we mean that you can immediately see it quickly, every time, at first glance at any O3 form on your desk. It might be a circle, or an underline. Something noticeable at a glance.

O3 forms are not strategy documents. For every manager whose O3s we're familiar with, O3s tend to be very down in the weeds, very detailed, very much about what's happening this week. Because they're that way, it would be hard to have such a meeting and not have it talk about the tasks and responsibilities that go with day-to-day work stuff.

And because O3s are also about relationships, trust is especially important. That means that we have to be sure to do what we say we're going to do. Thus, remembering what we've committed to do takes on special meaning.

So, circle what you promise to do, underline what you promise to do, put asterisks on what you promise to do. But be able to see your deliverables—your promises—at a glance.

We recommend that you capture communications or responsibilities in a different way. We apply the same distinctiveness principle to any notes that require us to engage in any form of communication with anyone. These could probably be classified as deliverables as well, but we and others have found that making the distinction is helpful. Maybe it's a rectangle or a double underline.

We recommend you capture feedback (which we'll talk about later), but not in detail or perfectly. You want to keep track because you're obligated to keep track of your directs' performance. In some severe cases, you'll want to have notes of your performance communications with someone who is at risk of discipline or dismissal, though this is rare.

Despite what most managers know or will tell you, the standard for what constitutes "documentation" is incredibly low. You don't need great details either for memory or for official record keeping when it comes to feedback. You don't need long MFRs (memorandums for record) that summarize your legal case. You need the raw data that will allow HR and its lawyers to construct a history of you communicating frequently with your directs about their performance. The key to this documentation isn't form or formality or

length. It is whether or not it is "contemporaneous": documented roughly at the same time as the incident or communication.

This is all the formality that HR/legal needs. You don't need to meet some legal standard, or write a memo, or write out exactly what you said, or what they responded with. Note taking is a much sturdier art form than that. It's unlikely you'll need raw recall of some obscure note 18 months later.

For instance:

F+, CT perf. Improved (This manager gave positive feedback for the improvement in Career Tools podcast listening stats.)

F+ 1MM sales. (This manager gave positive feedback for achieving a goal of 1 million USD in sales by the end of the first quarter.)

These are quite sufficient.

Finally, we recommend you capture coaching notes on the back of last week's O3 form. This is not so much a *how* to take notes recommendation but a *where* to take notes idea. One of our listeners recommended it, and we find it an excellent recommendation.

Rather than mixing your coaching notes in with the rest of your O3 notes, write them on the back of the previous O3 form. If you use a normal notebook setup, with your weekly notes proceeding from front to back in chronological order, then when you open the notebook or folder, the blank back of last week's form lays open to your eye to the left of this week's form.

Pushback on Note Taking

There are two types of pushback on note taking: managers who prefer to take notes on their laptop and directs who are worried that the manager's notes are a form of "documentation."

We don't recommend you take notes on your laptop, and neither does anyone else. Just do a quick internet search of the effectiveness of handwritten versus typed notes, and you'll agree with us. Remember as you do so that your brain stores pictures, not text. The ability to search text on your laptop/system isn't used as often as most folks who type notes plan to . . . and it is much harder to remember what you typed versus what you wrote by hand.

And with the camera in your phone, you can take a picture of your handwritten notes and now they're in your system.

That said, we love using technology to make our lives simpler too. If you're drawn to that, the best solutions we've seen are using Microsoft One Note on a tablet computer, or an Apple IPad with an Apple Pencil. And you don't have to carry around a notebook (at least for O3s).

"Documentation"

What directs mean when they ask about documentation is that they fear that when their manager starts writing things down, the manager is thinking that things could become bad enough that he will justify some sort of discipline or worse with formal notes/history. But that's not what an effective manager is doing, or trying to do, when she takes notes.

Documentation is an obligation, not something to be feared. Every note you take, every email you send, every spreadsheet you create are all documentation of something.

Documentation has gotten a bad name, just like annual reviews have, for stupid reasons. Annual/performance reviews are good examples of how managers have lost the argument about what even management *is* or what managers *do*. Annual reviews exist to allow your organization to do succession planning. They are intended to be forward-looking exercises and documents.

But because managers don't do well giving feedback, organizations (and managers) have allowed them to be co-opted into an annual feedback exercise. This is, of course, ludicrous because feedback must be done at the time of the behavior, not at the end of the year.

So, if one of your directs asks, "Are you documenting this?" We recommend you say:

> Yes. But not because you're in trouble in any way. "Documenting" isn't a bad word. I don't "start documenting" when something becomes a problem. I take notes about almost everything I'm doing. If you're my top performer, I take notes about your successes. I take notes to help me remember, to allow me to refer, and to be accurate. All professionals take notes all the time. We all take notes in all of the meetings we attend. This is just another meeting. The combination of my notes, my emails, my work products are all forms of documentation.

Where to Conduct O3s

First, don't do an O3 in public. The MTO3 you're having with one of your directs is for you and that one direct. Every one of your O3s is going to be different depending upon the individuals. That's the whole point of O3s: getting to know the individuals who work for you. You couldn't do them in public. In other words, you couldn't conduct an O3 in the middle of a meeting with other people there, who could hear you having your MTO3.

We're not suggesting there that we're going for secrecy. Public and private exist on a spectrum. There are very few things, professionally, that are done in complete privacy. Privacy implies you've got to have an office. Our guiding principle is you can't do an MTO3 in public, but you don't have to be completely private.

You could have a completely appropriate, totally professional, neither "public" nor "private" MTO3 in the middle of your cafeteria at 10 in the morning. There's always a steady stream of people coming down to get coffee. You could be sitting 15 feet from the center aisle, across the table from one another or sitting down next to one another, and have a meeting that is in a public space, but it's not a public meeting, in that everyone would know that you're meeting with one person, and they're not invited to come sit down.

We don't recommend that you search for privacy. If you have an office, that's the perfect spot to do it. We don't recommend you avoid your office simply because it's your office. You don't have to close the door, either. Some people do and that's fine, and you can leave the door open and that's fine as well.

Please, don't go to the direct's office. Don't go from your office to their cube because one person going to six or seven or 10 different places doesn't make any sense. It's much smarter to have six or seven or 10 people come to one place and frankly it makes it much easier on you. You have multiple meetings like this; they only have one. The logistics of getting out of your desk, out of your office and going finding your directs just gets in the way and just puts another barrier between you and the O3.

If you have a cubicle, it's probably a completely reasonable space in which to conduct an O3. When we're thinking cubes, we're thinking a three-sided workspace where you have a desk and usually your computer is in the corner of the desk.

Here's our rule about your cube: if you can measure your cube and it's six feet wide or wider, you can do an O3 in that cube. Have your direct wheel a chair over, have them set it right down next to you, scoot over a little bit, lower your voice, and have a quiet conversation.

You might be reading that and thinking, "Well, that's not ideal." And you're right. But we recommend it because it's a reasonable solution based on the situation many managers face. Don't make

the perfect the enemy of the good. Directs *do not* need total privacy behind closed doors to develop a great professional relationship with you.

If you're having a quiet conversation, there's usually enough ambient noise in most work-places that a private conversation is masked by the noise, by keyboard sounds, and people moving around, and printers, and fax machines and the hum of air conditioning and so on.

You can have O3s for one, two, three, four, five months in your cube and gradually build up enough trust and relationship strength that if a direct does want privacy, for a sensitive conversation, they'll ask for greater privacy.

Can I Do O3s over the Phone?

You can absolutely get great value from doing O3s over the phone. If you and your direct are not collocated, or one of you is traveling, phone O3s work very well. Our data show you get roughly 80% of the value from a phone O3 that you do from a face-to-face O3. The reason for the decline isn't the O3; it's the distance.

At Manager Tools, many of our managers are presenters. They travel extensively. When we're traveling, we still do our MTO3s. Ideally, we do a Zoom call, but phone works fine when you're on the road. Here's some basic guidance:

Do MTO3s face to face whenever possible.

Do Zoom MTO3s when you can't be face to face but can do a Zoom call. We've measured webcam MTO3s as well. You get about 90% of the value of a face-to-face MTO3 with Zoom.

Do phone O3s when you can't do Zoom or face to face.

The basics still apply. We've touched on the tools we're going to use for this O3 . . . but again, let's remember our purpose. Webcams and phones are tools, but the purpose is relationships.

- Primary focus on the team member
- Regularly scheduled
- Never missed
- 30 minutes—10/10/10
- Take notes

The Most Common Forms of O3 Pushback

If an initiative is important to you, it's worth thinking through the possible rejoinders and being prepared to address them. Don't be surprised if your directs don't immediately love the idea of MTO3s. Just because you think what you're going to try is a good idea doesn't mean your directs will go along with it right away.

Quite the contrary: when you change how you manage, the fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD) about the change are always part of the response. Don't assume it's just you—it happens to all of us.

The most common forms of pushback against O3s are the following three:

- It's micromanaging.
- I don't have time.
- We talk all the time (which we've covered previously).

"It's Micromanaging."

Some directs think O3s are "micromanaging." Before we tell you how to answer this red herring, do keep in mind a likely truth about your own situation: Would you deny YOUR boss the right to see you for 30 minutes once a week? Would you turn down his request for a meeting? Would you just not go?

Think about it. Your boss says he has a new way of doing budgeting, better and faster. Are you going to tell him no? She says, we're changing expense reporting. We will have to learn a new way, but it

will be worth it. Are you going to go over her head? Your company has a new budget process, new annual review, new vacation policy, new expense reporting software, new mobile phone contract, new vendor for shipping. Are you really going to ignore the company's policies? Of course you're not.

We have a popular Manager Tools podcast on this topic called the Middleman Test. *Never tolerate from your directs that which you would not visit upon your boss. And never do to your boss that which you would not accept from your directs.* The Middleman Test is a good general rule to apply when you get pushback: Would I do this to my boss?

Okay, but how do you answer the accusation that O3s are micromanaging?

First of all, O3s are not micromanagement. That's ludicrous. From the company's perspective (which is the perspective the manager must take), a direct wishing for virtually no managerial oversight at all is a liability risk.

The direct who holds to the concept that a 30-minute meeting once a week is overbearing and over-burdensome is telling you they are either afraid of oversight—which is scary legally—or they are above it—which is a level of arrogance that could tear apart your team.

The problem today with the average manager–direct relationship is NOT one of too much management, but far too little. Management, reasonably practiced, in virtually every organization, provides necessary guidance, controls, and incentives far below a level that is intrusive or detrimental.

And the ultimate defense of O3s as not micromanagement is a reminder of what micromanagement REALLY is. Here's the Manager Tools definition of micromanaging:

Micromanagement is the systemic and routine application of an intrusive relationship such that the manager assigns tasks, explains what

to do, how to do it, and insists on total process compliance, and then observes the work in real time, corrects the work as it is being done, and in the event of divergence from standards, takes OVER the work and completes it himself.

A demanding boss is NOT a micromanager. Asking for reports is not micromanaging. Expecting updates is NOT micromanaging. Asking for one meeting a week is NOT micromanaging someone. Providing your direct a weekly opportunity to communicate with you is NOT micromanaging. Spending time communicating about tasks and deliverables and deadlines and successes and failures and growth opportunities and yes even family—NONE of this is micromanaging in any way.

So, when one of our directs accuses us mistakenly of trying to micromanage them, we're going to address it head-on. Here's what you can say, in a calm and relaxed voice:

Look, I'm sorry, but that's just not so. O3s are so far from micromanagement that to compare them is to show that we've got really different ideas about what each of them are, and what they mean.

For the record, micromanagement is the systemic and routine application of an intrusive relationship such that the manager assigns tasks, explains what to do, how to do it, and insists on total process loyalty, and then observes the work in real time, corrects the work as it is being done, and in the event of divergence from standards, takes OVER the work and completes it him- or herself.

*All I'm asking for is 30 minutes from you each week. If you're working 50 hours a week, that's **1**% of your workweek. That's not micromanagement.*

What managers who consider themselves effective would argue is that a micromanager does NOT do these things: Talk about performance. Answer questions. Provide feedback. Assign work. Praise.

Provide coaching. Talk about relationships. Discuss development. Develop relationships. Inquire about status. Expect status reporting. Pay attention to work–family "balance." Plan. Check work. Reward.

These are the things done in O3s. Would someone seriously argue that all of that getting done at one time—more efficiently and more regularly for the direct, and definitely more efficiently for the manager—as opposed to 20 conversations throughout a week, many often NOT accomplished—is somehow bad, inefficient, or ineffective?

Finally, the answer to directs who push back on O3s because they are micromanagement is simply to insist. While we at Manager Tools know that relationship power is the clear number one of the three types of power, we never said that it was the only way to influence.

Sometimes, using your role power ("Hey, guys, we gotta do this because we gotta do it") is a legitimate motivational speech. Remember, though, that when you DO use role power, it is always more effective when resting on a strong relationship foundation.

Role power is *heightened by* stronger relationships with one's team. So, after telling everyone why O3s aren't micromanaging, you can also say, "I hear your input, and I've decided to move forward. I look forward to starting the process."

"I'm Too Busy."

The second most common pushback is directs who say they don't have time for them/they're too busy.

Let's face it, we're all busy. That's actually a good thing—not enough people for all the work to be done—it is a much better problem to have than too many people for not enough work. So, this is a legitimate concern from folks who feel busy.

The first thing to remember is that when your directs tell you they're too busy, they're talking about how busy they are *right now*.

But if we allow every new idea to be compared to everyone's *current* schedule, no one could ever introduce new ideas to change/improve performance or behavior or quality or quantity or efficiency. If we're all too busy for any changes, how will anything ever change?

To address this concern, when we announce we're going to start doing O3s, we announce that they won't start for 3, 4, or 5 weeks. Part of that is to allow for the scheduling to take place. It takes a day or two for directs to pick their times. Part of that is to allow time to answer questions. There are always questions when you change how you manage others. Part of the lag is also to allow us time to brief everyone, together, which may take a couple of days to set up. Part of it is also to allow directs who are so inclined to listen to or read further guidance you might make available to them. (More on this in Chapter 6.)

But the main reason is that people who have full calendars this week rarely will have that same fullness three to five weeks from now, as we mentioned earlier.

Today is almost always as full as you can get it. Tomorrow is probably also full. But 5 days from now, we'd wager your calendar is somewhat less filled. Maybe 50%? And 3 weeks from now there is virtually nothing on it but perhaps two or three standing weekly meetings. They probably represent less than 10% of your total available time that week.

So, when your direct objects on the basis of being too busy, tell them that you know and respect that, and that's why you're scheduling them now for 3–5 weeks from now . . . when you know they have nothing already scheduled.

Here's how it might sound in an actual exchange:

Direct: *I don't have time for another meeting. I'm swamped with work. You know that.*

Manager: *I know you're busy right now. Thanks for the hard work. I appreciate it and respect it. And that's why I'm not asking*

> *you to start now. I'm asking for time on your calendar three*
> *weeks from now. And I checked, and you've got plenty of*
> *time then.*
>
> Direct: *But by then I will have stuff on my calendar. It always fills up.*
> *I'm always busy.*
>
> M: *Yes, but when it starts filling up a few days before our first*
> *scheduled O3, what fills up your calendar will have one less*
> *half hour to work with. That's not too much to ask.*

Another approach you can take to combat the "busy" defense is that if we're all so busy we don't have time for anything more, we better get our priorities right. We may well be *so* busy we're not making time for the truly critical issues and opportunities. We need to be aligned, and what better way than a regular check-in?

You've probably learned by now that "busyness" is one of the most frequently used defenses against manager initiatives. The defensiveness our directs feel is reasonable. But being so busy that one can't change has dangerous implications. As busy as everyone is, this defense, left unanswered, suggests that the organization will never change.

Yet we all know that the busiest and most successful organizations change all the time. How do they change and get better when they are busy, too, just like we are? How can our busyness justify NOT changing, when they change when they're busy and still deliver results?

The answer of course is that busyness is no defense of anything. By definition everyone's supposed to be "busy" or at least fully using their skills. (In fact, organizational behavior experts tell us that those folks who probably don't have enough to do still fill up their hours. And they, too, not surprisingly, describe themselves as "busy.")

Let's look at "busy" a different way. Busy to most folks means they're working hard all day every day at work. "Busy" can be slightly different than "I'm in meetings all the time." "Busy" includes all the

work one has to accomplish in addition to all the time they spend in meetings.

But at its core, "busy" means, "I have more work to do than I have time to do it." Put differently, you're busy if you're not getting all your work done. Just ask yourself: Do you feel busy? And then, do you go home every night with all your work done?

When a direct says they don't have time to do O3s, it's a sign that they're fully busy with work they're not getting done. But if this is a defense against a new obligation, then we're never going to get that direct to ever do anything new.

And there's a simple rule about work when there's more than can be done: **before trying to get more of everything done, get the most important things done first**. This is a simple argument that it's better to try to first achieve results through *effectiveness*—doing the right things, the valuable things, the important things—before trying to achieve results through *efficiency*—doing the same work in less time.

Work on the right things first. Then get more efficient at those right things, and you'll have more time for either more right things, or some less important things.

So, when a direct says they don't have time or are too busy for O3s, another effective response is to explain that if they're that busy, we both know they're not getting everything done. And that means we need to make sure that they're working on the right things first and foremost. And that means talking more about what they're working on, to achieve alignment. Through the O3.

Here's how it might sound in an actual exchange:

Direct: *I'm too busy for another (worthless) meeting. I've already got too much to do and not enough time to do it. How is (yet) another meeting going to help me with that?*

Manager: *I know you're busy. We're all busy. And, as an aside, having too much work to do doesn't stop the vice presidents and*

directors from asking us to take an extra meeting or two. But anyway, look. If you're that busy, we'd better be sure that you're working on the right stuff. My guess is that there's stuff you're working on that I don't know about. And if you're like me, there's some stuff that you're working on that you like doing, but that maybe isn't the best stuff for the team, or the organization. No offense.

So, if there's more work than we can do, we've absolutely got to be sure that whatever we are doing is the most important stuff. And seriously, a half hour meeting—about 1% of your work week—isn't going to make your workload any worse.

Plus, I'll commit to you that when we get some alignment out of them, you'll get more time back in your week than you spend in our O3s. Guaranteed.

Finally, probably the easiest response to a direct with no time for O3s is to show them how little time you're asking for.

Part of the reason this response works is because so few people think globally or strategically about their time and calendar/schedule. They think about the now and the near-term upcoming, usually in the form of impending deadlines. And most approaches to creating more time are about spending a few less minutes on each of the next few things they're working on.

But that approach is tactical. It might garner some saved time, but it will be incremental. The highly effective approach is to apportion one's time differently, by starting from the top down. *Getting Things Done* teaches this beautifully. The book *168 Hours* does it very well. The concept is also beautifully illustrated by "The Big Rocks" by Stephen Covey.

When you're working in "the now" and someone asks for half an hour, apoplexy might be a reasonable response. You never feel like you have half an hour when you're up against the deadlines of

the now. But if I ask you for 30 minutes next month, you'd surely be able to make that work.

But let's do the time math for a *whole year* of O3s: 30 minutes a week times 52 weeks.

But no, not really. Half an hour for 52 weeks minus 2 weeks of vacation for you. And minus 2 weeks more for your direct's vacation. So, half an hour times 48 weeks.

That's 24 hours. If we assume 8-hour work days, that's 3 days. Every year.

The right response to that math might be: "Are you kidding me? Somebody doesn't have a measly 3 days *in an entire year* to meet with me to talk about work and performance and development and any other thing you'd like? When our website talks about team players and communication and collaboration? That makes no sense."

And if we're really going to get snarky, everybody is always claiming that they're working 50-hour weeks (and more). So now we're only talking about the equivalent of **two days a year**. Not a sustainable argument.

Further, they only have to talk for 15 of those 30 minutes. Which means we're asking them to come talk to us the equivalent *one day a year*.

The idea that someone doesn't have this much time is preposterous. Here's how it might sound in an actual exchange:

Direct: *I just don't have time for this, boss. You've given me tons to do, and I can feel the tension at home, too, with the hours I'm spending.*

Manager: *Okay, well, first things first. If there's problems at home with your hours, let's talk about that. Family first—go home, darn it.*

And look, I'm not asking for much time. It's kind of silly for us to have a conversation about what amounts to 2–3 work days in an entire year being too much to handle.

> *In a 50-hour week, 30 minutes is 1% of your week. You're going to struggle to convince me that you can't spare that for open communication when your calendar 3 weeks from now is so open. So let's start.*

One final response to the time pushback: pull rank. We don't recommend you do this very often. We always start with Relationship Power.

(You probably know this, but there are three forms of power or influence in organizations. Role Power—that which the organization grants you to compel others to act for the organization; Relationship Power—your own ability to persuade others because of their knowledge and trust of you; and Expertise Power—others' perception of your technical, industrial, or topical knowledge that causes them to follow your guidance.)

But just because we know that Relationship Power is the ultimate lever, that doesn't mean Role Power doesn't exist. If we use it rarely, when we do, it will be respected. Role Power tends to exist in inverse proportion to how often you have to use it. And sometimes to get people over the hump, it takes them seeing the benefits of the new plan rather than you having to convince them of its benefits in advance.

If you've tried some or all of the other responses, it's fair to say you've made a solid effort. And, time being what it is, while we owe each of our directs a reasonable effort at communicating, at some point it's both ineffective and inefficient to keep trying to use our Relationship Power by trying to persuade them.

Here's how using Role Power might sound in an actual exchange:

Direct: *I don't see how this helps me. Just another meeting rather than me getting some real work done.*

Manager: *Fair enough. I get that I haven't convinced you. That said, every once in a while, I get to be in charge rather than just a collaborator. I believe that over time this will become the most valuable time we spend each week. I haven't convinced you yet, but I'm willing to bet that the results of us doing so will. So, I'm going to insist. Pick a time, do your best to stay positive, and let's behave our way into believing.*

Not our first choice, but appropriate when managers believe in their plans.

5

Doing One on Ones with Remote and Hybrid Workers

One on Ones (O3s) are the foundation of effective management. Of all the manager tools we have ever created and tested, O3s have the most positive impact on results and retention, which are the hallmarks of an effective manager.

If your directs are remote or hybrid, our data show that absent manager behaviors, trust—the most important engine of effectiveness—declines noticeably. The Allen curve shows us that distance affects communication far more than most of us realize.

Despite our modern digital communication tools, the nature of human relationships causes us to communicate far less with those who are distant from us. As we said earlier, most of us have been mistakenly assuming that we "adjust" to communicating with those who are distant from us with more email, more Slacks, more text messages, or more phone calls.

But again, the data show that that's not so. We do not "compensate" with digital tools. We simply communicate less. And even

if we do communicate more in writing digitally, those tools do not build nearly enough trust to achieve high levels of effectiveness.

What this means is that with the move toward more remote and hybrid workers, O3s become even more necessary.

The professional effective manager of our new work environments must work harder than a collocated manager to build the trust we need for effective relationships and results.

Before we talk about how to deliver MTO3s remotely, we encourage you to consider that you need not assume that you have to passively accept that your directs must or should work from home. Many of the companies we most admire are pushing much harder than most companies to get employees to come back into the office.

If you have the chance to have any of your directs collocated with you, do so. If you can convince some or all of your directs to come into the office, we encourage you to try. Yes, it's true that your organization might "allow" remote work. And certainly some directs will want to do so. But this does not mean you must meekly accept their choice. It is reasonable to try to persuade your directs to consider coming into the office.

It is our experience that organizations allow remote work for two reasons. One is fear of not being able to recruit employees who must come into the office because other firms will offer work from home options. They choose to work from home for good reasons, such as the lack of a commute and child care and, frankly, what they see as a better work–life balance. These are legitimate reasons for those individual choices.

Yet much of the data about employees working from home having higher productivity isn't what it seems. Productivity is a hugely important factor for organizations, and it is tracked scientifically by many companies. But you may note that much of the data you have read about productivity lately talks about how employees "feel" about working from home.

But how employees "feel" is not how productivity was previously or scientifically measured. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been comparing apples and oranges: how employees presently feel about their work output compared to corporate statistics about corporate output and effectiveness against organizational metrics.

The second reason is fear of losing employees to other opportunities that do provide work from home options. In our experience, these fears are overblown. Remote directs are in fact much more likely to be *harder to retain* because of the lack of connection they have to their organization. And it is much easier to search for a different job when you are working from home.

We have also noticed something else about the growing working from home phenomenon. Your most productive and effective directs—those more likely to be part of your succession planning for promotions and the future leadership of your organization—are much more likely to want to come to the office. *They know that at some managerial level, organizations are going to expect their leaders to be collocated.*

Yes, there are plenty of stories of managers and even executives working from home. *These are the exception and not the rule.* The nature of executive life requires exceptional relationship building. Everyone always assumes that at the executive level one has more role power. This is true, but it isn't what matters in executive operations. Executive decisions are often the result of significant collaboration, trade-offs, and yes, politics.

We often tell our podcast audiences, "When you look at the top of your organization, what you call politics, they call collaboration." Politics are inevitable in organizations because they are nothing more than relationship effects.

The political capital required to achieve executive success is nearly impossible to build from a distance. Please be careful about allowing your best performers to work from home. The chances of promotions into management—not that that's what everyone wants, surely—are significantly lessened for someone working at home.

Yes, some top-notch professionals want to remain individual contributors. It's their career, and that's what they want. More power to them. It's our jobs as managers to help them be effective, and to retain them. There's no sense pushing someone to get promoted if they are remote and have no interest in becoming a manager. It will be harder to retain them because of the lessened communication and their increased ability to do job searches, but it's our job nonetheless.

If you yourself are managing remotely, some of this is probably hard to hear. But we would be doing you a disservice if we didn't tell you that if you want further promotions, your road there will lead you to working in the office. Don't doom your best performers—many of them future leaders—to wondering why they're not getting promoted if they choose to stay at home. They certainly can stay at home, and there are good reasons for that, as mentioned previously. But they will discover that very often their desire for more ability to influence the organization will become a casualty of that career choice.

All that said, we are going to have remote and hybrid workers for the foreseeable future. It will be more prevalent in the next couple of years (this book was published in 2023), but over time more and more organizations will insist on higher and higher percentages of workers back in the office.

How can we be most effective in our O3s with those remote and hybrid workers? First, let's talk about the hybrid situation. We are making an assumption here that you, the manager, will be in the office. (Obviously, if you yourself are remote, all of your MTO3s will be remote.)

For hybrid workers, we encourage you to conduct your MTO3s face to face on the days when your directs are in the office. Whenever you can, you want to do MTO3s face to face. You've surely heard that more than 50% of our communication is nonverbal, based on facial expressions and body language. Even on

a Zoom call, we're not able to sense all of the facial expressions and body language that we would in a face-to-face meeting.

Now, there's a problem with this. If your directs all come into the office on the same days, if you have more than a handful of directs, those days can get eaten up with MTO3s. If that becomes a problem, we encourage you to try rotating which MTO3s you do in the office, so you get face-to-face O3s whenever you can with the entire team.

When we have recommended this, we hear periodically from managers, "On the days when my directs do come into the office, they have tons of meetings, and this is hard to do." That does happen. There's a simple strategy to address this that we recommend for ALL MTO3s, whether you are remote or not: schedule your O3s in advance. As a general rule, if you've got your MTO3s on your calendar as a repeating item with no end date, those other meetings will have to find time around your existing O3s.

Whatever you do with your hybrid directs, don't just let them choose a time when they are not in the office. You'll be missing an opportunity for the richer discussions you will have in person.

What about fully remote directs?

We recommend you do MTO3s with all of your directs, remote directs included, no matter what.

As we hope we've made clear, the distance between you and remote workers and the lack of communication it leads to makes O3s even more critical. *If you don't have O3s with distant directs, their performance and your team's performance will suffer noticeably.*

You might worry that your directs won't like doing MTO3s with you. We typically hear this concern from managers who have never done O3s. As we said earlier, a great deal of concern that managers have about this is overblown. The vast majority of directs end up liking O3s—though those directs who choose remote work typically are more likely to resist MTO3s.

The primary way you can eliminate this resistance is to brief your directs about O3s before you begin them. *Never introduce*

a change to how you manage your team without first introducing the change before you make it. This is especially important for remote directs. When remote directs learn that you will be doing O3s with everyone, not just them personally, and not only remote directs, the resistance will ease.

How to Conduct Remote MTO3s

The best way to conduct MTO3s with remote directs is by using Zoom, Teams, or some other video call tool. It's a richer form of communication than by phone.

We have tested video, phone, and face-to-face O3s and their impact on results and retention on more than 60,000 directs. Here's what our data say.

First, we start with the principle that face-to-face communication is the richest and therefore best way to communicate. We'll assign the results and retention improvements achieved over 9 months of MTO3s a "100%" output.

For the record, in all of our tests, we included a control group of managers who didn't (were not *allowed to, and we monitored this*) do MTO3s while their colleagues were doing MTO3s using different communication tools.

Before the advent of reliable quality video calls, we tested phone O3s versus a control group of no O3s. **Managers conducting phone O3s achieved a results and retention improvement score of roughly 80% of the improvement achieved by managers conducting face-to-face O3s.** Managers who did not do O3s (the control group) got a marginally 0% improvement in results and retention.

When we tested video calls (once their quality didn't detract from the communication experience), we got better results than phone O3s. (We used Skype at the time for the video call tool.) **With video, the degradation in results and retention from face to face was cut in half, with an improvement of roughly 90%.**

You might say that 80% or 90% improvement is enough of a decline in results and retention that you don't want to hassle with remote MTO3s. But remember, that's not the best comparison to make. The comparison isn't about the tool—it's about the difference between these tools and *the control group, which got no improvement in results and retention.*

So, we recommend video calls—Zoom, Teams, etc.—for conducting your MTO3s with your directs who are remote. You can set these up as meetings just like face-to-face MTO3s. Some managers have their directs send the recurring meeting appointment; some prefer to do it themselves. We've seen no difference in results based on this implementation difference.

We will take one more chance to say it: distance erodes communication. Without robust communication, trust erodes, regardless of perceptions of productivity. The single biggest mistake that a manager can make in the world of remote and hybrid workforces is to not do Manager Tools O3s.

6

How to Start Doing Manager
Tools One on Ones

IF YOU'VE DECIDED TO START doing Manager Tools One on Ones (MTO3s), we're excited for you. O3s will become the core of your managerial behaviors.

Now that you know what O3s are, **here's what to do.**

Let's walk through, step by step, exactly what to do to get your O3s started.

1. **Choose times from your calendar.**
2. **Send out an O3 email invitation.**
3. **Allow for possible changes and questions as you get started.**
4. **Brief your team on your O3s.**
5. **Do O3s ONLY for 12 weeks.**

Choose Times from Your Calendar

In order to send out an email letting your team know you're going to start doing O3s, you need to pick times on your calendar to let them choose from.

Take the number of directs you have, multiply by 1.5, and that's the number of times you need to make available to them in the mail. (If you have an odd number of directs, round your answer up.) If you have six directs, for example, you need to find nine half-hour time slots, or 4.5 hours.

Why 1.5× slots more than the number of your directs? Because you're going to let them choose the time they have, and we don't want anyone to be "forced" to take the last slot you offered.

On the other hand, you might be tempted to just throw your calendar open and let your team members choose whenever they want. **Don't do this.** *We tried it years ago, repeatedly, and it always turned out poorly.* Doing it this way *will ruin **your** schedule.* Remember that each direct is only committing half an hour to this effort each week, but you are committing as many half hours as you have directs. It may sound counterintuitive, but you have to be more sensitive to your own schedule than any of your directs' schedules.

Now, look at your calendar 3, 4, 5 weeks from now—whenever you have decided to start the actual meetings—to choose which times on your calendar you're going to offer.

As a rule, avoid times right before and after staff meetings or regular meetings with your boss. Don't choose Monday morning because meetings slow people down, and we don't want to slow them down at the start of the week. Don't choose Friday afternoon, because if there's a late conflict, you won't have time to reschedule.

You'll end up with a list (let's say, again, for a team of six directs) that looks like this:

Monday 3:00 p.m.
Tuesday 9:30 a.m.
Tuesday 11:00 a.m.

Tuesday 2:45 p.m.
Wednesday 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday 11:30 a.m.
Wednesday 2:30 p.m.
Wednesday 4:00 p.m.
Thursday 8:45 a.m.

(There are all kinds of subtle variations in managers' situations—if yours is different, you'll probably find your unique situation covered in one of our many podcasts about MTO3s. —HSB)

Some managers prefer to have all of their O3s on one day (if they don't have too many). Some managers prefer to spread them out on multiple days of the week. Our data are inconclusive about which works better—do what works for you.

So now, you've got a list of 30-minute time slots that you're going to offer your directs. Good, now let's introduce them to MTO3s, and invite them to get on your calendar.

Send Out an O3 Email Invitation

You're going to send out a broadcast email to your entire team, not a bunch of individual emails. We have tested both. Sending out individual emails makes too many directs think *they are the only one getting the email, and they worry that there is a problem.*

Here's a draft of an email you can download and then edit, from our website: https://www.manager-tools.com/system/files/documents/1-Sample-1-on-1-email.txt?local=1.

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Team:

I've decided to start meeting with each member of the team on a weekly basis in meetings called One on Ones. I think this is a great

way for us to maintain good, open communication, and continue to build our relationship. We'll be meeting for 30 minutes once a week, at a pre-scheduled time. It will be a private conversation—just you and I.

Below is a schedule of possible times. I have already blocked all these times on my calendar, so I should be able to keep them. **When you reply to this mail, choose a time from the list, and Reply to All choosing that time.** *That way others will know that time is no longer available. I'll send out repeating calendar invites once everyone replies. Please respond within 48 hours.*

We will start the meetings (three weeks) from now.

The format of the 30 minutes will always be the same. The first 10 minutes are for YOUR agenda—anything you want to tell me, about anything: your work, your family, your hobby, your challenges, your career, our working together. You won't have to send me an agenda in advance.

The primary focus of this meeting is going to be YOU. That's why you're going first. The middle 10 minutes are for me, to share whatever I need to with you. We'll probably talk about projects you and I are working on, stuff I need from you, and things I've heard from up above. It will NOT be a team meeting with only one attendee; that is, I'm not just going to give you a ton of stuff to take notes on. The last 10 minutes are for us to talk about the future—your career, training, development, opportunities, etc. In my experience, a lot of the time you'll take 15 minutes, and I will too, so we won't get to the last segment. But that's okay, if we've covered what YOU want to cover, and I get a few minutes.

Some of you may say, "We talk all the time." And you'd be right, but a lot of those conversations are very short. And they're usually about something very specific, so we don't get to share more or go into more detail. Our one-on-ones will allow you to reliably talk to me every week about issues important to you.

Next week, during our weekly staff meeting, I'll cover more detail about O3s and answer your questions.

Regards,

(Name, with times below)

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Off the mail goes. Don't worry about not getting responses back quickly. Almost all, if not all, of your team will respond very quickly once the first person responds, replying to all and choosing a time (and thereby taking that choice away from everyone else). It will be a gold rush.

If someone doesn't reply within 48 hours, go ahead and schedule them into one of the empty slots, and send out a note which says something like this:

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I've heard from almost everyone, and here's the schedule. If you have questions, please just reply to this mail.

(And then list the schedule as chosen by [almost] everyone.)

■　■　■

It's only anecdotal, because we have only heard of a couple of hundred instances, but it's funny too: any people who didn't reply within 48 hours will now respond *immediately* since you've scheduled them without their input.

If they want a different time that's still available, of course allow them to change. If they want to argue generally, ask them to hold their questions or concerns until you brief everyone at your staff meeting and tell them the calendar item stands.

You may be wondering what you're going to do when they refuse the meeting or just don't show up. Trust us, the chances of that are incredibly rare. We've heard of that happening less than 10 times out of all the directs who reported to nearly a million managers. It just doesn't happen.

But there's a bigger answer worthy of addressing here. What are your options if someone just blatantly refuses?

To answer that, we go back to the Middleman Test: never tolerate from your directs that which you would not visit upon your boss. Ask yourself: If your boss asked you for a 30-minute weekly meeting starting 3 weeks from now, when it was obvious that you had time available on your calendar, would you say no?

Of course you wouldn't. It wouldn't even occur to you. You reasonably and rightly assume that your boss surely has the power to visit consequences upon you for not doing something that seems so obviously within the scope of his role power.

So, why then, if you believe this is within your boss's power, is it not within your power? And the answer is: it is.

And again, it doesn't matter, because the chances of an outright rejection are marginally zero.

Allow for possible changes in the near future. The fact is, all great planners will echo the wisdom: planning is everything; plans are nothing. Things are going to change. Your boss is going to change her weekly staff meeting. You're going to be put on a task force for some new something-or-other; somebody's child is going to make all-state band and have to be ferried to and fro.

So, you set the schedule and then after a few weeks, you allow for some changes, based on whether it's working, for both you and your directs.

Review Intent, Ground Rules, and O3 Agenda in Your Staff Meeting

Set some time apart in your next staff meeting—30 minutes is probably fine—and walk everyone through what you've learned here. There is a set of slides on our website to help you prepare your presentation, covering the basics.

Answer questions. Stand up in front of your directs and take questions. Don't be afraid of saying, "I don't know. We'll figure it out as we go. There's no way we can eliminate every hiccup with more planning. We'll get better as time goes by. We'll learn. And I'll get back to you on that."

If you don't know an answer, send us an email—customerservice@manager-tools.com—and we'll help you. And we'd encourage you to listen to our extensive catalog of podcasts (there are more than 50) on MTO3s as you start doing them. There's no shame in not having every answer before you start something.

If every manager had to have every answer to managing before they became a manager, there wouldn't be any managers.

Conduct O3s *Only* for 12 Weeks

This is perhaps the most important concept in our Trinity rollout guidance. You cannot effectively implement the whole Trinity all at once. It's too much. If not for you, then because your directs can't handle it. They don't *like* all that change. And when there's too much change, *none* of it goes terribly well.

For 12 weeks, don't introduce any other new management behavioral change. Just O3s, for 12 weeks. At the end, you'll know your folks better, and you'll be much more aware of how to deliver the next step.

Don't Rush to Get Feedback!

If you start giving feedback after only a few weeks of O3s, you'll be learning two things at once, reducing the effectiveness of each, and you'll be sending the wrong message. Even if you NEVER get to feedback, you and your team will perform better with O3s.

Don't rush to giving *negative* feedback. Even if you are a nice person, there's a good chance your directs have worked for

a jerk boss. That jerk boss often did one thing to try to sugar-coat something else. Your directs got smart and started waiting for the other shoe to drop *with every successive manager they have had since that jerk boss.*

Don't do that to them by quickly thinking you've mastered O3s and jumping right into negative feedback. It will do more harm than good. You'll do it poorly.

We'll cover why and how to do feedback—and how to roll it out—next.

7

Talk About Performance— Feedback

THE SECOND MOST IMPORTANT manager behavior that leads to results and retention is communicating about performance.

To be fair, you've probably tried to talk to your directs about how they were doing. But it was hard, wasn't it? Particularly when you have to point out a mistake. You tried to talk to them about what happened, but maybe they got upset. Or you just didn't have the right words, and it was awkward. It chilled your relationship for a couple of weeks. Awkward, and often a performance dampener.

And you probably thought that it was partially or even mostly your fault that some well-intentioned negative feedback went poorly. But it really wasn't. Negative performance communications are hard for a host of reasons, and none of them are your fault.

First off, don't worry. Performance communications don't have to be hard at all. **If you use the Manager Tools Feedback Model, we guarantee you that you will be able to give positive or negative feedback easily, and routinely, taking no more than 15 seconds each time. And your directs won't complain.**

You were doing it wrong. ;-)

We don't mean to be rude, honestly. But the fact is, *what kind of training were you given before you were given responsibility for other professionals?* We know the answer: NONE.

If you didn't get any training, what would make any reasonable person think that you would be good at giving performance communications? They don't teach this in undergraduate programs. We only know of one MBA program that teaches managers how to give feedback, and the content isn't impressive. How is that possible?

Feedback isn't inherently difficult to give or to receive. (It's a great deal easier to give and receive when trust has been built.) But when you do it wrong, it feels *really* wrong to the recipient. And doing it right just isn't all that hard, I promise.

It probably doesn't feel great to read, "You're doing it wrong," but we encourage you to let yourself off the hook. We did it wrong for years too, and sometimes still do. Most of our clients, colleagues, and friends who are effective managers all did it wrong for years, until we learned better. Yes, communicating about your directs' performance is part of your job, and yes, it's unlikely you've been doing it at a very high level, but you can be forgiven for not having done it much, or done it well.

Why? Because you've never been taught how.

In fact, we'd bet part of the reason you're reading this book is that you were given virtually no training as a manager when you first ascended to the role. You may have wanted to do the job. You may have had a sense that based on what *you* wanted from *your* boss, you would be able to give that kind of guidance and support if you were the boss. And it probably hasn't worked out that way.

Which makes you completely normal. If, when you look at other managers, they look like they get it, you're likely mistaken. They're as untrained as you are. If they seem confident of their managerial skills, they're probably not. They hope, much like you, that their lack of skills and knowledge won't be discovered.

The average manager hasn't been trained, hasn't been tutored, hasn't been mentored, taught, coached, or given anything approaching professional development of the skills necessary for becoming a successful manager.

This lack of skills and training shows up most quickly in our lack of ability to communicate about performance. We know we're supposed to. And we've tried. But it hasn't gone well.

We suspect this happened to you early on as a manager: You noticed that one of your directs had done poorly, or less than well, at something. You resolved to say something to him. You thought about it a little bit, and you had a couple of bullet points in your mind you were going to mention. You knew this was part of your job, you knew you didn't know *exactly* what you were doing. But you also trusted that your direct probably knew he had made a mistake and expected you to say something. And you had a pretty good relationship with him, so it would go okay.

Because you had heard the phrase, "praise in public, criticize in private," you brought him into your office. You made small-talk for 30 seconds to a minute, thinking that's what you would do before a normal conversation. Makes sense because you want this conversation to be normal.

And then you said what you had planned to say, mostly. You didn't say it exactly right because all you had was a couple of bullets. And you decided to say a little more, to sort of, in your mind, "soften the blow." It was all so clear in your plan, so clear in your mind.

But it went poorly, didn't it? The direct pushed back. Maybe he even interrupted. He told you why he did what he did (which sounded, to be honest, perfectly reasonable.) He got visibly frustrated and waited until you ran out of words and asked, "Is that all?" And then left.

So, maybe the next time you decided that you'd give the feedback indirectly. One of your directs had shown up late to meetings a couple of times and didn't seem to care very much. But you weren't

going to give her the chance to push back or give you her reasons. Frankly, there was a part of you that didn't care about her reasons. Asking her to be on time wasn't too much to ask.

So, the next time this direct was late, you waited until the meeting broke up, and you shared a final comment with everyone. "Hey, guys, I need you to get to meetings on time, okay? Not too much to ask." Not confrontational, not pointing fingers at any one person, clearly stating the standard.

But that didn't work *either*. The direct to whom you were indirectly sending it didn't seem to change her behavior. And your best performer, who was always on time, seemed irritated, and perhaps rightly, since he's always on time. We definitely don't want that.

All of these errors are normal, everyday occurrences in organizations all over the world. You're not alone.

Before we learn the details of the Manager Tools Feedback Model, let's first change your perception about what the purpose of feedback is. If you know the purpose, it's much easier to get your delivery right, or correct it when you get off track.

Consider this simple model of what causes feedback and its purpose.
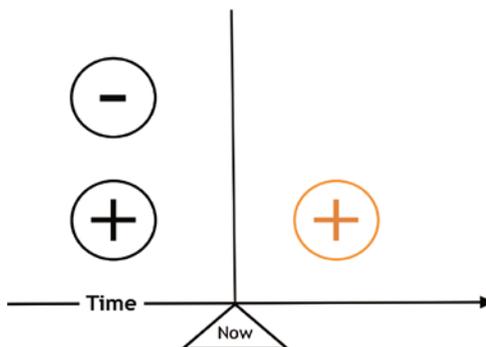
Assume that you are at the "Now" moment in the graphic. It's noon, on a workday. Time flows from left to right. What happened this morning is represented on the left of the graphic, and the future—this afternoon and beyond—is on the right.

This morning, one of your directs engaged in some behavior, either good or bad. The plus in the circle represents the good behavior, and the minus in the circle represents a mistake. And again, it's now noon, and you have become aware of the mistakes. You read a report, you got an email from the direct (or someone else), you watched the direct present, a colleague shared something with you.

And now you have to decide what to do. Of course, the classic response is: nothing. If it's a mistake, just let it go. "They probably know they messed up, they'll self-correct," we tell ourselves. If it's something good, no need to say anything really, "They were just doing their job. Can't go around praising people doing their jobs, they'll get addicted to the hand-holding and trophy-awarding."

But you also know that you want more input from *your* boss about how *you're* doing. So you decide to say something. You think to yourself: *Okay, what do I say to her about what she did?*

And this is where it all goes wrong. There are two parts to that thought: *What do I say to her* and *what did she do?* Let's talk about the "what did she do" first.

When the typical manager gives feedback, *the focus is on what happened.* We think about what happened in the past, and we ask ourselves how to talk to the direct.

About what happened. In the past. *Which we can do nothing about.*

That's a problem, and it's a big reason why directs get defensive when we talk to them about their mistakes. *They get defensive because we talk to them about their mistakes! Which happened in the past. About which they can do nothing.* And they feel trapped. Because we managers are focused on the past, and we haven't made clear our purpose for the conversation is in the future, our directs feel that we're just highlighting their mistakes, about which they can do nothing at this point.

Have you ever noticed that your directs often respond to your corrective comments with all the reasons *why* they did whatever it

was they did? You can probably work out why by asking yourself two questions:

1. **Have I made any mistakes in the last month?** If you're like the rest of us, you'll privately admit, "Yes, a number of them, if I'm honest."
2. **Did I *intend* to make those mistakes? Did I set out to mess things up on purpose?** If you're still like the rest of us, you'll immediately say, and perhaps vehemently, "No, of course I didn't!"

Well, remember, our directs are pretty similar to us. They made mistakes, but they weren't actively trying to mess things up. *They had good reasons for the mistakes they made!* So of course, they're going to respond to a discussion about their mistake with their reasons. The mistake may not be good, but at least their reasons were.

There are all kinds of reasons why directs defend themselves. Probably first on the list is lack of trust with you, their boss. The solution to that we already talked about: frequent high-quality communication between you and them, through Manager Tools One on Ones.

Our failure as managers to give them *frequent* performance communications increases directs' defensiveness as well. If performance communications are rare, every one of them takes on increased significance. If you don't point out mistakes frequently, your directs assume that if you've chosen to talk to them, they *may* be "in trouble." No surprise, then, the defensiveness.

Plus, let's face it: our role power increases their defensiveness. We control their addiction to food, clothing, and shelter, remember? Challenge someone who fears you more than trusts you, and you'll get some pushback.

And the way to reduce these problems down to a manageable minimum is to ask ourselves, "What is the purpose of this performance communication I'm delivering?"

The purpose of performance communications (and therefore feedback) is to **encourage effective future behavior.**

Each of those four words is important, but perhaps the most important is "future." If we talk to a direct with the intent of pointing out their mistake (or even their success), we doom the conversation to being about the past, about which we can do nothing. But the moment we switch to a future focus, we free ourselves up to *focus on something we (and they) can do something about.*

You'll note that in the past (this morning) there are two circles. One positive, one negative. But in the future, there is only ONE circle. The positive one. Can you see why that is? Because that's all we want in the future. Effective behavior.

Rather than thinking, *"What can I say to this person **about their mistake**,"* the right approach is to focus not on the past, but rather on what you want, which is effectiveness in the future.

Regardless of whether your direct was ineffective or effective this morning, the true purpose of any performance communication about either situation is exactly the same: you want more effective behavior, in the future. If your direct made a mistake, you want different behavior. If your direct did it right, you want more of the same.

When we realize this, we realize we ought not to be all that interested in a mistake itself when it comes to talking about performance. Sure, we want to know what it was. But we can't do anything about it because it's already happened. The only question is, "Can we encourage them to behave differently next time?"

Let's focus on what we want, not worry about exactly how we're going to word some criticism or how precisely to praise someone.

The best way we've found to encourage effective future behavior is the Manager Tools (MT) Feedback Model. It took us many years of testing different models and word choices with tens of thousands of managers around the world to refine it to where it

is today. It's very different probably than what you're used to because most managers' fundamental premise about feedback—talking about what happened—has been wrong.

The MT Feedback Model has four simple steps:

Step 1: Ask.
Step 2: Describe the behavior.
Step 3: Describe the impact of the behavior.
Step 4: Encourage effective future behavior.

Step 1: Ask

The first step of the model is simple: just ask your directs if you can give them some feedback. You can use the word *feedback* or another word, but you ask, every time, whether for positive or negative feedback. It would sound like this:

Can I give you some feedback?
Can I make an observation?
Can I share something with you?
Can I have a word?

The reason we ask for permission is the purpose of our brief conversation is to discuss our direct's future behavior, and they're the only ones who control their behavior. We want to make sure we have their attention, and that now is a good time to talk about their performance.

There is no point in talking to one of our team about *their own future behaviors* if they've just come into the building after a difficult conversation with their spouse, just come out of a difficult meeting, or have to finish creating a spreadsheet against a deadline. They need to be able to listen and hear us for them to understand what we're asking for from them in the future.

Asking (and honoring a *no* if it is given) enables you to make sure that the direct is listening. And before we ever use the Feedback Model with our team, we will brief them about it first, just like we did with MTO3s. (We cover how to do that in the next chapter.) They'll know that when we ask, they CAN say no.

Asking first here is a perfect example of a powerful managerial rule: never ask a question of your directs if you don't intend to honor the answer. If we were to ask, be told no, and then simply go ahead, we would prove to them that we are willing to be insincere to get what we want, and they need not give us honest answers any more. All they have to do is tell us what they think we want to hear. (While it's possible that a direct says "no" repeatedly to avoid getting feedback, it's exceedingly rare. That said, There's a Cast for That.™)

And you really don't need to worry about saying no becoming a problem. In better than three-fourths of situations (self-reported by managers) where directs say no to the question, they seek the manager out within a few hours to find out what the feedback was. We've been told by many directs that their curiosity got the better of them. (Wouldn't your curiosity get the better of *you* if your boss asked to give you some feedback and was kind enough to accept a *no* from you because it was a bad time?)

Now, if you're like a lot of managers, asking sort of bothers you. You think to yourself, *Wait, I'm the boss, why should I have to ask?* There are several reasons, but the primary one is all that really matters: *asking directs for permission to give them feedback significantly increases their appreciation for the feedback and the likelihood of effective future behavior.* We've tested our Feedback Model both with and without asking the introductory question first. Asking first produces significantly better results and satisfaction from directs. It might be a little awkward at first, but you and they will get used to it.

So it really boils down to do you want to "act like the boss," or do you want your team to be more effective?

By the way, it's a common assumption that we only ask when the feedback is negative. That's wrong; ask every time. If you only ask when you give negative feedback, your directs would soon understand that this was a signal—and know what is coming next. Asking only when you're giving negative feedback separates positive feedback from negative feedback. While that may sound right—negative feedback is harder!—it's actually wrong.

Remember that the purpose of feedback is effective future behavior. Regardless of whether a mistake was made, or someone did something well or to standard, the whole point of feedback is a positive one: effective future behavior. Anything we managers do that treats negative and positive feedback differently will make giving negative feedback harder.

In fact, many managers make their jobs harder by delivering negative feedback in a way that conveys some sort of punishment. They growl. They treat their offending direct poorly for a time. They scowl. They make sure their direct knows he or she is "out of favor." Sometimes they make a repeated simple mistake which they have been ignoring into a formal, scheduled discussion about "an issue," of "some concern," while hinting at or even threatening written documentation.

These techniques do not work. Behavior generally doesn't improve as fast as using our feedback model. But more importantly, trust is destroyed, and retention declines.

We previously said that "many" managers do this. We would have said "most" if we could have, but that's not supported by our data on hundreds of thousands of managers worldwide. No, what most managers do when it comes to feedback is *absolutely nothing at all*.

We could spend a whole separate book talking just about feedback, and you don't have time for that. But we will mention two brief things that you may find motivational if you're a manager who hasn't been giving feedback.

First, you might be surprised to know that in human psychology, there is a word for an environment that doesn't provide feedback: **a wicked environment.** That's right. Psychologists have shown over and over again that the issue of feedback is so important we can't just say we don't want to give it or they don't want to receive it. Wanting isn't the issue; feedback is **needed** as part of normal human interactions. This is such a serious problem that it's considered *wicked* to expect anyone to perform without it.

Do you intend to act with wickedness toward your directs when you choose not to give them feedback?

Second, use the Middleman Test again. Your boss notices something, good or bad, about your behavior. Do you want him to keep it to himself? Or do you want him to share it with you? Would it be okay if he just stored it all up and surprised you with it on your annual performance review?

We thought not. So now, if you want your boss to give *you* the feedback, *how can you deny that same feedback to your team members?* Why is it okay for you to want it, but not give it?

Of course, the answer is, it's not okay. What you want from your boss, your directs want from you.

Okay, let's get back to the question we were about to ask. We gave you a list of questions to choose from. You may create one of your own. But please remember that whatever question you use to start a feedback moment, you shouldn't use it to start other conversations.

For instance, you might "feel better" about saying, "Do you have a moment?" rather than saying, "Can I give you some feedback?" The reason for that is you've said, "Do you have a moment?" before. It's known to you (and them), and it's comfortable.

But if you later start a non-feedback conversation with, "Do you have a moment?" they'll get confused. They'll be expecting feedback and not get it. Or you'll use it when you *do* intend to give them feedback, and they'll be surprised by the feedback. Surprised responses to feedback don't lead to effective future behavior.

Before we walk through the rest of the model, you may be feeling that the model feels like a script. Well it is, and it isn't. The actual Feedback Model comprises the ideas necessary to talk about performance effectively. The scripting is just a way to bring the model to life. It only feels like a script when you're starting out. *The feeling that you are using a script will fade when you and your directs get some practice under your belts.*

For the record, we created the scripts because we used to just teach the model and its ideas. Managers said they wanted to figure out how they were going to say it on their own, which made sense. Managers loved the concepts of how and why feedback should work—most admitted that they had never known any of what we were sharing—but wanted to say it their own way. Fair enough.

Pretty quickly, though, managers started telling us privately, *I don't know what to say. I'm afraid I'm going to do it wrong.* So, we tested and tested and tested for years, going through nearly 20 iterations to get the present model we teach. It means a lot to us that over half a million managers have tried some version of our models and scripts, and the one we teach now is the most effective.

At some point, you're going to get so comfortable with the model and its subtleties that it won't feel like you're following a script, and you'll still easily get across what you need to your directs. And they'll know the structure, and be able to understand you clearly.

That's a lot better than sitting around, knowing you should say something, and thinking, *I don't know what to say.*

Step 2: Describe Behavior

Okay, so we've asked for their attention. Now we have to mention what they did. We tell the direct what they did well or what they did that we'd like them to change.

You'll notice we said "behavior." This is an important distinc-tion, and you'll do a lot better giving feedback if we explain why we say behavior and what it means.

First, one of the reasons many managers stop giving feedback is because when they have tried to give negative feedback, they got a less than great response from the recipient. One of the most com-mon reasons is because the feedback they've given *is not* based on their directs' behaviors.

If you give feedback on anything other than behavior, you're going to get a lot of resistance from your directs, your feedback won't work, and for most managers, you'll stop doing it.

Managers for decades have been trying to give feedback about topics other than behavior. There are two primary reasons why, based on our conversations with hundreds of thousands of managers.

First, we all believe—*completely mistakenly*—that we are good at determining what others are thinking. We think that we can see and hear someone behave and correctly determine what they were thinking and why they did what they did.

Second, managers believe—not without justification—that *they would rather fix the cause of the problem rather than just the symptom.* It certainly makes sense.

Unfortunately, we are incredibly wrong in our belief that we can determine what someone is thinking or feeling. And that means we'll be fixing the wrong cause.

The way most of us do this is to think about what *we ourselves* would have been thinking or meaning in order to have done what our direct did. *But this logic only works if our direct is behaviorally quite similar to us.* Based on most behavioral science models, this narrows the field to roughly 30% of the population (maybe a little more since hiring tends to be biased toward similar behavioral types).

So we're wrong at least 60% of the time and perhaps as much as 70% of the time. Imagine what kind of results you'd get in any

other part of your professional life if you continued doing something knowing you were wrong that often.

We hate to break it to you, but our data support all of this. Most managers are doing feedback wrong, for the wrong reasons. It's no wonder there's so little feedback in large organizations compared to, say, world-class athletes.

If it's any consolation, it's not your fault if you have fallen into these traps. We'd bet that no one in your organization ever took you aside and said, "By the way, you need to understand that being a software development *manager* is *a lot* different than being a software developer. So we're going to teach you the basics of management before you get a team to lead, the same way you got taught the basics of software development before you started writing code."

This is why our Manager Tools podcast is so popular, having been downloaded over a quarter of a billion times: people are being asked to manage others, and not being told that there are some fundamental rules and principles you can't do well without.

There's another reason worth mentioning about giving feedback about anything other than behavior: **directs don't like it!** Nobody likes it when someone assumes they know what we're thinking, assume it's negative, and then attempts to correct it. Nobody.

When we try to talk to our directs about their "attitude" or what they "meant to do" or "why" they did something or their intent generally, **they know that we don't** *actually know what they're thinking or feeling.* They know we're guessing because no one *ever* "knows" what someone else is thinking. And so they simply deny that you are right (even if you are, in fact, right). And if you're not right, why should they listen to you about what you want changed?

They will very likely ignore your input or even actively resist and argue the point you are making.

Now that we've hopefully convinced you to stick to behavioral feedback, we need to define what behavior IS. And be careful here:

when most professionals refer to "behavior" they mean interpersonal stuff. And that's wrong.

What IS Behavior?

Behavior is generally thought of as five things in the professional world.

■ **The words you say.** There's a difference, audible and measurable, between the salesman who asks, "Can I place that order?" and the one who says, "I hope you'll consider placing an order." Both may mean well—both surely would say they meant well. But meaning well and saying those two things will likely get you different results in the long run. (The question requires an answer; the "hope" statement doesn't.)

The words you choose to say out loud to others are a choice, and different words produce different results. *Your choice of words makes a difference in business results.* Furthermore, certain words are known to produce distinctly better results in certain situations.

Suppose a production floor worker who reports to you had just shut down his machine and seemed to be working on it when you came by and asked him, "What's up?"

What if, in response to your inquiry, he said, "I'm working on it"? What if he said, "I don't have time right now"? What if he said, "I think I have a stripped widget; give me 5 minutes to give you an estimated up-time"?

All of these statements are true, after a fashion. But are they therefore all equally useful or professional? Definitely not.

What if you asked two of your busiest directs in a meeting to help you with an important project. One said, "No problem." The other said, "I'm really busy, and I don't know why someone else can't do it, but no problem." Which would you prefer? Maybe they "mean" the same thing, but these are different *behaviors*.

■ **How you say those words.** The tone and tenor and speed and inflection with which you say what you say can change your meaning—intentionally or not—enormously.

Our friend Michael Swenson uses the string of words, "I didn't say you had an attitude problem," to illustrate this beautifully.

If you say, "*I* didn't say you had an attitude problem," well then, someone else said you had a problem, I didn't say it.

If you say, "I didn't *say* you had an attitude problem," well then, I surely am implying you did.

If you say, "I didn't say you had an *attitude* problem," well then, you've got some other kind of problem.

Here's another example. You ask one of your directs to help solve a problem the team is facing. He says, "Okay," but sounds like he's being forced to do so. A different direct whom you asked said, "Okay!" with enthusiasm. Are these the same?

Further, if you tell me you know how to solve a problem but with a hesitant and reserved tone that I infer as lacking in confidence, I might choose to give the job to someone whose similar words are delivered more quickly, more loudly, and more briefly.

■ **Your facial expressions.** Whether you smile, frown, or have an expressionless face can cause others to understand you better or worse. Whether you raise your eyebrows or not when you make a point, will show whether you are enthusiastic. Making eye contact, or choosing not to, can affect others' belief in your confidence or truthfulness.

Usually, smiling when you agree to do something extra for a customer is perceived by customers as more professional than furrowing your brow and not smiling at all.

You might say that you mean nothing by it—but communication is what the listener does, and you're still responsible for your communication. Meaning is determined 7% based on the words we use, 38% by tonal differences, and 55% by nonverbal—facial expressions and body language.

When you hear an idea that someone else is excited about, and you choose not to smile, you allow the inference that you are NOT excited about the idea. If you've only just heard it, that's seen as a quick disregarding of someone else's hard work. Perhaps you're right. . .but it might damage that relationship.

■ **Body language.** How you stand, how you sit, where you put your hands and arms, which way your body faces—these are all clues for others to interpret about your level of interest in their ideas, in them, and your and their work.

Crossing one's arms isn't always *just* a response to cold. Looking down when asked a direct question isn't perceived the same way as a response with eye contact. Drumming your fingers on a conference room table may "mean nothing," but most people would assume you're impatient.

Suppose a direct, when asked about their status on a project said, "Pretty good," while smiling and nodding her head, and looking right into your eyes. Another of your directs said, "Pretty good," after pausing, looking down, and then looking away? Most managers would interpret those answers very differently.

This is not to say that one direct is right and the other is wrong. But there is general agreement about the differences and what they mean in terms of effectiveness toward achieving results.

■ **Work product.** This part of behavior is what so many managers miss. What you do and how well you do your job are behaviors as well. Conceptually, this in part flows from your organization as an entity unto itself, *with you and your fellow associates as the hands and arms and eyes and ears of the firm*. In the same way that your hands and eyes engage in your behavior, you engage in your firm's behaviors.

This means that your job responsibilities are a good starting point to think about what your behaviors ought to be at work.

■ As a general rule, work product is defined more specifically behaviorally as follows:

■ *Quality*—How does your work compare to accepted standards of effectiveness and excellence? Did you meet, not meet, or exceed the standard? Do you do your work correctly, according to standards?

■ *Quantity*—How much work have you done? Did you meet your quota or minimum or the guidelines? This is certainly true in many jobs where there are numerical goals, though there are many jobs that are not formally measured where quantity and efficiency can be assessed and is thus a behavior.

■ *Accuracy*—Does your work require rework, or does it meet generally accepted practices in your profession? Does it have to be checked or corrected frequently?

■ *Timeliness*—Do you meet deadlines? Are you on time to work and to meetings? Meeting task deadlines is the same behavior as being on time for meetings.

■ *Documentation*—You're responsible for the communication (and analysis and ideas) you present to others in written and electronic form. Emails are behavior—you made choices about what you said and how you said it. This is very much akin to the words you say and how you say them, mentioned earlier.

What to Say

Step 2 of the model, describing behavior always begins: "When you. . . ." For example,

> "When you finish this deliverable early. . . ."
> "When you meet the quality standard…."
> "When you stay an extra hour to find the root cause…."
> "When you respond politely after the customer insults you…."
> "When you make that extra call to keep the customer informed…."
> "When you present your idea completely in only 10 minutes…."

"When you" are the two most important words in the MT Feedback Model. It tells your directs that you're going to tell them immediately what they did. The model is built this way because directs say that's what they want when they get feedback: clarity about what they did, quickly.

Sometimes managers say they want to "soften the blow" of some negative feedback by taking their time to describe the situation, be clear that differing points of view might exist, etc. **Whether you want to do that or not, the reason not to do so is crystal clear: your directs DO NOT want you to do that.** They want you to tell them what they did, good or bad, briefly. We have gotten this input from directs for more than 25 years.

Let's use the Middleman Test again here. Suppose you knew your boss was about to give you some negative feedback. She has two ways to deliver it. She can either take 15 seconds, or 3 minutes. Which would you prefer?

We thought so.

Keep your delivery of feedback simple by being brief. Start step 2 with, "When you," and then state the behavior that your direct engaged in.

Step 3: Describe Impact

In this step, we say what happened because of what our direct did. The model is built on the simple cause-and-effect principle: our direct did something—the cause—and something happened because of it—the effect. Obviously if the effect is good, it's positive feedback, and if the effect is bad, we're giving negative feedback.

Here are some simple examples. When your direct tells you he's going to get a report to you a couple of hours early, you're able to rearrange your calendar to spend more time on it in preparation for your big presentation. When your direct is ahead of schedule on a big project, it shows you she's ready for more visibility to senior

leaders. When your direct meets her weekly number, it shows how diligent she is in a tough market. When your direct lets you know in advance of someone coming to you to complain, you can prepare and defuse the situation.

This impact statement doesn't have to be something big and important. Don't try to do that. It doesn't have to be that your organization won a big contract or finished a project ahead of time or broke a sales record. In fact, since our guidance is that you give frequent feedback, if you waited for those kinds of occasions, you'd hardly give any feedback. Look for small behaviors, and the small impacts they cause, which happen every day. It's easier to give feedback on small items, and all those small changes will add up.

Beginning this step with "Here's what happens" will help you remember the model and formulate the feedback properly. Once you're confident, you can leave out the words.

Some examples of this step include the following:

"I can focus on other areas that need my attention."
"Here's what happens: the customer calls to thank me...."
"Here's what happens: I notice your extra effort...."
"I appreciate it, and the team's job is much easier...."
"Our case for the new hire is that much stronger...."
"The project stays green, and we dodge a political bullet...."

Step 4: Encourage Effective Future Behavior

In our final step, we either encourage a change in behavior by asking for it (negative feedback), or encourage effective behavior by thanking our direct (positive behavior).

With positive feedback, the direct now has specific understanding of the behavior you're thankful for and the impact it has. With negative feedback, we show them how what they did was ineffective and ask (positively) for them to change in similar situations in the future.

Here are some examples of Step 4 for positive feedback:

"Thanks."
"I appreciate it."
"I appreciate you."
"Keep it up."
"Well done."

In adjusting/negative feedback, all we do is ask the direct to behave differently. All we want is for them to say yes, that they'll handle that situation differently the next time.

Once you and your directs are comfortable with the model, you can also use "What can you do differently?" This is a more difficult question because it requires the direct to come up with an alternative right away. Wait until they're comfortable getting feedback this way before asking them to come up with a specific solution.

Some examples that we've tested and work well include the following:

"Could/can/will you change that?"
"Can you do that differently?"
"What can you do differently?"
"How could that be better?"

Putting It All Together

Here are several examples of all four steps of the model working together.

M: Can I give you some feedback?
D: Sure.
M: When you're ahead of schedule on Project X, I can focus on other areas that need my attention. Thanks.

■ ■ ■

M: Can I make an observation?

D: Of course.

M: When you respond politely after the customer insults you, the customer calls to thank me for your professionalism. Well done.

■ ■ ■

M: Can I share something with you?

D: Yep.

M: When you promise me the data yesterday but miss that deadline, I have to scramble to put everything together. Can you work on that please?

If you'll practice some, you can deliver feedback in 10–15 seconds. At our Effective Manager conferences, we give feedback to five or six people in a row, and our presenters can do it in 40–45 seconds. It's quick, it's easy, and directs warm to it quickly.

Shouldn't I Engage in a Discussion or "Dialog" with My Directs?

No, no, no, no, please, no.

Having a "conversation with your direct" as a form of feedback has been popular for several years. But we've been gathering data about feedback for the past 20 plus years, and all the data we ever gathered do not support it in any way.

You'll note, by the way, that nobody suggests that we should have a conversation or a discussion or a dialog when we give positive feedback. This alone tells us all we need to know about this popular myth. They're only talking about negative feedback because they don't understand that feedback is *both* positive and negative.

Feedback "Conversations" Are Not Supported by the Data

As we said, Manager Tools has been gathering data about feedback for more than 20 years. We've never seen any positive correlation between "discussions" or "dialogs" about mistakes in any form with improved performance. And we tried because managers and HR departments mistakenly believed it would be valuable. In fact, as we will share, conversations, discussions, and dialogs *always were negatively correlated with improved performance.*

These data are not based on an extrapolation of an experiment using college kids who volunteered for it to make some additional money. We recently laughed at a widely reprinted study that purported to show that managers could require too much reporting on status of projects, and cautioned against micromanagement.

How was this conclusion deduced? We quote here from one article, which got to the heart of the data.

> *The study's findings derive from a behavioral experiment in which 87 university students recruited from undergraduate business courses volunteered to take a 30-minute, multiple-choice test of critical reasoning administered via computer. As the students proceeded through the questions, all could monitor on their computer screens the passage of time and their total correct answers. But there were two important differences in the instructions participants received. About half were instructed to report their scores to an in-person test administrator every ten minutes, while the remainder were asked to report only once, at the 30-minute-test's conclusion. Reporting involved simply raising one's hand for the administrator to check one's screen and write down the number of correct answers, something done without comment.*

The idea that the conclusions about this data from college students could be extrapolated to say anything about a professional

workplace are risible to the point of hilarity. What comparison do we have in our modern workplaces to having to report every 10 minutes? The comparison of this study to a high optempo workplace, with projects with 10, 20, or 30 different professionals contributing deliverables, some spanning several days or even weeks, is the stuff of fever dreams. *Every 10 minutes?* Seriously?

The data we have gathered about feedback comes from *managers giving feedback*. In the workplace. To their own directs. About real work. Not simulations. Not practice scenarios. Not actors, in an experiment.

One of the first bits of data we got related to "discussions" for feedback comes, interestingly enough, from our introduction of the first step of our feedback model, "Can I give you some feedback/ Can I share something with you/Can I have a word/Can I make a suggestion?"

Before we added that question—and we did not know it would work—our model had three steps. Essentially, the manager just said, directly, without lead-in, "When you do X, here's what happens/ thanks/can you do that differently?" In some cases, they had a short lead in, like, "I want to share something," or "By the way." But they weren't asking.

When managers used that model, the average exchange with a direct took close to 50 seconds—one minute. This was the average in three different studies, across multiple companies, utilizing data from more than 4,500 managers over a 4-month period.

That might sound good—less than a minute. And that was better than our previous model, not that that previous model included a "discussion" of "what happened." But managers also told us during their individual and group out-briefs that the lack of an intro *caused more discussion about the past behavior and took away from the focus on future effectiveness*. Managers told us that directs were caught

unaware, asked for clarification more often, and wanted to revisit their misguided behavior. *And they also told us that having to take nearly a minute on average to discuss a simple mistake was causing them to give less feedback.*

So, we added our initial question. When we did, a great deal of the directs' interest in "discussions" went away. *And the average length of a feedback instance dropped to 27 seconds.* Managers were overjoyed with this! We had cut the time they had to spend giving feedback—*both positive and negative*—in half.

To make sure that the only outcome wasn't "manager joy," we measured amounts of feedback given in manager groups who used the three-step model versus the four-step feedback model. These test groups were smaller—about 500 managers using the new four-step model, and 700 using the three-step model. Managers using the four-step model continued to benefit from shorter interactions—around 30 seconds in our first test (and repeated a second time with similar results).

They also reported giving more feedback. Luckily, we were also asking directs how much feedback they were getting. This is always the standard—not what managers say they did, but what directs say they heard. *The four-step managers were giving 30% more feedback than the three-step model users.*

We think this proves that the *longer it takes a manager to give feedback, for any reason, the less feedback they give.* Further, the data also showed that managers who gave more feedback gave more positive feedback. Managers who gave less feedback gave less positive feedback. Managers who gave less negative feedback didn't compensate in any significant number—in any study we ever did—by giving more positive feedback.

Think about that the next time some popular guidance suggests you should sit down and talk to your directs for 4–5 minutes to "hear their side" or "hear them out" about a mistake they made.

Discussions About Intent Are Worthless

Managers whom we haven't trained on our feedback model tell us all the time that their directs "get defensive" when they are given negative feedback. They describe the reasons why they did what they did.

Since this happens—*because it's supposed to*—in most feedback dialog guidance, it's worth unpacking.

First, note that the manager describes this situation as the direct "getting defensive." That's a big clue that they're not thinking about separating intent, motivation, or emotions from behavior. That means there's a much greater likelihood that the feedback itself wasn't exclusively behavioral. If you give feedback about your directs' motivations, intents, beliefs, values, or emotions, there is almost no model that will help you be effective. You will almost always get pushback because, as we said earlier, directs know that you don't "know" what their thoughts and feelings are.

What's more, we would argue that it isn't even really feedback. Telling someone what their thoughts or beliefs or emotions are isn't helpful; it is a personal attack. It's certainly not professional.

But even if the manager thinks it is feedback, when we attack a direct, why be surprised that they defend themselves? Consider this: I hit you—physically hit you—and then you hit back, defending yourself. How funny would it sound if I then said, "Hey, you're getting defensive!"

If your performance communications are about anything but behavior, it's highly likely that your directs are going to feel attacked. And if they're attacked, they're going to defend themselves. And then we're going to say they're being defensive, blaming them for their reasonable response.

That challenge aside, the discussion concept of feedback has at its heart learning about what your direct was thinking or trying or

feeling when they did whatever it was that they did. In some models, we managers are "encouraged to probe ethically" or "engage in a productive discussion."

Why is the heart of the dialog model misguided? Because your dialog will inevitably end up discussing your direct's intent. But—and we realize this will sound harsh in today's world—your directs' intent isn't relevant to the organization's needs. We can try to illustrate this countercultural point with a few examples.

Suppose your company produced a product that didn't sell well. That lack of sales success is product *feedback* from the marketplace, the society your company exists to serve. If intent mattered, then why doesn't your CEO go on TV and ask people to buy anyway, because your firm "meant well" or "had good intentions"? CEOs don't because they know intentions don't matter, results (which are organizational behaviors) do.

Here's another example we mentioned earlier: Have you made any mistakes in the last month? We bet you have—we sure have. Now ask yourself: Did you intend to make any of them? Of course you didn't. You had good, solid, reasonable intentions. And yet things didn't go well.

Do you expect forgiveness? Does your boss send you a note and say, don't worry about the mistake, you meant well? If you make a lot of these mistakes, and your results suffer, will you get a raise "because you meant well"?

Of course you won't, because results matter, not intentions, not reasons, not ideas. Results.

Now, you might say, *But hey folks, I see this dialog/discussion thing differently. I'm not trying to give them a chance to justify their thinking—I get that their outcome was wrong, even if they meant well. What I'm trying to do is learn about their thinking, so I can see where upstream they might have gone wrong. That way, they can self-diagnose when they're going wrong and do it better next time.*

We applaud the way you're thinking, but it's still misguided. We know what we're saying isn't popular, but, alas, our data show we're right, and good intentions don't win the day.

The fundamental problem with this approach is your organization doesn't want you solving all of your directs' problems. We know you probably think of yourself as a problem solver, and there's nothing wrong with that. But from your organization's perspective, *problems are most economically solved at the level at which they are created.* You're a more expensive resource than your direct, so you solving their problems isn't what your organization wants from you. Your organization wants you to do your job, and point out the miss, and ask for better, *and have your directs solve their own problems.*

This is not to say that you shouldn't solve *any* of your directs' problems. There are some you should. But your bias should be toward solving only the biggest and thorniest, and *letting them solve all the rest of their problems themselves.* If you have a dialog with them whenever they make a mistake, you're inevitably pulled into a discussion of what they did and why, and you'll be spending too much time (and therefore organizational money) solving problems they need to learn to solve themselves.

Before you get worried: we're not telling you to feed your directs to the wolves. It's okay to coach, to suggest, to encourage, to recommend things for your direct to think about, or do. But if you do this every time you give negative feedback, you will be solving too many of their problems, and spending too much of your time doing it. And you'll give less feedback because you'll have less time to do so.

The way to address your desire to help is to decouple your responsibility to give feedback from your desire to help, teach, and train. *Give feedback first.* Then encourage them to ask questions or come back for help. If you see a confused look on their face, ask them if they need a few minutes of help.

Even this simple decoupling of your responsibility and your desire, feedback and help, will save you a great deal of time. It will also help your directs by making them responsible for their own development. As the Montessori School slogan goes, "The parents who continue to tie the shoes of the children who can do it themselves are just in the way." But this won't happen if you see all negative feedback situations as a chance to dialog with them.

Discussions About What Has Already Happened Are Worthless

The purpose of feedback is not to achieve agreement about what happened in the past. This isn't a popular thing to say these days, but it is nonetheless true. The dialog model attempts to recreate the past, by going through what has already happened and analyzing and dissecting it.

The purpose of all feedback (both negative and positive, despite what common wisdom seems to imply) is to encourage effective behavior in the future. And our point there is that guidance whose purpose is the analysis of the past is too far afield from the future-based purpose of feedback.

Yes, analysis of the past can be helpful to see what went wrong. And your direct can very likely do that on their own if you're giving feedback often enough, or you can ask them if they need help on some occasions, but not all.

Asking for Reasons Reinforces the Wrong Things

Many proponents of replacing feedback with dialog encourage managers to probe the reasons why our directs engaged in whatever behavior produced the wrong results. This is a mistake.

Don't ask purveyors of dialog what their purpose is: you'll get 100 different answers, and lots of them filled with psychobabble. They're about "encouraging a flexible mind," "addressing the difficulties they are facing," or "connecting with purpose." Believe

us, your organization probably says a lot of those things in press releases, but it's not what your organization cares about.

When we talk about the past, we're in the wrong time zone. When we ask a direct for reasons, we're aiming at the wrong target.

Your directs will have good reasons (just like you have good reasons when you make mistakes). But now your direct has been reminded of all the good reasons she had for the action she took that produced an ineffective or inefficient result. You'll discover that in many cases, this dialog will *strengthen* your direct's belief that she was right because she had good reasons. Directs will confuse intent with action, and action with results.

Be careful about talking with your direct about their reasons. We don't have any data on this, but we have seen it often: the direct believes that the discussion is about their justification, and not the necessity of their different future behavior. Remember: all feedback is about future behavior, not past reasons.

Root Cause Analysis and Feedback Are Different

There is a particular strain of "dialog" feedback worth special mention. It's particularly true of technical and engineering managers, and in our experience, software developers especially so. It's called "root cause analysis."

Root cause analysis is an important and powerful skill and tool. Many managers' jobs require it, and they're good at it, and they enjoy it. Managers dig through a problem, sometimes with a direct, and determine what really and truly went wrong, in a determined and fundamental way. In many roles, like software development, it takes skill and insight and diligence to truly isolate and identify a problem.

At a very simplistic level, the rationale for feedback and root cause analysis are similar: something went wrong, and it needs

to be fixed. Alas, root cause analysis and feedback can feel quite similar, but they are incredibly different. Root cause analysis by definition is a detailed review of past actions. It is specifically focused on isolating the original offense to the system and then trying to correct it. But feedback is most assuredly not that. It is about future behavior.

Nevertheless, far too many hardware and software (and regular) engineering managers approach far too many situations as opportunities for root cause analysis (RCA). This is a mistake. Most subordinate mistakes or errors in every field, technical or otherwise, are opportunities for feedback and not RCA.

We believe this tendency toward RCA versus feedback is based on a combination of factors. We believe one of the big factors is software engineering managers used to be software engineers and still do some software engineering. Often in their world, technical prowess and better coding skills are much more prized than managerial skills. So, the manager is drawn toward RCA rather than a more expedient delivery of feedback.

There are two fundamental reasons to choose feedback over RCA in the vast majority of situations. First, you don't have time to do RCA as often as you want. If it is your go-to tool, you'll be using it a lot and won't have time for anything else. Most mistakes, errors, failures, misses, and delays are smaller and better served by feedback.

Second, when you help your directs solve their problems, you incentivize them to bring you problems. Problems in organizations are best solved at the level where they were created. Yes, sometimes you need to help, but it's not what you're paid for. Root cause work is heavy lifting and not called for in most situations.

When engineering managers tell us, "We can't use feedback; we use root cause analysis," that's like saying, "I don't want a bike; I already have a tank." Different scope, different scale, different cost, different results. And never use a tank to run an errand.

When Should I Give Feedback?

Give feedback to your directs *as soon as practicable,* but no longer than a week after the behavior. What does "as soon as practicable" mean? It means as soon as you can deliver it briefly, politely, and for the private use of your direct.

Before we give you some examples, let's address a common misconception: "immediate" feedback. It would be great if we could give feedback immediately. But the vast majority of the time you can't.

Pretend one of your directs gives a great briefing during your staff meeting. It is short, complete, and accurate. You want to give her positive feedback. *But you clearly can't give it right in the middle of the meeting, which is what "immediate" would demand.* It would be rude to others, and it would violate the rule that feedback is given for the private use of the recipient.

The problem with immediate feedback is that there are far too many managers who use it as an excuse to dodge their feedback responsibilities. They say, "Well, the ideal feedback is immediate, and I can almost never give immediate feedback, so I'm not going to do it." Technically, they are right that immediate is ideal, but it's so rare in virtually all situations that *it's not a standard, only a goal.*

These managers are making the perfect the enemy of the good, and not doing something because they can't do it the perfect way. But nothing any of us ever do is perfect. Immediate feedback was *never* the standard for professional feedback. Even National Football League players only get detailed feedback (on every play they played, in slow motion, with their coach!) 24 hours after a game.

So, if you get a chance to give immediate feedback, do so. Just don't sacrifice our other components of effectiveness: behavioral, specific, polite, brief, and focused on future behavior.

In our example of our direct presenting, we couldn't give the feedback during the meeting. But we could do it after the meeting ends, in the meeting room itself. We could also do it walking with

her to her office or the restroom or another meeting. We could do it kneeling by their cubicle chair, a few minutes after the meeting. And certainly we could do it in our next One on One because that's very likely less than a week away.

These situations and locations to deliver feedback might surprise you. Too many managers incorrectly believe that "feedback must be given in private." That's not only inaccurate, it makes managers make bad choices about when and where to give feedback.

Notice that our guidance is not "in private," but rather, "for the private use of." You don't have to bring your direct into your office and close the door to achieve "privacy." ***In fact, bringing your direct into your office and closing the door to achieve "privacy" to "protect the direct," is almost always a terrible idea.***

When you bring someone into your office and close the door, you're making feedback into too big of a deal. Feedback is *not* "an important conversation," about "an issue" or "a concern." Feedback is simply a brief conversation with fellow professionals about their future performance. The vast majority of feedback is about small things: being on time, meeting a standard, being late, failing to check someone's references. These are not conversations that require the kind of solemnity a closed door implies. Total privacy sends a message of importance, even seriousness, which isn't appropriate for giving performance feedback.

What's more, managers who overdo "privacy" surely only do it for negative feedback, while giving positive feedback not in private. But this just underscores the idea that negative feedback is different, and more important, and gives it a secretive and serious tone that isn't appropriate (and will take longer, and reduce the amount of feedback you give). By the way, we have a popular podcast episode, "Praise in Public, Criticize in Private Is WRONG," addressing this common wisdom that is misleading for managers.

Let's get back to our example. Believe it or not, you can give feedback in the meeting room, after the meeting ends. Just ask the direct to stick around for a moment. Maybe they're sitting next to

you, there's noise in the room as people leave, and you can just lean over, lower your voice, and say:

> *Can I give you some feedback?*
>   <Yes>
>   *When you give a short and complete presentation in such a short time slot, it shows me you were well prepared. Well done.*
>   <Thanks boss.>

We have timed that entire exchange, and it takes 10 seconds.

Maybe you're not sitting next to this direct. As you and she are leaving, you sidle up to her and say the same thing, in a low voice, as both of you walk out of the room. You could catch up to her in the hallway—same low voice, privately to her, 10 seconds. You may not catch up to her, but you could find her at her cubicle. You could kneel down, and quietly say the same words, in the same 10 seconds.

Imagine if your boss gave you positive feedback like that. Wouldn't you appreciate it?

But what if it was negative feedback? Well, we've talked to tens of thousands of directs over the years, and they all say basically the same thing: "Those scenarios are WAY better than having to go into someone's office with the door closed and "have a conversation" about "an issue." That doesn't feel private, it feels "secret," and no direct likes that.

Giving feedback this way, without all kinds of formality, lowers the perception of its significance. It eliminates the drama. *And directs love it.*

How Long Is Too Long to Wait?

Now that we've learned how quickly we should try to give feedback, let's address the other end of the time spectrum: How long can we wait?

One week. Don't give feedback, positive or negative, about anything that happened over a week ago. Your memory isn't that good, usually. We live our professional lives in weekly increments. If we asked you to remember yesterday, you would probably do fine (though many are surprised that they can't even recreate their yesterday to a "fine" standard). If we asked you what you were doing over the next two to four days into the future, you'd also have a pretty good handle on it.

But if we asked you what your schedule was like 10 days ago, you wouldn't be able to be at all specific without reviewing your calendar. And if we asked you what your calendar looked like 10 days from now, you couldn't accurately answer without, again, looking at your calendar.

And your directs are living the same kind of professional life you are. These time parameters apply to them too.

Why is this important? Three reasons. First, you don't want to have an argument/disagreement/misunderstanding with your direct about what actually happened 10 days ago. Giving feedback within a week makes that likelihood a less than 1% chance, based on our data trying all kinds of different timelines and scenarios.

Avoiding an argument/misunderstanding is important when giving feedback, obviously. You're talking about someone else's performance. You're their boss, and you have role power over them. You might be able to brush off a difference of opinion, but they won't. As the saying goes, you control their addiction to food, clothing and shelter. And, as always, for perspective, consider the Middleman Test: How would *you* feel if your boss gave you some feedback from 10 days ago and she got the specifics wrong? Whether it was good or bad, you wouldn't appreciate it. It would feel sloppy and unprofessional. Whether your recall of events or her recall of events is accurate doesn't even really matter, if you think it through.

Second, *the purpose of feedback is effective **future** behavior*. If you're basing your feedback on an inaccurate recall of what happened in

the past, how much should your directs respect your desire for their future behavior?

Third, if you waited 2 weeks to give the feedback, directs tell us they have to wonder whether you really mean to focus on their future behavior so far after the event. They've lost 2 weeks of opportunities to try to either repeat (for positive feedback) or change (for negative feedback) their behavior.

And here's a bonus reason not to wait more than a week. Over and over again in the past 3 decades, when we have asked directs about how feedback feels, and its effectiveness for them, they have told us that when bosses wait too long, "it feels like punishment" in the event of negative feedback. Roughly quoting one commenter who summed up a plurality of views: "It feels like he waited on purpose, and if he cared, he would've told me sooner so I could be careful about this."

Should I Wait for a Pattern?

There's one other piece of guidance about delivering feedback that relates to timing that's important. We only give feedback about the most recent occurrence of a behavior you've noticed.

Suppose someone was late to a meeting. They're one of your better directs, and you decide to give them some grace. This is completely reasonable in many situations, and we have a podcast about it (There's a Cast for That™).

But then the next week they're late again. You decide to give them feedback, **and to mention both instances.**

This is a mistake. It's a mistake first because you already gave them grace on the first instance, and now you're taking back that grace because they did it again. Directs feel like you were saving it up, just in case it happened again.

The other reason this is a mistake is because mentioning both mistakes makes your feedback much more about the past and their pattern rather than their future behavior.

And this guidance applies whether you gave them grace or not on that first instance: **do not wait for a pattern to appear before giving feedback!**

Waiting for a pattern is a classic feedback mistake of managers the world over. We've seen it for 40 years. When we've asked managers about it, they say, well, they wanted to be absolutely sure there was a problem. They wanted to have a compelling case that the direct wouldn't be able to squirm or argue their way out of.

But these rationales are all about the manager. Even though this approach might make you feel better, ask yourself what feelings this will engender in your direct. Actually, you don't have to, because we asked directs. And what it feels like to a direct is they're a defendant on trial. They feel that their boss has intentionally withheld feedback in order to make it easier for the manager to give it.

Let's apply the Middleman Test again: How would you feel if your boss watched you make a series of similar mistakes over a period of weeks, did nothing about it on purpose, and waited until he had a compelling case to "prove" to you that you had a "problem"?

So, bottom line: if your direct makes a mistake and you want to provide some grace, do so, and good on you. But if it happens again, only mention the second one. The grace you gave still applies.

How Does Feedback "Sound"?

Here's something we've learned that has surprised a lot of managers: *the most effective positive and negative feedback* **sound identical**. Remember, our purpose is on the right, in the future, and it's a positive future. That purpose is the same whether it's positive or negative feedback.

Let's be crystal clear about what this means because most managers don't understand this and get it totally wrong. **Even when you give negative feedback, our data show that you will get the best results when you deliver it with a positive tone.**

We don't growl. We don't hint at bad outcomes. We don't raise our eyebrows implying some hidden future difficulty. *We focus on the positive outcome we want in the future.* **How could we claim that the purpose of our feedback is a positive future and then deliver it with a negative tone?**

Do you like it when you have done your best and something turns out wrong and your boss makes it into a big deal and hints at it being a big problem?

Here's a good but quite counterintuitive way to think about feedback from one of our founding partners, Mike Auzenne: "I only give (negative) feedback when I can chuckle about it." He knows that if he can't chuckle about it, there's a chance he's going to deliver it with some negativity, perhaps even with some judgment, or some mild anger. He's learned that while it might feel good to vent, in the long run it's ineffective.

If you aren't in a mindset that you can chuckle about a mistake, you're not in the right mindset to deliver negative feedback. And we hate to say it, but considering our earlier comments about not waiting longer than a week to deliver feedback, if it takes you longer than a week to be in the right, positive mindset, you should reconsider being a manager entirely.

Mike's approach reminds us of a manager who was really struggling with the MT Feedback Model. He had had incredible success with One on Ones. He was surprised to hear what his directs shared, and he was getting to know what made them tick much better. He was also stunned that even though he was worried about the time it would take, he seemed to have even more free time than he thought.

But what came next was sad. The manager told us how he was *really* struggling giving feedback. He said, "They all recoil in fear *every time*. Morale has *plummeted*. One on Ones have gone downhill too. It's a disaster."

We asked, "Why don't you walk me through what you're doing when you give feedback?" It's been our experience coaching

managers that feedback in theory is almost always different from feedback in practice.

He roleplayed with us to show what he was doing.

"Can I give you some feedback?"

<Yep!>

"When you behave like THAT, let me tell you something. You make me angry QUICK. I think to myself, if THAT happens a couple of times, you're a big problem for me, a problem I'm not happy about. What are you gonna do about this?"

Wow! His demeanor was VERY direct. There was meanness, power, and intimidation in his delivery.

This was not well-delivered feedback. Sure, he asked, sure he said "feedback." He said, "When you," and he ended with a question about the future. But it's still not Manager Tools feedback because it violates the purpose of feedback, to encourage effective behavior.

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you think about delivering feedback.

Question 1: Am I Angry?

If you're angry, don't give feedback. Full Stop.

If your directs even sense that you're angry, they are *not* going to be receptive, even if they *say* they are by answering yes to Step 1. And even if they *are* in a receptive mindset, you're not in a delivering mindset. Your directs are not going to be encouraged when they think you're angry.

And look, you're not Brad Pitt. You're not Meryl Streep. If you're angry, you won't be able to act your way out of it. You can't fool your team. They know when you're angry.

If you're struggling with delivering feedback—in terms of less than great responses from your directs—and you're a high energy person or a perfectionist who gets angry about little things, this is an important question to ask yourself before you give feedback.

If your directs know you're angry, the feedback is about you and how you feel now. It's not about them and their future behavior. That violates the purpose of feedback, both in terms of encouragement and in terms of behavior.

And even more simply: it won't work. Apply the Middleman Test, and you'll agree.

Question 2: Do I Want to Remind or Punish?

If our purpose is to remind our direct of their mistake, we're not in alignment with feedback's purpose. If we're giving feedback, then our purpose is to encourage effective future behavior. Yes, we have to mention the past, but that's not our purpose. We're not trying to point out the mistake.

Question 3: Can I Let It Go?

If you can't let it go, we recommend you *do* let it go. We've found over and over that managers who feel an urge to deliver feedback are doing it for the wrong reasons. We don't want to confuse the need for delivering feedback quickly with an *urge* to do so. The manager who really believes in the purpose of feedback, and wants to focus on future behavior, isn't in a rush to give feedback.

If we're rushing, it's possible we're not in the right mental place, that we're not "in the heart of feedback." It's likely this delivery is about how *we* feel rather than what's good for the direct.

If we can't pause, we may have too much energy around this instance to deliver feedback that will encourage effective behavior in the future.

Maybe Delay or Defer

What do we do if we don't pass the check-up questions?

First, if you do pass, go ahead and deliver the feedback. If you're not angry, if it's not about the past or about punishment, and if you can let it go, then go ahead.

But if we don't pass, what do we do? **We either delay or defer.**

Delay means we hold off for a bit. Maybe we get over being angry. Maybe we realize that in our haste, we were thinking in a sloppy way, and we're back on track toward the heart of feedback, where our purpose is to encourage effective behavior. And then we realize we probably could let it go. . . so it's okay to have that 15-second feedback conversation, after a delay of a few hours, or overnight.

Delay is okay. It's only one piece of feedback, and a few hours won't hurt.

And suppose we pause, and we realize a few hours later that we're still not in the right place. We're still angry, or for any other reason we're just not where we should be.

That's fine. Defer completely. Let this instance go completely. Don't give feedback on this instance of behavior.

It's okay. Remember that feedback is about the future, right? Suppose we don't give some negative feedback, and then, for whatever reason, the behaviors we were going to address don't occur again. Seriously, what's wrong with that? Why don't we just take credit for the magical change? Doing nothing worked. That's like a self-licking ice cream cone: we didn't do a thing, and we got what we wanted.

And what if delaying doesn't work? What if the behavior comes back? Sounds like it's simply time for to give some feedback. Think of your delay as a grace period, and only give feedback about the latest instance. And do that checkup again before you deliver.

What Do I Do If One of My Directs Pushes Back or Refuses Feedback?

What do you do when a direct disagrees with your feedback? We think many newer managers—and particularly newer managers

who are rookies with the feedback model—are stunned into a kind of muteness when this happens. The answer is what we call *the shot across the bow*.

The shot across the bow concept of handling defensive responses to feedback is based on the naval concept of shooting across the bow of an opposing vessel.

When a Navy or Coast Guard ship wants to warn someone, they fire a "shot across their bow." They don't fire a warning shot, just randomly into the air. A shot across the bow is a specific thing.

Two things make the shot across the bow distinctive. First, in order to shoot across the enemy's bow, the enemy ship must be in range. The shot across its bow shows them that they can be reached. Second, because the aiming point is a specific place—forward of amidships, behind the prow—when you shoot there, you prove that you can hit what you aim at.

Basically, a shot across the bow says, "I can reach you, and I can hit you if I want to."

Don't get too wrapped up in the militaristic nature of the analogy. It's just a way of thinking about the conflict that has arisen when you are trying to deliver some professional feedback.

The analogy works this way: when your direct gets defensive, *you needn't do anything at all about it because you have already fired a shot across their bow*. They likely know they're in the wrong, and they know you're aware of what they did. If it continues, you'll likely be back to talk to them again. Enough said.

Remember, the purpose of feedback is encouragement *about the future*. If your direct becomes defensive, they're being defensive about what happened, why it happened, or that it didn't happen. **These are all arguments about the past.**

And who thinks arguments are encouraging?

You initiated the conversation, and your purpose was a request about the future. You meant well, and you care about your direct.

And now your direct wants to argue about the past. Why should you give up on your purpose—the future—in order to go back into the past?

Even if you were to win this argument that you didn't start, it's an argument about the past, and the purpose of your conversation is the future. And if you delivered it politely, how professional is it of our direct that they are resisting?

So if your stuck-in-the-past direct won't allow you to achieve your original purpose, don't honor their request that you join them in the past. It was your conversation to begin with, and every once in a while it's good to use a little role power.

In other words, we recommend *you give in* when a direct argues or gets defensive.

You read that right. Don't get drawn into a discussion about who said what, what they meant, what you saw, what they actually DID, who reported to you, how they have different priorities, how you don't have their technical skills, or how they were trying something new. Do not discuss with them what happened. Don't even *say* that you have already decided what happened because there is no discussion about what they did that is about the future.

Once you've given the feedback, and they've pushed back, pause, smile, apologize, and walk away. You've made your point. Don't let them try to win their argument simply because you've shown them the courtesy of letting go.

It might sound like this:

Manager: Can I give you some feedback?
Direct: Sure, what is it?
M: When you're late to staff meeting, we have to rearrange the agenda. Can you do that?
D: Geez! Is that all you ever see, mistakes and lateness? Traffic was horrible! My email wasn't downloading! Gimme a break!

M: (Backing away, smiling) You know what, let's forget it. No worries.

The crux of the matter is this: *Does your direct change his behavior in the future?* He's much more likely to if you avoid the arguments he's throwing around.

"It's Too Positive" and Systemic Feedback

Many managers are surprised by how our feedback model focuses on positivity. Some managers say it won't work "because it's too positive." To us it's funny when they say it because most then also admit that their manager could not be too positive when she gave *them* feedback.

The crux of their complaint is simple, and understandable: since I'm not punishing, or threatening, and I'm being positive even when I'm giving negative feedback, what would keep directs from just continuing to do what they're doing? If there's no consequences for poor performance, why would they change?

Before we get to why the model works, and how directs respond, let's address the assumption at the heart of the resistance: *when directs make a mistake, they must be threatened or punished to change their behavior for the better*.

There's too much wrong with this thinking to address it in detail, but we think it's so wrong on its face that most people would say, no, you don't need to prove to me that that approach is wrong. I know better than that. There are plenty of directs who want their boss to treat them reasonably and respectfully. The fact is, *the vast majority of directs are this way*.

And we'd guess you're one of them. Does *your* boss need to threaten you to get you to change? We'd bet a good portion of managers who read this book will say, well, they certainly did threaten me, and at times punish me, but they sure didn't need to.

The positivity in the MT Feedback Model is not some sort of new-aged, newfangled idea. It's just respect, dignity, and trust. Frankly, we'd rather be wrong pursuing that (though our data show we're not only not wrong, we're seriously right) than be right while pursuing a model of threats, intimidation, and punishment just because some managers think that that's what is needed.

Let's look at some data about how effective the MT Feedback Model is. First, remember that the complaint that the model was too positive was based on the assumption that without punishment or threats, directs would not change their behavior when given negative feedback.

Our data show (this is from two studies looking at more than 7,000 managers and over 20,000 directs) that **93% of directs change their behavior to become effective** *after just one piece of negative feedback using the MT Feedback Model.*

And it gets better. We suppose there are managers who aren't satisfied with having a 10-second conversation that is effective 93% of the time. So, the data goes on to say that another 4%—getting us to 97% of the total—need only one more instance—*a total of two 10-second conversations*—before they change their behavior for the better. One more instance of feedback captures another 2%.

This means that, on average over a very large sample size, we need to give only three instances of feedback using the model to change 99% of the ineffective behaviors. Thirty seconds of positive conversation, no threats, no punishment, for a 99% success rate.

We always thought that was good enough. But some managers persisted with this line of defense. So, we decided to develop something to address that last one percent.

It's called Systemic Feedback. You'll probably never have to use it, but if you do, it's well tested and works beautifully. And if you already know how to use our model, it's easy.

Say you have a direct, Austin, who has trouble with timeliness. He was late to staff meeting Monday afternoon, and you gave him

some quick, positive-toned negative feedback. On Wednesday, he turned in his team report a couple of hours late, and only after you went and reminded him. Again, you gave him feedback, in the same tone, in 10–15 seconds. (Lateness with work product is the same behavior as personal lateness to meetings.)

But his lateness continues. On Friday you have to chase him down for his weekly status report. The following Wednesday he is quite late to a staff briefing which included your boss. The following Monday his budget forecast was late by 3 hours.

In each of these cases, you gave him professionally delivered negative feedback. In the Systemic Feedback Model, **we do not change our tone in any way for any of these instances. Despite the fact that we are not getting effective behavior, these are still small things, and we're continuing to trust that he will change. We do not escalate.**

It's important to note here that getting the fourth part of the model right is *critically important* to using Systemic Feedback. When we give negative feedback using the model, we ask a question like, "Can you work on that?" "Can you do that better?" "Could you change that?"

The reason this question is so important is that *it requires a response from our direct*. You might not have noticed it before, but with negative feedback, because we're talking about our direct's future behavior, we ask them to make the change because they're the one controlling their behavior.

You might think it would be easier to "just tell them what to do." Actually, while it may be easier for you, it's less effective overall. The reason, as we hope we've made clear, is that your organization wants problems solved at the level they're created rather than at higher levels.

Now let's get back to using the model. Remember, with negative feedback we ask for a change in the direct's future behavior, *and they agree*. You won't be able to proceed to Systemic Feedback if you haven't asked your direct each time to change or improve his

behavior. (Remember, we don't have to worry about directs saying, "No," when you ask them to change their behavior. It's so rare it's not worth worrying about.)

Now let's fast forward in our scenario. Austin continues to struggle with timeliness, so much so that you have now given him, over a three-week period, six polite instances of negative feedback.

You'll note we said six instances over three weeks. If those same issues with lateness had happened six times over *6 months,* that's not a systemic problem. Everybody is probably late six times or more with work deadlines or being on time themselves over a 6-month period.

And now our direct is late with a report again. You have to go find him, and after 30 minutes he comes by, apologizes, and gives you the report. You thank him, and ask him to sit down, and give him Systemic Feedback, politely and professionally:

> *Austin, can I give you some feedback?*
> <Sure.> [We have interviewed many recipients of Systemic Feedback, and they all say that at this point they were expecting negative feedback about the late report.]
> *When you promise me repeatedly that you are going to change your behavior regarding timeliness, and then you don't make the change you promised, the problem we have changes from being on time to one of honesty, or integrity. You've told me six times in the last couple of weeks that you would start being on time, and you have not done so. The question now is one of trust and not timeliness. I can handle someone on my team who is a little late every now and again. But I can't tolerate someone whom I can't trust, someone who promises things to colleagues and then repeatedly fails to deliver. What can you do about this much more serious problem?*
> <I promise I'll start being on time.> [Delivered very shakily.]
> *I don't think you're seeing the problem. I didn't give you feedback about timeliness. We're past that, at least for now. I'm saying you're not being honest with your commitments. People rely on us here.*

I rely on you. But lately you're not reliable. You say one thing and then do another. Again, what can you do to regain my trust regarding your commitments?

As you might imagine, this conversation has a dramatic effect. In the vast majority of cases, directs recognize their error, both in terms of promising, and the underlying behavior that started it all, and make serious changes quickly.

You'll probably never have to use our Systemic Feedback Model, but you can rest easy that the regular Feedback Model works exceptionally well, and in that one in a thousand chance that it doesn't, you've got a powerful tool in your back pocket.

What If My Direct Doesn't Know What to Do?

If you directs don't know what to do to change their behavior, the feedback model still works beautifully. We've tested it.

We often get told by managers that one of the reasons they don't want to *ask* their directs to change rather than just tell them what to do is that their directs *often don't know what to do*. This is a fair concern, but applying it broadly to most directs has always seemed to suggest a manager who has a really low opinion of her directs.

That said, some directs truly don't know what to do. We didn't train them, they don't have a lot of experience, it's their first week on the job, they've never been in this situation, or they don't know company processes or systems. All entirely possible and reasonable.

So, you notice a direct has made a mistake. We can't always assume they don't know what to do because that would mean every mistake requires training, or much more explicit instructions, which would probably cause accusations of micromanagement. None of this is feasible or sustainable.

So, we give our direct negative feedback, and we ask him to change, and he says yes. But we're smart enough to notice a look on his face that suggests he is unsure.

At this point, it's completely okay (and smart) to ask, "Do you need some help?" And if they're open to it, make some suggestions. "Look, the way I always did it was like this. You don't have to do it my way, but that might get you started." Or "Ask around on the team. If that doesn't do it, let's discuss it in our next One on One. We've all been there. It's okay to not know. But it's not okay to not know and not ask for help."

Now, remember here: you gave this direct negative feedback first. You know that negative feedback takes at most 30 seconds. So, when you ask if they need help, and they say yes, you may literally not have enough time to have the conversation.

That's okay. Just say, "Good, I'm glad you're willing to ask for help. And, unfortunately I have to get to a meeting. Take a look at my calendar, find 10 minutes on it, and schedule some time for us to talk. Happy to do it."

The point here is that if every time someone makes a mistake or doesn't perform up to standards and we have to train them or teach them, *we will run out of time to do the rest of our job*. In the vast majority of cases—93%!—all we have to do is give some brief, positive-toned feedback, and allow our directs to figure it out.

In those cases where they need help, offer it. But that might take 10 minutes, and if every time something goes wrong we have to spend 10 minutes on it, we're never going to get anything else done.

The MT Feedback Model is not just the most effective feedback tool we've ever tested, it's also the most efficient.

The Real Key to Giving Feedback

We've given you a lot to think about and put into action. But have you noticed that so many of our examples, and the concerns managers have, are about negative feedback? The fear of negative feedback is so great among managers that we generally assume that when we say, "feedback," managers hear "negative feedback." And it's worse than that—pay attention when you read webpages and

articles in the business and management press about feedback—*it's always about negative feedback.*

And That's Wrong

Feedback is both positive and negative. We've tried using different models for positive and negative feedback, and *they have never worked at all.* One of the reasons that our Feedback Model works so well is that it sends a message to our directs that positive and negative feedback are basically the same thing. Even if you never understand that all feedback of any type is about future behavior, directs say that a manager who is willing to be positive and polite when giving negative feedback is priceless.

There's so much modern focus on negative feedback that popular guidance misses a beautiful thing about treating positive and negative feedback the same.

If you want to be able to give more negative feedback, and have the negative feedback you give be received more positively, **just give more positive feedback.**

That's all you have to do. When you give more positive feedback, you'll discover a number of things. First, you'll get better at seeing behavior and connecting it to results. So, you'll be better at delivering feedback generally. You'll feel better about your job because you'll feel like you're doing an important part of it well. You'll feel good after giving positive feedback—as will your directs—and so you'll want to do it more.

And believe it or not, when you show your directs that you can see that they are doing many things well, you will gain trust in their eyes, making them more receptive to both positive and negative feedback.

We followed a group of highly effective managers for several years to try to determine things they did differently than other managers, even differently than other managers who were also using the

Manager Tools Trinity. One characteristic we found among these highly impressive managers—at all levels—is their ratio of positive to negative feedback was around **nine to one.**

That's right: the most effective group of managers we ever followed for an extended period gave nine times as much positive feedback as they did negative. When we asked them why, many of them said largely the same things:

> *The vast majority of stuff that happens around here is good. And that's true everywhere, or an organization will fail. If your organization is still around, that means most of the stuff in it is good. A lot of managers think their job is to look for mistakes, but it's not. Our job is to achieve results and keep our people. If all I do is point out mistakes, I'm focusing on the bad in the organization. But 90% of it is good. Nobody likes it when they do nine good things, and the only thing that gets noticed is their one honest mistake. It makes people not trust their manager, and I work really hard to be trusted. Some managers say that we shouldn't reward people for just doing their jobs, but I'm not "rewarding" them. I'm reinforcing what I want. That's how I see positive feedback: reinforcement. When my boss points out something I did well, that's reinforcement for me. Just imagine this one small example of behavior: imagine that everyone in your organization was always on time, rarely missed a deadline, and when they knew they were about to miss, they let you know in advance? How awesome would that organization be, right? Well, then why don't we reinforce those things that would make such a huge difference?*

If you want to get better at negative feedback, give more positive feedback.

8

Giving Feedback to Remote Directs

It's HARDER TO GIVE feedback to remote directs, but not for the reasons most managers fear. Remote Feedback is exactly like in-person feedback. The problem isn't distance; it's behavior.

This is probably a hard pill to swallow, particularly for the managers who are doing One on Ones (O3s) and love them, and are NOT doing feedback and know they should be. The fact is, delivering feedback to remote directs is no different than in-person feedback is. But you're not wrong if you fear it, because it definitely *feels* different, and you'll feel like you have a lot less opportunity to observe behavior and deliver feedback about it.

But the basics are NO different. We're not saying it's any easier if your directs are remote. On the contrary, it's definitely harder to give feedback remotely.

Let's walk through all of the basics of feedback, and then see how those basics work for remote directs. Feedback is a fundamental part of every manager's job. No one disputes that. Most managers—get

that, "most"—readily admit it. There is a thread right now, in 2023, in popular management thinking, that feedback doesn't work, but they're just flat out wrong and playing to the always existent crowd of managers who wants to not do things. And their solutions have all been tested and found wanting, "dialog" being the worst in all eternity, as we mentioned earlier.

But let's be crystal clear about this: if you haven't mastered feedback yet, and now your directs are remote, your learning curve will be longer and slower. The distance reduces the chances you have to give feedback. But it's the same stuff.

Feedback is most effective when the direct trusts the manager. Remote feedback is much, much harder without trust, so please, if you haven't already read Chapters 4, 5, and 6 about O3s, go back and do so now. Yes, all of our tools work *ala carte*, but remote feedback is exceptionally hard without having done MTO3s. Far too many managers think the silver bullet of management is feedback, but it's not: the silver bullet of management is trust, through O3s.

Feedback must be verbal. We've tested verbal and written feedback, many times, in many incarnations. Verbal is roughly four times more effective. And you CAN give verbal feedback when your directs are remote. We've been doing it for 30 years, and it works just fine. Sure, in person is better, but that's not the point here.

Whatever you do, don't use "remote-ness" to switch to written feedback. It will blow up in your face. You'll think it's efficient to be able to just shoot off a quick text or email or Slack. And then you'll get a long response to any negative feedback. What's more, you will have lost all that productivity from your direct while they were responding.

Here's where a lot of managers say, "Well, I'll give positive feedback in writing, and negative feedback verbally." We tried that too, both in person and remotely—it doesn't work. Directs think that the written delivery makes all the negative feedback more important— they don't see it as equivalent to the positive.

Further, as you've seen with our model, positive and negative feedback *sound identical*. You can't do that with some in writing and some verbal.

Now, there's nothing wrong with praise and encouragement in writing. But as we have said many times, Yes, Please Praise (*There's a Cast for That*™)—but praise isn't feedback.

How do we address verbal feedback remotely?

The easiest way to give verbal feedback remotely is during your O3s. As a general rule, most managers wait until their portion of a Zoom or telephone MTO3 to do so. You certainly could deliver feedback during your directs' portion as well. But we would recommend you wait to start doing that until both you and your direct are comfortable with delivering and hearing the model. And the way you do *that* is start giving lots of feedback.

But there are plenty of other opportunities for feedback. Ask a direct to stick around after a Zoom call. Ask someone to stick around after a standup meeting, if you do those. Text or Slack someone and ask them to call you. Don't tell them it's for feedback—they'll assume it's negative! Or just call them on the phone.

All of these work. Many managers will hesitate. But remember the Middleman Test. You have a boss. Don't you want more feedback, assuming you trust your boss and believe she'll treat you fairly? Your directs are just like you in this regard.

Try to remember that the vast majority of directs have been previously starved of feedback. They bring to their relationship with you all their previous (bad) managers who only gave feedback when it was negative, and it was "serious." Their managers delayed, they made excuses, they hoped their direct would "fix themselves," they waited, "until there was a pattern," and when they finally said something, the delivery was fraught with overtones of concern, worry, and future punishment.

Feedback is best when small. Don't wait, like the manager in the previous scenario. When you see something good, give positive

feedback. When a direct meets a deadline, give them positive feedback. When they're well prepared for a meeting, tell them so with feedback. Sure, you could just praise them–but it's a missed opportunity for positive feedback, which will make you less likely to give them negative feedback when they make a small mistake. **The vast majority of managers overestimate how important or "big" something has to be to be worthy of feedback.** Smaller, more frequent feedback is better.

How do you address small feedback remotely?

Thinking small when giving feedback makes it easier to give feedback when we're remote from our directs. We don't need to think a lot about what it takes to "earn" feedback. Virtually everything your directs do is a good opportunity for feedback. Even just one smart comment in a meeting is worthy of positive feedback. One of your directs saying to a colleague, "That's a really good idea," might be taken for granted, but it's a perfect chance to give them positive feedback after a Zoom meeting—ask them to stick around. If someone interrupts a colleague, ask them to stick around for some small (and as we'll see, brief) negative feedback.

Feedback is best when brief. "Brief" goes best with "small," right? Any delivery or discussion longer than a minute starts to become a negative. This is true for both positive and negative feedback, interestingly enough. And in our data, 20 seconds is plenty of time. Twenty seconds! You need no longer than that, and your directs don't want it to be.

The reason for brevity in negative feedback is obvious: directs just want to be done with the exchange. Some managers don't see this; because directs push back so often, it *seems* that they are wanting a longer conversation. But input from directs makes clear: they don't want a longer conversation so much as they want to defend themselves.

The reason for short *positive* feedback is different: **the longer it takes us to give feedback, the less feedback we give.** Over and

over again, directs say that what they want is *more feedback.* But if it takes us 10 minutes to prepare each time, and then 5 minutes to deliver it, each instance takes 15 minutes. That's half of an O3. And so, managers who think it's going to take 15 minutes to "have a conversation," just end up *not giving any feedback.*

And you don't want your positive feedback to be brief and your negative feedback to be long, or even vice versa. All feedback is about the future—about encouraging effective behavior in the future. *All feedback is about encouraging a positive future.*

How do you keep your feedback brief when you are remote?

Brevity and small go together. If your feedback only takes 20–30 seconds, how can being remote be any harder than face to face? Be willing to call your directs on the phone for even just one bit of positive or negative feedback, taking no more than 30 seconds.

For so many of us, remote work life means back-to-back-to-back meetings. So feedback has to be short. Since every meeting starts late, make a habit of finding someone on your team to call or Zoom in the 1–2 minutes when you're waiting for a meeting to start.

Feedback is best when it encourages effective performance in the future. One of the most important misunderstandings about performance communications is that managers think that feedback is about past behavior. Most managers believe that the purpose of a feedback conversation is to discuss the mistake or the success of a direct's recent behavior. But we know that isn't right, let alone effective.

What this means, interestingly enough, is that *all feedback is encouragement.* When we learn this, part of our hesitancy around giving feedback drops away.

How do you address encouraging feedback when you're remote?

Deliver all feedback, positive and negative, in a positive tone. Think of yourself as having forgiven your direct if they've made a mistake. This will lower your fears of giving it, and lower your directs' defensiveness in receiving it. And the more you give, the easier it will get.

Feedback is best when it's positive. This is different than staying positive because it's about the future. We're saying, feedback works best when it's *positive feedback*. **Managers focus entirely too much on negative feedback.** We want to "fix" our directs. We don't want the hassle of dealing with problems. We want that "silver bullet" we mentioned earlier.

But as we've said, positive feedback is way more powerful than negative feedback.

How do you address giving more positive feedback remotely?

This is no different from being collocated: look for positives. At some point, you will have given so much positive feedback, your directs, *having become comfortable with the model,* will start asking for negative feedback. Isn't that a world you'd like to live in? Where your directs regularly ask for negative feedback?

Feedback is best when it's about behavior. As we've said, feedback oughtn't to be about beliefs, or attitudes, or mindset, or intent, or motivation, or emotions.

How do you address behavior remotely? That brings us to the real challenge of remote feedback.

The Problem with Giving Feedback Remotely Isn't Distance; It's Behavior

The big problem with remote feedback isn't opportunity, as we hope we've shown in this guidance. Most managers think opportunity is the problem because they're applying all the wrong ideas about performance communications: waiting for a pattern, waiting to have a dialog about intent and to engage in coaching, looking for something big, positive or negative, or making negative feedback into punishment or a dressing down.

The problem with giving feedback to remote workers is remote managers are significantly less likely to know what their behavior is. And we blame it on the distance. The distance is part of it, but it's not as relevant as most of us think.

Clearly, if we are collocated, we're going to have more chances to observe the first four components of behavior: the words people say, how they say them, their facial expressions, and body language. But going from in-person to Zoom doesn't cut us off completely from those things. It certainly cuts down on body language input—in part due to how much of our directs we can see on Zoom—so there will be less there.

On the other hand, we encourage you to give negative feedback if someone doesn't have their video on frequently enough—because of your lack of ability to assess their body language. Yes, some organizations have mistakenly put out policies saying you can have your video off, but too many managers have mistakenly concluded that that allows any of their directs a blanket policy of no video.

For instance:

Can I give you some feedback?
    <Yes.>
    When you turn your video off during a team meeting, I can't assess your responses to others' comments and you become separated from the group. Can you work on that please?

Nevertheless, your gut instinct and experience are right: directs being remote will make it harder for us to give feedback on the first four components.

But here is the real lesson of remote feedback: we simply need to lean more heavily on the work product part of behavior: Quality, Quantity, Accuracy, Timeliness, and Documentation.

And that, unfortunately, is a serious problem for a lot of us managers. First, because we've focused on the first four components up until now, and second, because we don't have visibility into a great deal of our directs' work—whether they're remote or not.

Based on the combined 30 years that Manager Tools and its predecessor, Horstman and Company, have been operating remotely, and input from the field since COVID-19, we have some

recommendations for how to increase the amount of work product data you can see to be able to then give feedback on.

Ask during O3s what your directs are working on, today and this week. Frequently, you'll find out your people are misaligned with your priorities. When that happens, it's time for negative feedback. If they are aligned, give them positive feedback.

The following week, check on what they said they were working on. If they haven't accomplished it, and you believe it should have been accomplished, probe for understanding, or give them negative feedback. If they've done it, give them positive feedback.

Learn to Assign Deliverables, not Tasks

Here's the difference between tasks and deliverables. A task would be: "Create a five-slide decision brief on your vendor recommendation." Making that into a deliverable: "Send me a five-slide decision brief on your vendor recommendation by close of business Thursday." Deliverables have clear deadlines (tasks do too, but lots of managers forget that), and *they include with the core task the reporting of the status of the task with the task itself*.

With a deliverable, you never have to wonder whether something is done. If you haven't gotten it, it IS NOT DONE. That's why including the sending/reporting function with the task itself is so powerful.

Switching to deliverables from tasks gives you far more quality, quantity, accuracy, and timeliness behavioral data on your directs. You'll know whether their work is getting done because they have to report on it to get it done.

Some directs will complain that this is extra work. They are in fact partially right. But far too often the one doing the "extra work" is the manager, tracking down work that is supposed to be done but the direct has not notified anyone she did it. And the fact is, communicating about work status is a core responsibility of every

manager. It's not extra work; it's a part of all of our jobs. If all you want to do is "your work," and not have to communicate, go work at a company with just one employee: you.

Ask your directs to copy you on certain emails they send, or if they prefer, blind copy you. This allows you to see that the mail is sent and for you to assess the words used, the tone you pick up from the word choices, and the timeliness of the mail. Before you scream "micromanagement!" remember the Middleman Test. If your boss asked you every once in a while to copy her on a mail you sent, would that be micromanaging you? Of course not. Please.

Create public, real-time work/project tracking websites, and review them publicly. There are all kinds of vendors for these types of tools, but you can make one yourself using our Cypress model for free in an hour or two (and There's a Cast for That™). Yes, there's a little work up front, but it has massive benefits.

Public visual reporting (of deliverables, not tasks) is one of the least appreciated tools available to all managers. If work on something is going to take longer than two weeks and involves more than one person, it pays to break it down into daily tasks. This will annoy your directs, no question. But if we're not collocated, and we don't know what anyone's daily tasks are, why would any of us be surprised if someone reports (it's better than hiding) that their month-long project is a month behind?

Public visual reporting, with each deliverable assigned to an individual, requiring task owners to update the status of their deliverables themselves, with each task's status (green, amber, red, based on published due date) automatically updating, will allow you to massively increase your view into the work product behaviors of your team.

And if it's worth tracking, it's worth meeting and reviewing weekly.

Finally, ask your directs what they want feedback on. You'll be surprised by what you learn. Just their interest will help you focus your attention. Make clear that what they want is only part of your

equation—you can still give them feedback, positive and negative, on stuff you see and hear and notice outside of their areas of interest. And you'll definitely want to give negative feedback to the directs who say they don't want any feedback. We don't mean to be funny or snide, but receiving feedback is just as much a part of their job as it is a part of your job to give it.

Remote directs makes feedback harder, but not in the way most managers typically fear. The key is to focus more on work product and put in place systems that allow you to see it and give feedback on it.

9

How to Start Delivering Feedback

Starting to deliver feedback follows naturally after you've rolled out One on Ones (O3s). Warning order, though: if for some reason you've jumped right to this feedback section of the book, and you haven't rolled out O3s yet, you could be in for a very rocky road. We encourage you to go back and seriously consider starting to do Manager Tools One on Ones (MTO3s). Bosses who are trusted have much better success delivering feedback, and MTO3s are the best way we've tested to achieve a trusting relationship.

We don't recommend you start using the Manager Tools Feedback Model until you have done 12 weeks of O3s. Then you can start the process of delivering your performance communications using the Manager Tools Feedback Model.

Rolling out feedback is a really simple process. But please remember, the best guidance we can give you about changes you make to how you manage your team members is to *never introduce a change to how you manage your directs without first introducing that change before you make it.* If you start thinking you can just jump right into new things, and your directs aren't ready, they'll resist your efforts.

Reflect again on the Middleman Test. Suppose your boss started coming up to you and saying, without context, "Can I give you some feedback?" You'd wonder what was going on, right? You might wonder whether you were the only one she was talking to this way.

We'd also bet you would naturally assume it was going to be negative feedback. After all, if she was going to give you positive feedback, wouldn't she just tell you what you did and thank you for it? Why would she have to ask permission?

When managers tell us that their directs are resisting getting feedback, even positive feedback, we find that in the vast majority of cases, one or two things didn't happen: they hadn't started doing MTO3s yet, so trust was low, or they didn't brief their team in advance of delivering feedback.

Directs know it's our job to provide performance communications. We know we're supposed to do it. We want our boss to do it, provided he does it professionally. And yet, somehow, magically, almost no performance communications happen in most professionals' daily lives. All of this is a good reminder that we'd better be planful and professional when we begin to decide we're going to live up to our responsibilities and start communicating regularly about performance.

There are a couple of important caveats about this stage in your use of our tools:

Don't rush to get to feedback. Wait the full 12 weeks of our guidance before you announce you're going to add the Manager Tools Feedback Model to your toolbox. If you start feedback after only a week or two of MTO3s, you'll be learning two things at once (O3s and Feedback), reducing the effectiveness of each.

Whether you intend to or not, you'll be sending the message that you really only did MTO3s to "soften the blow" of communicating more about performance. As we've said, most managers think that feedback is the silver bullet of management, but it isn't; O3s are.

At our Effective Manager Conferences all over the world, we teach O3s and Feedback in the morning. During a working lunch, we teach how to roll out all of our tools and the timeline for doing so.

When we teach the MT Feedback Model, in the corner of every slide there's a reminder: "Faster is better." This is a reminder that, as we said earlier, directs don't want to spend a lot of time hearing feedback. And you're the same, surely, as we've said: given the choice between a 15-second feedback interaction and a 2-minute interaction, everybody always chooses 15 seconds.

But when we teach the *timeline* for rolling out each of the tools in order, the guidance switches: "Slower is better." Yes, directs want *each* interaction to be brief. But they also want—*and you will want*—time to learn and digest each tool and its implications before you and they move on to the next one.

If you go too fast, your directs are going to start pushing back. If you try to move through each of the tools faster than our guidance, *the resistance you get will cause the overall process to take longer than the timeline*.

If at any time in the process you start to feel pushback, it's okay to stay where you are, and wait a few more weeks to introduce your next change. A few more weeks to continue building trust and help your directs (and you) learn your new techniques is time well spent.

If only one of your directs is resisting your approach to feedback, it's okay to move forward with everyone else and take a slower approach with that one direct. While you shouldn't let one direct deny others their professional development, it's okay if you want to go slower with that team member for a few weeks.

Don't rush to get to negative feedback. Introducing negative feedback is perhaps the most delicate time of rolling out Manager Tools. For many if not most of your directs, you will be the first manager ever to have a comprehensive suite of tools to address your responsibilities. Your directs will be learning along with you. And many directs *think* they're going to handle negative feedback well, but they don't *know*. They don't know because they've never had a boss do what their boss was supposed to have done—talk openly,

candidly, professionally and politely about performance, on as much as a daily basis.

When it comes to rolling out the tools, remember: Slower is better.

Here's how to do it.

Announce your intention in your weekly staff meeting. Now that you've decided to add feedback to your bag of Manager Tools, you've got to announce it to everyone all at once. Feedback is an individual behavior, but announcing it to the team says everyone is going to benefit. If you don't, each of your directs will wonder whether they're being singled out for special (probably negative) treatment.

We don't recommend giving the same briefing over and over again in your O3s—that's inefficient. Not only will each of your directs assume they're being singled out, you'll have to answer many of the same questions. More importantly, if you brief individually, none of your directs will know what questions others asked, and they won't learn from your answers to others. This is a good general rule to apply to virtually all briefings to your team. If everyone is going to be affected by a new policy/system/process, it's far better to brief them as a group.

Schedule 30 minutes for your briefing. We've seen managers try to shoehorn it into 10–15 minutes, and it's usually not enough time. With directs' sensitivities about performance communications, it's better to not rush.

Use our materials. We've got a feedback document that gives you everything you need, free on our website. Hand it out to your directs. It will make it much easier for them to RECEIVE feedback if they know what's coming and why it's coming.

Cover the purpose of feedback: Encourage effective behavior. Unfortunately, every one of your directs has had one or more bad bosses in their career. The fear your directs will feel about feedback will cause them to attribute to you motives that you are unlikely to have in your heart.

So, you've got to counteract that sign on your forehead and *tell them plainly* why you're using the feedback model.

Walk them through each step of the model. Tell them what you're going to do and how you're going to do it. Practice a little with them. Ask them for examples of positive feedback situations, and do your best to show them how you're going to use the model.

Here's one way to share how you're thinking about this tool.

[We hope you like that we've written you an entire speech you can give. This is the kind of guidance you'll find in our thousands of podcasts. It's the guidance we always wanted. —HSB]

"I've got an obligation to help you be at your very best every day. If you're like me, you're not always sure that your good work is being recognized or that it's what the boss wants. And you're not sure if you're always doing it exactly right or you're not certain that there isn't a better way. So the feedback model is just a way for us to talk about what you're doing and what the results are. It's not about punishment. . .it's about always getting better. It's not about revisiting your past mistakes, but about encouraging you to do your best in the future. Here's how the model will sound. . . . Here's what each step is like, and why I do it this way. And here's some sample exchanges. . . ."

"Also, this is new for me and you, so I'm going to introduce this tool slowly. Since positive feedback is easier to hear, I'm only going to use this new feedback model with positive feedback for 8 weeks. **In the next 8 weeks, if you hear me ask, 'Can I give you some feedback?' it's because I intend to encourage you to keep doing something you did that was helpful, effective, efficient, or productive."**

"You'll notice that much of my feedback will be about relatively small things. This is intentional. Most managers make the mistake of waiting for a pattern or waiting for 'big things' to justify a conversation about performance. But this is wrong. If I know you're doing something wrong, why wouldn't I want to ask you to do it better? If I waited, that seems like I'm trying to make a stronger 'case against you,' rather than trying

to help you. I would certainly want to hear from MY boss sooner rather than later if I made a mistake that she had noticed."

"And think of it the other way: imagine a world where each of us was on time all the time, communicated what was necessary in a timely and professional way, delivered all of our tasks on time, and was helpful to others on a daily basis. It probably makes you laugh, but I can picture it. If thanking you when you do well and encouraging you to change when you stumble increases the chance for that kind of world, I'm all for it."

Start by giving only positive feedback for 8 weeks. Don't give *any* negative feedback for the first 8 weeks you use it, as you're learning the model. If you try to slip in some negative, you run the risk of doing it poorly because you haven't yet mastered the model and the delivery. Perhaps you hurt the feelings of your directs. Now you've maybe poisoned the well of the model, and even when you give that direct positive feedback, their dislike of the model makes it hard for them to hear your praise.

Here's something that may surprise you. It's hard to believe, but we've heard of it happening so often we want you to know about it. It's likely that even though you tell your directs that you *will only be giving positive feedback using the model for the next 8 weeks,* the first time you ask a direct, *Can I give you some feedback,* you'll see some panic or fear. It's happened often enough over the years of our training and coaching that it's more than likely that it will happen to you, too.

That should tell you how directs have been treated by managers over the decades. They've learned to be afraid of any performance communications because they are so often rare and so often negative.

Imagine that: you notice something good and want to share that with your direct, and they panic when you try. Again, it's likely not your fault—it's just how other managers have treated them: poorly.

How Much Feedback Should You Give?

If you wonder how much feedback to give, shoot for one item of feedback to one direct per day as you start. Not one delivery of the model to *each of your directs:* just one to *any one* of your team. That's not that much. Even if you stumble a bit, that will only take 30 seconds.

Start slowly with feedback. Don't try to be a hero and give everybody all kinds of feedback. One bit of feedback a day. Just one.

If you can go five days in a row having given feedback one time, raise your limit to two, and so on. There's a Cast for That™—it's called Measuring Feedback, and unofficially the Poker Chip Cast, and it works surprisingly well.

You are not going to win any medals by giving tons of feedback right away. Give yourself small goals, ones you're sure to meet. Think of this as a marathon, not a sprint. If you gradually build up, within 6 months you will have given your team more feedback than 99.9% of managers in the world.

Can You Give Negative Feedback When You're Rolling Out Positive Feedback?

What should you do if one of your directs makes a mistake worthy of some negative feedback before it's time for you to roll out negative feedback? Easy: whatever you did before. *Doing whatever you were doing before clearly is acceptable*—you still have your job. A few more weeks of not doing negative feedback perfectly isn't going to hurt you or your directs.

If you ignored the problem before, ignore it again. Even though you have this new tool, and you may even be a little excited about it, don't try to correct someone by using the feedback model for negative feedback before its time in the rollout process. If you would have taken them into your office and had a chat, do that.

And, okay, yes, if what you used to do is yell and scream, don't do that. Just do nothing.

But There Is a Better Way

Okay, so for a period of 8 weeks you're not going to use the MT Feedback Model for mistakes and errors. As we just said, just keep doing what you're doing, and don't try to use the model until you have enough positive reps under your belt.

But managers *still* want to try to do something more. So, we tested a lot of guidance several years ago, and here's what we learned:

> If you really want to (1) give negative performance communications and (2) know not to use the MT Feedback Model yet and (3) want to be better than what you were doing, here's our guidance:

> **Be nice.** Over and over again, we learn that bosses who aren't angry, who aren't sharp, and who don't "send a message" get MUCH better results. This is just "Land of the Blind" thinking—*In the land of the blind, the one-eyed person is king or queen.* Put differently: just don't do the stupid stuff everyone else does.

> **Smile.** Speak in a polite tone. Act as if the mistake that was made was sort of funny. Look, there are times when something is so bad it deserves something more than feedback, but 99% of the time, stuff that happens isn't that. (And the reason THOSE things happen often is the lack of corrective guidance before.) This takes the edge off of your Role Power. (You have it whether you want to admit it or not, and when you're correcting someone, it looms larger.)

Be brief. Don't take more than 30 seconds, and even that is almost too much. Directs do *not* want to spend more time than that hearing about their mistakes.

You don't need to have a conversation, an exploration, a dialog, or a mutual understanding. Yes, some directs want that. . .but that doesn't mean it's smart for you to do it, *so don't*. Obviously being brief precludes this. Our point here is that if the direct wants to get defensive, walk away. Say, "Hey, no big deal. Let it go." There's more on this in our Shot Across the Bow guidance.

Ask that they not do it that way next time. This is one of the constructs from the model you *can* say. For instance:

"Hey, can you not be late next time? Thanks."

"Would you meet the deadline next week? I'd appreciate it."

"Would you please check for errors next time? I found some in here."

"When you do this again, would you include Q3 like I asked? Thanks."

"Next time, would you talk to me before asking the client that? I don't think that worked. Thanks."

"Would you try a little harder to work better with Bob? I gather you guys had some conflict today. Thanks."

Note that on many of these, we end with "Thanks." This is a vocal way of ending the conversation by assuming their answer. This significantly cuts down on defensive comebacks and the desire for more "discussion," which is really just proving that they meant well. Without it, the conversational convention is they now have a question to answer. With it, you can move on.

"When you do X, Y happens." This is a really pared-down version of the peer feedback model, relying on the pairing of behavior

and consequence, action and reaction, cause and effect. We call this "Just wanted you to know. . ." because those are the words to have in your head when you finish stating the behavior and the consequence.

For instance, consider the following:

"When you're late, I worry about you."
"When you're late, it messes up the agenda."
"When you miss deadlines, it slows us down."
"When there are errors in this stuff, it takes me longer."
"When you leave out Q3, we run the risk of not forecasting right."
"When you don't ask me first about that, I can't tell you they don't like those kinds of exchanges."
"When you are in conflict with Bob, less work gets done."

And, if this feels like learning yet another model, you can just do whatever you've always done. Apparently whatever you've been doing isn't that bad—they haven't fired you yet. ;-)

What if a top performer asks for negative feedback before its time? For the record, this happens a lot. Top performers know they do a lot of stuff well, and generally really want to know anything they can do to improve their weaknesses. (This isn't always a great approach based on what we know about professional development, but that's for another book.)

If they ask, should you violate our guidance and give them negative feedback early?

Our guidance is, it depends on you. If you're not comfortable with the model yet, don't do it. Tell them you appreciate their openness and that you'll think carefully about some opportunities for improvement. Then, give them one instance in their next O3, and pay attention to their response. Keep doling it out (if you're not yet to the 12-week mark) a bit at a time.

If you are in doubt, just WAIT. It's fine. A few more weeks isn't going to hurt them, and it will give you time to really feel like you can deliver negative feedback easily and professionally.

Again: If you have any doubts, *wait*.

After 8 weeks, add in negative feedback. Notice we don't "switch" from positive to negative. We just start looking for opportunities to give negative as well as positive feedback.

You don't have to tell your team you're doing this, but it wouldn't hurt. By now, assuming you've been giving one bit of feedback a day for 40 days, everyone on your team has some experience receiving feedback.

More importantly, *you will have gotten used to the model*. This will give you more confidence when you start giving feedback about behaviors you'd like to see change in the future.

If you want to make this step a little softer, you can take advantage of your top performers' eagerness and start negative feedback with them before spreading it to everyone on your team. Once you have 10–20 reps of feedback with them, you can roll it out more broadly across your entire team. They're likely much more eager for it and, therefore, will be more receptive and less likely to be contentious.

If your early efforts at negative feedback end up being contentious with a high performer, we encourage you to talk to them during your MTO3 about the dichotomy. "You said you wanted it, and then you argued with me. What's up with that?"

Stay as positive as you can. Be careful that you don't overdo negative feedback. Most managers fail to realize how strong their own paradigm is that their job is to find mistakes and correct them. If you believe you should be "vigilant" against "mistakes," two things will happen gradually: you'll start seeing all the mistakes, and you'll STOP seeing all the good things.

Great managers will tell you that they give far more positive than negative performance communications. They look for opportunities to point out things that are going well. If they didn't, they

probably wouldn't notice them. And whether you like it or not, in an organization full of humans, there are going to be a lot of mistakes. Even if you think of yourself as good at policing mistakes, many, many more happen than you will ever see.

Positive feedback is much more powerful than negative feedback.

10

Ask for More—Coaching

THE THIRD CRITICAL BEHAVIOR for effective managers is always raising the bar and asking for higher levels of performance. The Manager Tools Coaching Model allows you to help each of your directs grow their skills without you spending more than 5–10 minutes a week on their improvement efforts.

Most managers with some experience have been put in at least one situation where they knew they needed to help someone grow. One of their colleagues, or someone from human resources (HR) said, "You really need to coach him." But nobody knew how. Or it involved weeks and weeks of planning a 6-month improvement plan, with daily and weekly tasks. And they slunk away from the drawing board, without the time or the knowledge to get a plan in place and see it through.

Coaching is the least often used tool among the Manager Tools Trinity. There are some good reasons for this. One on Ones (O3s) are the most powerful, and once managers start O3s, they never want to let them go. Feedback happens next, but it's hard for many of us, and so we stumble. Many of us are afraid of introducing conflict, and fear increased turnover (even though of course the opposite is

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the case). And if we can't get through feedback, it's unlikely we're going to embrace the coaching. Feedback takes seconds, but coaching takes months—it seems much harder.

And before we go any further, here's an important caveat here about vocabulary: coaching, to different parts of the professional world, has two different meanings. In some cases, it's just a manager pointing out mistakes and making suggestions. Very episodic, very ad hoc. Nothing systemic, nothing planned.

There's also a large number of organizations where coaching is really only the name given to the performance improvement plans that failing employees are forced to agree to. But they're not put on the plans to succeed. They're put into a plan to allow the organization (manager, HR, and legal) to gather objective data about their failure to perform against some very high standards.

The Manager Tools Coaching Model is neither of those things. **It's a way for you to supervise the self-improvement process of one of your directs, over a series of months.** And you can do it in 5–10 minutes a week.

Our Coaching Model has four simple steps:

Goal	Resources	Plan	Act
DBQ	Brainstorm	Deliverables	Reporting
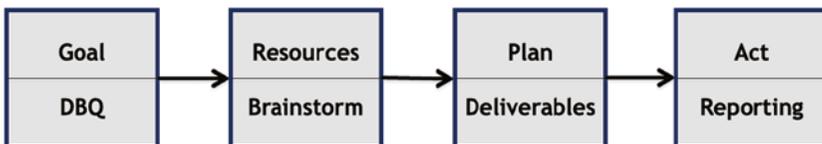
Step 1: Collaborate to Set a Goal

The first step is really simple. Once we've decided what our direct is going to get better at—about which more in a second—we sit down with our direct and set a goal.

Note that the first three steps of our model start with the word "collaborate." The first time you coach any of your directs, even though you will have briefed them, you want to engage them in the process they're going to go through.

Don't think you'll be like a teacher and prepare lesson plans, which they will have to enact. That's the way children learn—it's called "pedagogy." But adults learn though "andragogy"—the adult learning model. **The adult learning model says adults learn by doing.** The more you work with your direct early in your coaching efforts and engage them in the solution, the more likely they are to succeed.

We also want our direct to feel supported by us as we help them grow their skills in a particular area.

It's entirely possible that you will be able to accomplish the first three steps of each coaching engagement you work through *in a single O3 meeting.* And if you struggle with these first steps, send us an email, and we'll help you.

How do we set a goal? Easy. **We describe a behavior or a result we want to achieve, starting with a date by which we want it achieved.** For example, consider the following:

* By 1 December, you will attain certified network engineer status.
* By 30 October, you will run the staff meeting successfully.
* By 1 January, you will submit the capital plan without errors.

We use a goal structure called DBQ: Deadline, Behavior, Quality. We start with the deadline because deadlines drive behavior. And because we remember that coaching is a more powerful tool than feedback, we usually don't set coaching deadlines of less than 4 months away. If someone can change their behavior in less than 4 months, they probably just need lots of feedback, and we don't need a Manager Tools Coaching plan.

*If you're wondering how far into the future to set a goal for one of your directs whom you're coaching, take whatever length of time you think it will take them, **and double it.***

Here's why we recommend doubling whatever length of time you first come up with. Suppose you think your direct can master

this skill within, say, 3 months. Maybe that's a little aggressive, but he wants to get promoted and seems eager. Great.

But we have to remember: he still has to get all his existing work responsibilities accomplished. And we all know, if we think about it for a bit, getting our work done is never a straight line. There are vacations, special projects, family member illnesses, mandatory trainings to attend, short-notice trips to upset customers, and new executives who announce a new initiative . . . the one constant in our work lives is change.

Suppose one—or more!—of those discontinuities occurs as he is working on his coaching plan. Suppose that that causes him to miss the deadline by a month. We thought it would take 3 months, but it took 4 months. Even though he reached the behavioral goal, he didn't do so within the deadline.

The direct is going to feel like a failure. That's what thousands of individual contributors told us when we were testing and shaping the Manager Tools Coaching Model.

But think of the difference if we had given the direct an extra 2 months. It still took 4 months, *but now he feels like a hero for fin- ishing early.* You can do this because your coaching effort wouldn't have existed if you hadn't started it, so who can say how long it will take? *It's much better to build a development/coaching plan around win- ning the process than forcing the process.*

The behavior portion is what we want directs to master, the behavior they're wanting to improve.

You'll note that we say behavior *they* want to improve. This is important. Coaching is a *self-improvement* effort. We managers are responsible for assisting our directs and overseeing their own self- improvement project.

You can't coach your directs if they don't want to improve. You can't put the burden on your shoulders. You can't "do as much as you pos- sibly can" for them. Sure, you can help them plan, but you can't do the actual learning and trying tasks for them. You doing anything

beyond planning and checking makes *you* better at that task, not your direct, which defeats the purpose. Adults learn by doing, and that means your direct has to be the one doing all the doing.

The quality portion of the coaching goal is how we're going to measure the behavioral outcomes we want. Here's an example. We can't just say we're going to coach someone on running meetings, and then say that their goal is to run a meeting. Under that criteria, they could run a meeting—doing so disastrously—and say that they achieved the coaching goal. If we're going to coach a direct, we have to define what the measure of success IS for the behavior we're expecting to change.

So, let's put together the whole DBQ coaching goal for the example of someone we're coaching to run meetings:

By I October, you will run a successful meeting. You will have an agenda, start on time, and end on time.

That's a perfect example of a DBQ goal, one you could use to start coaching one of your directs on running a meeting.

You may be saying, gosh, that sounds great, but that's not what I would've come up with. Don't worry—you're normal. You've never done this before. If you're like most managers, you worry that there is a "right way," and you don't know what it is. But the fact is, there is no "right way" for much of management—only effective and ineffective ways.

Rest assured, 90+% of managers don't know how to coach their directs. They don't have a concept to apply or a process to follow. But thanks to Manager Tools, you do. That's not to say our way is right, and other ways are wrong. But our way is the one tested on more than 100,000 managers worldwide. If you want, use our guidance for a while, and then modify it a little to fit your situation. We think your directs deserve your best, and if you're going to call yourself a good manager, you need to know how to coach.

If you come across a situation where you don't know how to set the DBQ goal or what resources your direct might use, just send us

an email. We'll be happy to help. It's free because you bought this book. We don't want you to have to learn these techniques by trial and error, like we did. It's not fair to your direct reports.

Okay, so we're getting going on coaching. We've collaborated with our direct on creating the goal. We did this during our O3 with them.

You can make this first coaching discussion easier by telling them this *the week before*:

> *Hey, next week, let's get started on your development goals. If it's okay with you, we'll start on running meetings. To make that possible, I'm going to give up my portion of our One On One, and we can spend that 10–15 minutes getting started. If you want to make that first session more effective, you could listen to the Manager Tools podcast on their Coaching Model, but you don't have to.*

As you go through the coaching effort, we highly recommend you write down the coaching engagement goal on our O3 forms or wherever you capture your MTO3 notes. Many experienced Manager Tools community managers do it on the back of the previous week's notes, having kept their MTO3 notes in a notebook. They *put only* coaching notes there, so they can always keep them separate from the rest of their MTO3 notes. But many also write them down right on the form itself.

It helps audiences we train to learn about the Coaching Model through an example. Suppose one of our directs has a problem managing projects. Plus, he wants to get promoted, and you know he can't get promoted in your organization without your boss and her peers believing that he can manage projects.

Our direct is Derek. Our coaching collaboration with him might have started like this:

> *Derek, I know you want to get promoted. And we both know, you don't have any experience in managing projects, which, as we've talked*

about before, is a prerequisite for getting promoted to manager here. Even if I put you up for promotion, you won't get it without some project management experience. So what do you say we work together to get you up to speed on project management. I can coach you.

Now, how do we apply a DBQ goal to Derek's plan?

For a deadline, 4 months from now is, say, January 1. Well, we're not going to have a deadline during the holiday season. And, frankly, what's wrong with thinking, he might need more than 4 months? Let's give him 6. It's far better for us to OVER-estimate and have Derek finish early than to have him be stressed out about a deadline that can be slipped if we have to.

So, our deadline is going to be March 1. We start therefore with "By March 1."

Now, what behavior are we working on? And how are we going to measure it? Easy: project management. So let's try this: "By March 1, you will manage a successful project. You will finish the project in scope, on time, and in budget." We might then say, wrapping up our goal collaboration: *How does that sound, Derek? Do you think we can get there? Feel it's reasonable and achievable?*

Step 2: Collaborate to Brainstorm Resources

So, we've got a goal, now how do we get there? By jointly brainstorming resources the direct could use to become more effective at the skill we're coaching.

Here's an important point: part of our coaching plan will include finding out what resources are available and availing ourselves of them, without even knowing which one is best. If we don't do it this way, then every manager is limited to coaching on what he or she knows and is confident coaching others on. This means exceptionally limited coaching opportunities for managers AND directs and suddenly our organization is seriously limited in what it can grow and become.

It would be completely normal in a Manager Tools coaching engagement to have a task of reading a book that brainstorming suggested might be helpful, only to discover it is NOT and to have "wasted" the time spent on that book. This is a hard concept for most managers to grasp. We all seem to want silver bullets, quick and easy, one shots, no-brainer solutions. But sometimes the resource we choose isn't going to work, and we have to move to another one. (And we're glad we added some extra time to the goal.)

How do we brainstorm resources? We continue our discussion with our direct during that same MTO3. We follow the MT Brainstorm guidance we have in our podcast on that topic (There's a Cast for That™).

We take 2–3 minutes to come up with a list of potential resources we THINK that MIGHT be POTENTIALLY helpful to our direct in learning and doing this new or better skill. We write them down as we share them with each other.

Suppose you were coaching a direct on improving their Meeting Management techniques, for instance, as indicated in our goal example above. You might list, Google, Toastmasters, Manager Tools, Amazon, Dale Carnegie, Fellow Managers, Executives, Robert's Rules of Order, Podcasts, Meetings for Dummies, Meeting Videotapes, Agenda Training, etc.

The idea here is to go for VOLUME, not accuracy. This again runs counter to what lots of managers want—a silver bullet—which, of course, doesn't exist. We're NOT looking for the ONE right thing. We're looking for lots of possible things, thinking that in there somewhere are probably one to four things that will collectively get us where we need to go. It is silly for us as managers to assume we will know exactly how to improve someone else in some skill that we ourselves are not necessarily good at.

So, we take a couple of minutes, and write down everything we think of in our brainstorm. Maybe one sticks out, maybe one

doesn't. Brainstorming says anything goes, including "peanut but-ter." Whether we USE any one of the ideas/resources is irrelevant when we're brainstorming.

Here's a list that we created in 1 minute to coach someone on project management:

• Project Management Institute	• Amazon	• Podcasts
• Notify team	• Private coach	• Google
• Project Management Professional	• Predetermined rewards	• Blogs
• Weekly reporting	• Project manager books	• MS Project
• Apology required	• Shadow a project manager	• Formal classes
• PMBOK	• YouTube videos	• Mentoring
• MS Excel license	• Horstman's law	• Management Tools Forums
• Peanut butter	• Project management blogs	• Tasks into deliverables

Step 3: Collaborate to Create a Plan

We've got a goal. We've got a pile of ideas to get us there. What now? Now we just create the first week or two of a plan. We choose one or two resources that we want to start with and write down a series of tasks (deliverables!) for our directs to help them start learning and improving their behavior. We can either use one resource, if we agree that it's a great one and free, or we can use two or three together. Again, it's better to start slow to make sure we have early wins.

And the steps/tasks/deliverables in the plan, as we mentioned earlier, each have three parts: a deadline, a behavior, and the report-ing that the task is done inherent in the task. The reporting (see the

"send me" part of each of the following tasks) is what makes a task a *deliverable*.

- By September 15, send me a receipt for your order of the book *Project Management for Dummies* from Amazon.
- By September 16, send me a note on what you learned listening to Manager Tools podcast on project management.
- By September 19, attend another manager's meeting and send me an email on what they did well/poorly.

We want to let our direct have significant input here because they will be the one doing the work. Don't expect them to learn the way we did. Some people like to read books; others like to shadow a mentor. Neither is right; they're just different.

Now let's return to our example of Derek. Let's say that Derek really likes to attend classes. That's fine. . . we might have some training budget to do that. But we recommend you start with lower-cost stuff, like a book or a mentor or a podcast or blog-reading. And, there's nothing wrong with picking two resources, one that Derek wants and one that you want, presumably because you have some idea of what might work best.

Note here something that surprises a lot of folks: we're only going to plan the first 1–2 weeks. We are NOT going to plan the entire 6 months of work. That would take too long, we don't know enough, and things will change 10 times between now and then. We'll never ever coach anyone with that model of full, long-term planning.

We often illustrate the value of very-short-scope planning at conferences by asking attendees, "Please raise your hand if you assigned everyone on your team a book to read, gave them one month to read it, didn't provide them the book to start (but told them you'd pay), and you never checked on their progress nor mentioned it again. . .if HALF of your team or more will have completed the book at the end of the month."

If you've asked yourself the question, you shouldn't be surprised and don't worry . . . because out of 100 attendees, maybe five raise their hands. Left to their own devices, the vast majority of professionals, asked to do additional, temporary work, *that doesn't feel urgent* because the deadlines are too far away, will not do it.

This isn't cynicism. It's fact. And it makes no sense for us to lead and manage based on what we want people to do, what we think they "ought" to do, or what they "should" do. "Hey, he said he WANTED to get better/keep his job/get the maximum raise/ look good for promotion! I shouldn't have to prod him! He should just do it!"

Well, okay, but he won't, most likely. (Always watch yourself when you say "should" relative to management.) Rather than decrying what he won't do, we ought to embrace reality and figure out a way to get them to take the actions that support what they say they want to do.

And that means creating short-term tasks. The short-term task/ deliverable approach is validated by your own experience on projects. If you start a project as a team member, and at the first few weekly meetings, nobody does any of their deliverables, and there's a lack of energy around moving forward, you totally know you're on a project that's going to die. On the other hand, if in the first 2–4 weeks, every deliverable is neatly accomplished, and it's "early green," as we say, you'll probably be thinking, this effort is going to be successful.

There's something else to remember from our project management experience, one of the rules of project planning. Every project is in danger of being delayed by the longest unfinished task in the project. (If you didn't know it, this really is a cardinal rule of task development in project management.) Thinking of coaching as a project, and knowing this rule, it makes no sense at all to assign someone a book to be read in a month and expect them to show up with it all read.

And it's not just that 30-day-long tasks are problematic. They're the worst of offenders, but they're not the only one. We've further found that if we assign tasks of as long as a week, and we check each week, urgent daily activities regularly take precedence, leading to coaching "projects" being behind by a week right at the start.

DEADLINES that are going to be enforced are the biggest creator of coaching success. Not clever learning events, but deadlines, plain and simple.

So, what the MT Coaching Tool model does is leverage what we know of human organizational behavior and sets short deadlines, on doable tasks, to increase the chance of completion, and create an "early green" state.

Here's an example of how we might go about getting a book read which was one of our resources.

- By 3 p.m. today (Monday), send me a list of five possible books on project management.
- By 9 a.m. tomorrow (Tuesday), ask me for my five book suggestions if I haven't already replied.
- By 2 p.m. Tuesday, send me a receipt for the book you bought.
- By 3 p.m. Wednesday, send me a three-sentence summary of the first chapter of the book you bought.
- By 2 p.m. Friday, send me a three-sentence summary of the second chapter of the book you bought.

Can you guess what the next task will be? Probably so. And as the old saying goes, how do you eat an elephant? *One small bite at a time*.

By tightening tasks down to even an hourly scope, we can quickly determine our direct's interest in this development/coaching effort.

Our direct's feeling of accomplishment is not to be taken lightly. It will lead to more effort in the weeks ahead, more willingness to

keep at the self-improvement project when there are other tasks on their desk.

Also notice the use of tasks that are not done until they are reported on as being done. Yes, work is "done" in the mind of the doer when she finishes the task. But the work has no value to the organization until the organization knows it's done.

Further, to recur to a point we've made hundreds of times, think for a second about directs who have finished a task, and their manager, who doesn't yet know it's done. In order for other work to be done, assigned, or aggregated, the manager needs to know it's done . . . and it IS done . . . but the manager doesn't yet know. At this point, who is the best person to help the manager know it is done?

The answer is the direct, for two reasons. First, they're the first to know, and reporting is always easier for the one who did the work. Second, the direct can report on it in less time than the manager can find out, at a lower labor cost per minute too.

Thus, we don't assign reading a chapter of a book, for instance. We assign to the direct the task of reporting (to the boss) that reading.

There's something else that's important here as well. The adult learning model reminds us that we learn by doing. Whenever possible, we look for opportunities to observe our directs engaging in the behavior we want, to provide them feedback on what we observe, and we make that a regular very-short-scope task.

Step 4: The Direct Acts and Reports on the Plan

This is the step that carries us through the rest of the entire effort. Once we collaborate on a goal, and collaborate on resources, we collaborate on some very-short-scope tasks, and then the direct gets to work.

The way this process is set up, we're getting daily or at least regular updates in the form of task completion reports. Remember

the direct we're coaching has to send us notifications of the tasks she completes as they come due.

Then, each week, we are discussing progress briefly during our O3. As a general rule, we wait until the end of the O3. We don't tell them to spend their time on the agenda updating us. We tell them we'll ask about it during OUR agenda time, or we'll cover it in the "future" portion.

But it's not quite that easy. What do we do if they don't accomplish all their tasks? What do we do when they run out of tasks?

When they fail to accomplish something the previous week, we give them negative feedback, politely. It might sound like this:

"Can I give you some feedback?"
< Sure.>
"When you miss your coaching deadlines, that's more work for later. Can you work on that?"

"Can I give you some feedback?"
<Yep.>
"When you don't meet with your mentor, I worry about you keeping up with the plan we agreed to last week."

"Can I give you some feedback?"
<Of course.>
"When you don't let me know a task is done, I don't get a sense of how you're doing. Can you keep me posted going forward?"

What Happens When They Run Out of Tasks?

Very-short-scope planning means you're back at planning the next week or two pretty quickly. Many managers are surprised when the 5–10 very-short-scope tasks they assigned in week one are already done within that first week, or even a day or two.

When the direct we're coaching runs out of tasks, we just sit down in the next O3 and either extend with the resource they're already using (more mentor meetings, more book chapters), or we go back to our resource list to see if there's something there we could use to help move toward the goal.

When a particular resource doesn't seem to work, we stop using it. This is particularly important to remember when we and our directs are different in style or behavioral tendency.

And, yes, please also give positive feedback when they meet their very-short-scope tasks. It might sound like:

"Can I give you some feedback?"
< Sure.>
"When you let me know you accomplished what we agreed to, it feels great. Thanks!"

"Can I give you some feedback?"
<Yep.>
"When you accomplish all five of your weekly tasks, I feel like we're making progress."

"Can I give you some feedback?"
<Of course.>
"When you let me know in advance that a week is going to be tough, I feel like we're in sync, and I appreciate it."

And when they finish the entire engagement by achieving their DBQ goal, celebrate with them.
That's the MT Coaching Model, with a detailed example.

11

How to Coach Remote Directs

It is only a little more difficult to coach remote directs than it is to coach directs with whom we're collocated. We're not going to see remote directs as often. And we're not going to be able to directly observe their behavior as often, unless you create situations where their coaching tasks are observable by you.

But the vast majority of your coaching work is identical whether you are collocated or distant from your directs. During a coaching engagement with one of your directs when you're collocated, 95% of YOUR work will be done during your One on Ones (O3s).

Think about it for a minute. You're still doing O3s, right? (If you're not, coaching gets really hard, really fast.) If you are, you're still having your weekly meeting. If you're following our guidance, you're doing it over Zoom. Further, you're insisting on their video being on during your O3s.

Our experience with thousands of managers doing MTO3s over Zoom and coaching directs shows that there is almost no difference in coaching using the Manager Tools Coaching model.

You might want to consider the following differences:

- If your MTO3s are already long, you may want a separate coaching meeting. This doesn't happen that often, but it does happen.
- Because you don't see your directs as often on an ad hoc basis, you'll have less sense of how they're doing on their coaching tasks. Even though you see them in meetings, Zoom meetings are not like face-to-face meetings in terms of the opportunity for chatting up our directs. There's really only one conversation that can occur at a time before the start of a Zoom meeting. That's different than a face-to-face meeting, where you have a chance to have a quiet/whispered exchange with your direct about how coaching is going.
- So, if you find yourself coaching someone remotely, try your best to get everything done during your MTO3, and if you can't, schedule a separate 15-minute meeting to go over coaching task accomplishment and planning the next 1–2 weeks of tasks.

Remote Coaching Relies Extensively on Deliverables

Remember the difference between tasks and deliverables? A task is something like, "Create a deck." There is no conveyance of the completed work, or the status of the completed work, in a task. It's often assumed: "Why would my boss want me to create a slide deck and not give it to her?" But we've all assigned tasks and assumed that our direct knew that we expected them to send us their work or notify us it was done, only to find out later they didn't get that part of the memo.

And nevertheless, there's no requirement to communicate a task's status inherent in a task.

If you only assign tasks, and not deliverables, while coaching a remote direct, you will be forced to check up on every deadline

of every task, or only find out the status of all of each week's tasks at the end of the week, during your MTO3.

Think about that: on Monday, during your MTO3, you and your direct agree on coaching tasks that are due Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of this week. These are not deliverables, just tasks, and this direct is remote.

The following Monday, your direct briefs you on her coaching progress. She tells you she had a hellacious week, and she didn't get to any of her tasks. While you can certainly forgive her, think about the loss of time and productivity that's just happened. Now, *all of those tasks are not just late, but late by nearly a week.*

But if you and your remote direct had agreed on deliverables, you would have known when she missed her deadlines. Deliverables require communication about the status of the task at least at its deadline. For remote directs, whom we don't get to see as often, deliverables become almost mandatory.

Consider a Shared Digital Coaching Status Board

One way to overcome the distance and its Allen curve curse of communication degradation is to have your direct create a shared, digital Coaching Status Board (CSB) covering all of the tasks in their coaching engagement.

You can include the creation of the CSB as part of each of your directs' first coaching effort with you. In fact, you can have all of your directs copy the template the first one to three directs create, each getting better each time. You can help share learnings across your team as you coach each one of them, though the basics of CSBs are simple.

A CSB is just an online spreadsheet that lists, vertically, the deliverables your direct agrees to undertake during the coaching process. First task, row 1, second task, row 2. List each task in column A, and list its date in Column B. You'll only have 1–3 weeks

of current tasks live at any one time, but after, say, 20 weeks, you might have 3–5 tasks spanning rows 100–105, with the previous rows showing all those previously completed tasks.

If you want to get fancy, you can set up some logic in your spreadsheet that turns a cell red if the date in its deadline cell is in the past. If you want more guidance about the subtleties of such spreadsheets, There's a Cast for That™, about the Manager Tools Cypress spreadsheet. It's been used for hundreds of thousands of tasks.

The beauty of a CSB when you're remote is that you can check on your directs' progress without them reporting the status of any deliverable. It's a different, passive form of communication that serves as a support mechanism for your and your directs' efforts at their self-improvement.

12

How to Start Coaching

ROLLING OUT COACHING IS very much like rolling out Management Tools One on Ones (MTO3s) and Feedback. You're going to want to brief everyone on your team together. You'll want to familiarize them with the Manager Tools (MT) Coaching Model. You'll want to explain coaching engagements take months, rather than weeks or days or moments, so getting everyone up to speed will take longer. And you'll probably want to start with your top performers.

Brief your team. After you've introduced O3s and feedback to everyone on your team, it's time to brief them on how you're going to begin coaching them on their skills and abilities.

Note that if this book is your first exposure to our guidance, and you're not doing MTO3s or using our MT Feedback Model yet, starting coaching won't happen until nearly 8 months from now. (Start date plus 3 weeks to start doing MTO3s plus 12 weeks of MTO3s only plus 8 weeks of positive feedback only plus 8 weeks of both positive and negative feedback equals 31 weeks.)

To brief your team on the MT Coaching model, set aside time in your weekly staff meeting, and walk through the four-step model.

If you have time, give them examples of DBQ goals and how smart tasks are actually deliverables with short deadlines.

Start with Your Top Performers

It's not a good idea to try to start coaching everyone all at once. Even though it doesn't take as much time, coaching feels more intensive to many managers. It will be more fun to coach a top performer without the sense that it's a "must improve" situation the way some of your lower-level performers will feel as you start to coach.

After coaching a couple of your top performers through to one or two successful coaching completions, roll out coaching more broadly across the entire team.

If you've noticed that our explanation of each step in rolling out the Trinity is a little easier and a little shorter, kudos for paying attention. The general key to rolling out such tools is *brief them before you use them*. Otherwise, your directs will resist, not knowing what their role is. As we have said many times, **never introduce a change to how you manage your team without first introducing that change to your team before you make it.**

We've learned over the years that with each successful rollout of a tool, the next tool is easier to introduce. Not only have your MTO3s been strengthening the trust your directs feel for you, but they also start to trust the tools you use.

Every new Manager Tool in the Manager Tools Trinity will come online faster than the previous one, thanks to trust and effectiveness.

13

Push Work Down—Delegation

DELEGATION IS ONE OF the core reasons our Manager Tools cofounder, Mike Auzenne, did so well as an executive. He saw a lot of technical folks get promoted for various reasons over the course of his career. And he saw many of the best of them gradually slow in terms of their growth in responsibilities through promotions. They'd get promoted, and it would take longer than their previous job for them to master the new job. And it seemed like the "smartest" ones were the ones that slowed down the quickest.

What he was seeing was the gradual change in managerial life—from being smart about STUFF to being smart about PEOPLE. Basically, at some point your technical or industrial smarts run out, and you've got to get smart about people. And what Mike realized earlier than other technically bright folks is that he was getting further away from technical responsibilities and more and more of what he did was about or through people.

At first he felt frustrated. He was good at technical work, yet now there were people between him and the technical work.

Then he had the realization that separates all great executives from managers: that people were what executive effectiveness

was all about, and it was no longer about the technical (or other) work. And then he realized he had to make others more effective at working on problems rather than throwing himself at problems, **no matter how much better he was at solving the problems than everyone else was.**

The leverage equation became simple. You want the best people you can get and then you want to make those people as effective as you possibly can.

Mike realized he was able to do more because he had been asked to do more and more and more along the way. He benefited enormously from his bosses giving him more to do. And his bosses were saying, "I delegated that to Mike. He's doing exceptionally with it. I've put more on his plate than anybody else."

And then he got promoted. Again.

For Most Managers, Delegation Is a Dangerous Problem

Mike's story is a great one. But most managers fail to learn delegation when they are a manager, and it dooms their career.

If you've ever heard or seen the phrase that some newly named executive "resigned to pursue other opportunities," it's likely that their failure to delegate is what doomed them. Now, you're probably thinking, "Well, they resigned. Why are you saying they were doomed?"

Because "resigned to pursue other opportunities" is the term of art for an executive who got fired. Organizations can't say they fired an executive; it's too embarrassing. We let them get to the level where they were responsible for the future success of the organization, and *then* we discover that they can't handle it? No, too ugly of a look.

So, organizations that have to get rid of executives don't fire them. They give them a "financial kiss on the cheek" that assures their silence/nondisclosure, and the executive gets the fig leaf of resigning.

And in our experience, the single biggest reason for new executives being forced to pursue other opportunities is their failure to learn how to delegate when they were a manager.

Here's how it happens.

In the middle of our careers, when we're managers, we're constantly being asked to do more and more. Because we're the most competent person among us and our directs, it's natural to take responsibility for the new tasks that come into our team. Most managers take a heroic approach, assuming they're supposed to do all the new and interesting work that comes to the team. Not only that, they feel that they must "protect" their directs from the deluge of additional work. They do it all themselves.

And through a mighty effort, long hours, and strains on their family, they get promoted. (To many of the folks around and beneath them, it seems to suggest that the heroic/long hours/long suffering approach is the right one, but it isn't.)

Then they become an executive. What they had always been aiming at! But being an executive isn't what most managers think it is.

The first thing that happens is one third of their calendar is taken away from them. You might think that executives have enormous freedom, and they do. But that freedom is circumscribed by an even bigger mountain of responsibilities. In order to get stuff accomplished as an executive, you have to be able to collaborate. That means you have to go to a lot of meetings about things that may not be critical to you but are critical to your colleagues. . .*and by supporting their initiative, they'll support yours later*.

You've probably complained about decisions that happen above you in your organization. You've probably said, like the rest of us, "This [thing] is SO political" or "It's just/all politics."

Well, you're right, but here's what you're not seeing: **when you look up at the top of your organization, what you call politics,**

those executives call collaboration. Trust us, there are no executive roles that aren't *rife* with politics.

But here's the thing: politics is just a slightly dirty word for the collaboration that is happening. Politics are nothing but relationship effects in decision-making. Executive decisions are never made solely on the basis of logic and data and rationality. Executive decisions always include the relationship effects that exist in your organization.

So, this new executive has one-third of her schedule taken away. And concurrently, she's given a bunch of new responsibilities, basically tripling her workload.

And this is when things start to break down.

If our recently promoted executive hasn't previously learned to delegate and hasn't trained her team to accept delegation, she can't pass on some of her work to them. She's been the hero, but now she *cannot* do it all. . .and neither can her team help her.

So she gets to pursue other opportunities . . . all because she was capable of doing it all herself but, in the process, didn't learn the lesson that to be an effective executive, you've got to be able to delegate.

That's the *why*. Here's the *what* and the *how*.

What Delegation Does

A manager's primary ability to achieve her responsibilities comes from maximizing the effectiveness of her directs. The biggest lever she has to accomplish her responsibilities is the trusting relationship she creates with those directs.

The best way to ensure day-to-day performance is to provide feedback to those directs—as any high-performing system, athlete, or performer gets all the time every day. And the best way for the manager to address the ever-increasing demands that are put on the organization to survive is to ask for notable improvements in performance from those directs.

Note that the bulk of that is about what the manager *does*, but all that doing is still in the service of her responsibilities. Those responsibilities are entirely about the *organization*, not about the team members or directs. The manager is the responsible party of the organization, both responsible *to* the organization and responsible *for* the organization.

But these efforts only address the near term *survival* of the organization. It only allows the company to keep up with the natural and evolutionary market forces and economies in which it competes. We believe that for the average manager, in a typical organization, these are the minimum standards of managerial professionalism.

But the modern organizational manager is not just responsible for meeting standards that lead to survival; he is also responsible for *growth*. For the organization to grow, it must not just keep up. It must produce both more value than the rising tide of human evolution and more value than the other entities that address the needs of its customers.

The solution managers have for growing the capability of the organization beyond their team's responsibilities is delegation.

How Delegation Drives Productivity and Growth

Delegation helps the organization most easily grow its productivity by transferring work from a higher cost center to a lower cost center, which is to say from a manager to a direct.

After an initial period of change, when quality decreases slightly, the output of the team is unchanged but the cost of what the manager and his directs just did went *down* because the direct is now doing work that the manager used to do.

The organization *also* gains the time in potential productivity that the manager used to spend doing the delegated task. Assuming that the manager uses that time wisely, delegation leads to less costs

to produce the same output and also producing more with the same number of people.

Why delegation is the solution. Before we explain how to delegate, we want to show you how delegation works conceptually. The diagram that follows represents your worklife. The box holds the 50–60 hour workweeks you live with. Each of the balls represents a project or task you're working on. There are 5 big balls and 15 small balls—a total of 20.

Each of the big balls is one of your core responsibilities, so they take up more of your time. For the purposes of this conceptual model, we'll say you spend FIVE TIMES more time on any one of your biggest responsibilities than you do on any one of your smaller balls/responsibilities.
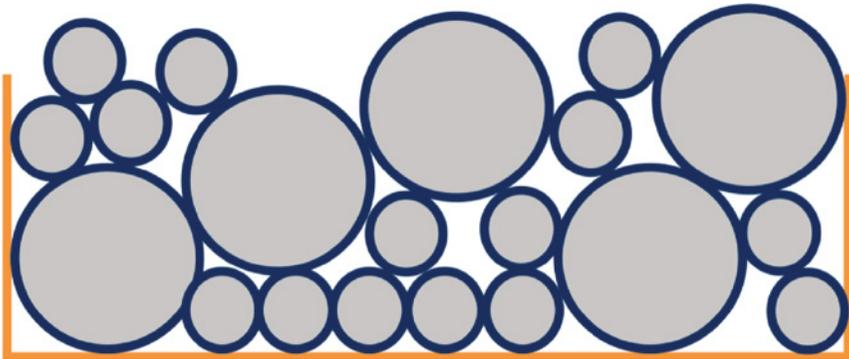
Now, while you're sitting at your desk, just coping with the 20 balls you've got, the chief executive officer (CEO) just signed a new $8M account. That means your boss just gave you a new big ball, something that she used to do, that she has to have you do so she can take on some of the work of that new client.

Now, you've got 21 balls, and one of them is a big black one. This means you have one big ball's equivalent of new work, *and it does not fit into your box.* Your box, your professional day-to-day life, is now out of stasis. You're going to have to make a change (but it can't be to change the box).
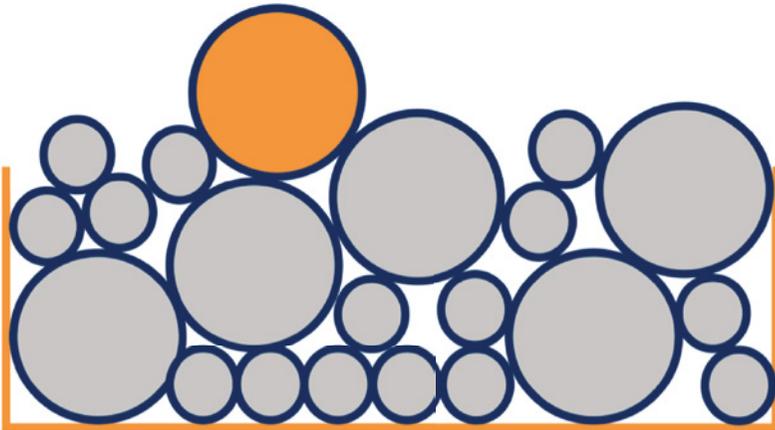
Before you start finding solutions to this problem, we're going to give you some realistic constraints. First, you cannot work more hours. The size of the box is the absolute maximum your spouse or body will allow you to work. Think of the box as rigid.

Further, you can't work "smarter." Over time, we all get smarter about our work, and we can do more. But that takes time, and you can't magically work smarter and fit all 21 balls into the same-sized box. You can't instantly get smart enough to be able to do the work required for the black ball too. Nor can you suddenly get a lot better at a bunch of the rest of the balls.

Also, you can't say no. We call this the IT solution. IT managers follow a logical path when presented with more work. They think: I have 10 guys who can program 100 lines an hour. They are currently producing 8,000 lines a day. Since they don't have any more capacity, we can't add another project. It's logical, but not helpful.

The solution, of course, is delegation.

Yes, you can take on that new big ball. You just need to delegate. If you look back at the diagram, you have three choices:

Delegate one of the big gray balls.
    Delegate the big black ball.
    Delegate one or more of the small balls.

Let's take the options in order since the first two are wrong, and the last one is right. ;-)

Delegate one of the big gray balls. At first glance, this seems like a reasonable answer. If you're going to have to delegate something (and we've told you that you are), why not delegate a single item—less hassle, right?

There's only one problem with that. Let's imagine that your directs have a box, just like yours. Their time is restricted by their spouse or their bodies. They also already have 20 projects on their plates.

What does it look like when you delegate one of your small balls to one of your directs? It looks like the picture below.
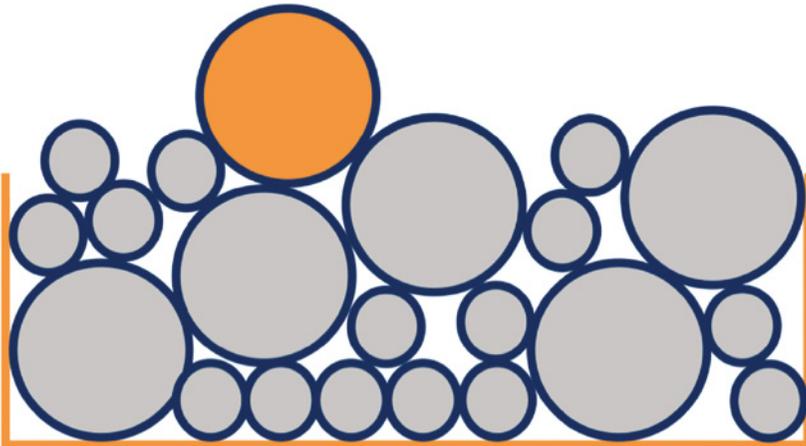
Just in case you didn't get it, we'll say it again. *This is what it looks like when you delegate one of your SMALL balls to one of your directs.*

The lesson: one of your small balls is a big ball to your direct. They don't know how to do the task, it's new to them, and the expectations are higher. They have to spend a lot more time than you did to get it done. So your small ball/responsibility, when it drops down a level in the organization, becomes a big ball for your direct.

So now maybe we can see why we can't delegate a big ball to our directs: because it would CRUSH them. The balls get bigger as they go down the organization—because you're skilled at what you do, but your directs aren't yet. They will be overwhelmed.

Splitting a big ball among multiple directs is generally not a good plan. If the ball were easily splittable, it would have probably already split itself up into small balls. Managing multiple people's work and coordinating them to come together to achieve one result at this level makes your life harder.

What about delegating the big black ball? We already know that delegating ANY big ball is a bad idea, but delegating the big black ball is an exceptionally bad idea. Why? Not because your boss is keeping an eye on it (though she is). Not inherently because it's new—though that's part of it.

You can't delegate a new big responsibility because *you don't know how to do it yet.* If you don't know how to do it, how are you going to help your direct to understand it? How are you going to know if they're following the right path? You need to understand the project before you can delegate it.

So the answer becomes to delegate one or more of the small balls. Since we've eliminated all the other options, this must be the right answer. Let's look at that diagram again. Five small balls are equal in size to one big ball. So, in order to have enough time for you to do the work required for that big black ball your boss just gave you, you'll need to delegate five of your small balls.

At every one of our Effective Manager Conferences, when we work through this model, we're interrupted. There's a flaw in our reasoning, we're told.

If you haven't spotted it, here it is. The CEO comes in with her new $8M client, and as a result, she delegates one of her small balls to the chief operating officer (COO) (to whom it seems big). The COO delegates one of his small balls to the vice president. The vice

president delegates one of his small balls to the manager (and, as at every other step, the small ball becomes big).

And the manager delegates to the individual contributor. But now, the individual contributor has 21 balls and NO ONE to delegate to. He doesn't have any more time, and he has too much to do.

So the only solution to this delegation cascade is the individual contributor must stop doing something.

When we get to the bottom of the organization, since there's no one to delegate to, the individual contributor "delegates to the floor." He stops doing some things.

Wait, you say. They can't just stop doing things.

But yes—they can. And frankly, they must. Why "must"? Because if the individual contributor can't stop doing anything, then his boss can't ever delegate to him: "I'm too busy." And if managers can't delegate because their box is also full, then the director can't delegate to the managers. And you can follow the logic: *the CEO can't take on that new client because everybody is. . ."too busy."*

And that lays bare the lie that managers must "protect" their people. The reality is quite the contrary: organizations' existences, which are predicated on growth, *require professionals at all levels to accept delegations.* **Delegating and the acceptance of delegation are a core professional behavior necessary for long-term organizational success.**

What Should You Delegate?

Every manager will choose to delegate different tasks. But there are some general rules that will help you decide what to delegate. And there are some fairly standard delegations that virtually every manager can make. We'll cover both.

Don't delegate your primary responsibilities. Even if they fit the following criteria, hold on to those things the organization most expects from you.

Don't think about yourself. Many managers delegate responsibilities that they don't like, don't need, don't want to do, or aren't good at. This is called the "push" model of delegating: we "push" things down to our directs.

This method usually fails, and the managers who try it blame everything—their directs, their busyness, their company, etc.—rather than acknowledging that they chose poorly what to delegate.

If your directs realize you're getting rid of work you don't like, don't need, or don't want to do, they won't see delegation as a trust-based behavior. **They'll say no because they don't want to be your trash bin.** And rightly so.

Rather, think about your directs. Ask yourself four questions about each of your directs, to determine who gets what:

- What does he **want to do?**
- What does she **like to do?**
- What does she **need to do for her growth?**
- What is he **good at?**

Want to, Need to, Like to, or Good At

THIS is called the "pull" model of delegation. You're not pushing down stuff you don't want; you're letting your directs' needs and wants "pull" responsibilities toward them.

And here's the challenge in the pull model of delegation: *it doesn't matter if you like or want or are good at the thing you're doing.* **If your directs want to, need to, or are also good at it—and they can do it close to as good as you can—you ought to seriously consider delegating it to them.**

You might think, "Well, one of the reasons I'm not delegating this is that I'm better at it than my folks. And it takes me less time." Fair enough; this is probably true for a lot of what you and your team do.

But again, this is not a defense against delegation. Your organization relies on you as a manager to have work done at the lowest possible level. If the "I'm better at it than they are" defense was a legitimate one, there would be a lot of gifted senior execs and even CEOs who would be trying to do everything. (In fact, this is one of the reasons for the principle that "entrepreneurs can't scale." They do it all themselves.)

Here's a helpful thought for getting over your "superior skills" argument. You're probably comparing your ability right now on a particular responsibility to your perception of one of your direct's skills right now. But that's not the standard your organization has ever applied to that task or deliverable.

The standard you ought to apply when thinking about delegating is, "Can she do it as well as I did it *when I first started doing it in this role?*" When you think of it that way, it's pretty clear: you weren't that good when you first started handling some of your responsibilities. But you didn't get fired, did you? You're still there, right?

And so will your directs be when they do the newly delegated task the first few times.

Four No-Brainer Delegations

There are four tasks you likely engage in today as a manager that you could delegate to your directs (even, in some cases, rotating these responsibilities among them). If you're wondering what to start delegating, or if you thought the previous system of thinking about your responsibilities too complex, here are 4 dead simple choices.

1. Reporting. Creating reports isn't an effective use of your time. Yes, you're responsible for making sure your boss or whoever gets the necessary reporting from your team—but nobody expects you to create the reports yourself. Frankly, executives assume you've already figured out that you ought not to be the one creating reports. And if you're worried, tell whomever you delegate which report to

let you know about if anything looks weird or bad. And of course, copy you when they send them out.

Creating the reporting for your team will teach your directs how your team is looked at—a good lesson.

2. Meetings. Stop running your meetings! A monkey could run a meeting. Have one of your directs be a facilitator, responsible for running the agenda and facilitating the meeting.

Lots of managers don't think about it, but when you're running one of your meetings, there are three tasks you're supposed to be doing in that meeting, and most managers are only doing two of them. The tasks are running the meeting; contributing to the meeting, with comments, decisions, and questions; and evaluating your directs' performance in the meeting. Who's knowledgeable? Who's prepared? Who's not prepared? Who's respected by others? Who's ignored?

Now ask yourself: Which of those three things is most valuable? And which is least? If you're not paying attention to your directs in your meetings, running that meeting is distracting you from your more important responsibility.

3. Presentations. You're probably quite competent at presenting, in part because you've presented a lot. How are your directs going to get better unless you delegate some of "your" presentations? If you are assigned a presentation, delegate it to a direct, and help him create the slide deck (if necessary) and rehearse.

The way you learn to do a thing is to do the thing. And if they need help presenting, coach them with our MT Coaching Model. And then send them to Toastmasters—it will work like a charm.

4. Projects. When you're assigned a project, don't assume you must be the project manager. Once we become managers, there are things that come to "us" that are actually coming to our role/office. Learn to separate yourself from your role, and think of delegating projects as a great way to teach your directs how to lead across the organization without role power.

The Manager Tools Delegation Model/Script

Once you've decided to delegate to a direct, the actual delegation is relatively easy. The initial conversation will take very little time and can take place in a One on One (O3) or at another convenient time. It has four simple steps, with some additional details that occur after the delegation is accepted.

You'll note that we called it the Manager Tools Delegation Model/Script. It's actually a model that we've tested with tens of thousands of managers over 2 decades. But it's also a script because in the beginning, we learned that managers need some words to get started.

You don't have to use our words if you don't want to. But here's the thing about models that have been tested: use any words you want, but make sure the words you're using adhere to the principles of the model. If they don't, you won't be able to understand the responses you'll get.

In the beginning, say the words in the script. Once you get used to it—and start getting lots of yesses—you'll understand the principles behind the model, and you can use whatever words you want.

State your desire for help. "Sarah, I'd like your help." It's that easy. When we ask at conferences, "How many of you, if your boss asked for help, would say yes, without needing to know any details?" Ninety percent of the audience say yes. Just asking for help almost guarantees you that you're going to be able to delegate this activity to your direct.

Notice, we don't ask "Sarah, can you do me a favor?" This isn't a personal thing. It's a work thing. We're asking nicely, but we're not getting personal. (And we tried this construction, and it didn't work when we tested it.)

You'll also notice we don't recommend you say, "Sarah, I need your help." Managers who were learning this model 25 years ago liked the idea of saying *need*, so we tested it, and it didn't work.

What happened was directs heard "need" and thought that they didn't have any choice but to say yes when we asked them to take on the new responsibility. You'll see that in Step 3 of the model, we're going to ask our directs to take on the delegation. We're not going to tell them. If we ask, but we've previously said, "need," we get directs feeling forced to say yes. You'll understand why that's bad when we discuss Step 3 later.

Tell them why you're asking THEM. Remember the guidance we gave previously about how to choose what to delegate? What your directs want to/need to/like to/are good at. In the second step of the model/script, we're going to make sure they understand why we're asking them and not somebody else. We're not just making random guesses at who will take on this new task. We've thought about it, and we've thought about them and think they would be a good fit for the responsibility.

So, say we've decided we're going to delegate a particular presentation to Andrew because he wants to get promoted, and this presentation will be to our boss and his peers, who will be involved in the promotion decision. We want Andrew to be known to our boss and his peers.

The first two steps of the script are easy and would sound like this:

"Andrew, I'd like your help on something."
    <Sure dude, what is it?>
    "You've been wanting to get promoted ["want to"], and we both know that means we need to make sure everyone on the promotion board knows you . . . ."

Ask for specific acceptance. In the third step of the model/ script, we *ask* our direct to take responsibility for what we're delegating. So, in the previous example with Andrew, it might sound like, "Would you please take over delivering my monthly briefing to the executive team?"

Many people are surprised here, for two reasons. First, because we *ask*. We don't "tell" when we make delegations. This is intentional.

Were we to tell—"You're now giving my monthly briefing. . ." we would be using role power. We have the authority to assign such work to Andrew, and so we use it to transfer to him the responsibility for the briefing.

But typically what role power engenders is what is called "compliance energy." That is, our direct knows he or she must comply.

But when we *ask* our direct to take on a new responsibility, we are using relationship power. Relationship power is based on trust. When we use our relationship power with our directs, we get what is known as "commitment energy," which has been shown to be more valuable in task accomplishment than compliance energy (as you might imagine).

The reason we get commitment energy when we ask is that our direct gets to choose. Assuming our direct trusts us (remember why we do O3s, and do them *first*), they know that they can say no, and we will honor their declination. Knowing that they are free to say no, directs who choose to say yes put better effort into their new responsibility.

You might be worried that asking brings up the risk that our direct will say no. And you'd be right; it does bring up the risk of that. But we still ask, for two reasons. First, because *the risk of being told no is far outweighed by the value of engaging our direct's commitment energy.*

Second, while there is a risk of being told no, our data show it's relatively small. **Our data show, over 9 years and close to 3,400 delegation requests we measured, 81% of directs say yes to their Manager Tools manager's request to accept a delegation.**

The second reason managers are surprised about Step 3 is that you'll note that we have not yet explained in detail what this delegation entails. Some managers say they would need to "know everything" before they could say yes.

But that's not what our data show, as you just learned in the positive response percentage of 81%. *Even though we managers worry that we have to tell our directs everything before they'll be able to say yes, more than four out of five of them say yes without knowing the details.*

For the record, if you want to tell your direct all the details first, that's fine, you can do that. Or if your direct hesitates and wants more detail, by all means give it to them.

But before you do, we want you to know of a hidden benefit of asking the general question first, before going into all of the details.

If you wait to ask your directs only after walking them through the details, they will have been listening to the details thinking of the problems and issues associated with all you're telling them. **But if you ask first, and they say yes, they will be listening while trying to figure out how to work through and solve for the details you're sharing with them.**

And by the way, if one of your directs says no to your high-level ask, you'll have saved yourself the time of going through all the details. ;-)

Now describe the task/project in detail. "Here's what's involved. . . ." As you describe what your direct will be doing, be sure to address their concerns. "This will take you less than 30 minutes per month" or "I have work instructions so you'll know exactly what to do" or "We'll talk to Karl about taking over the month-end run. It'll be great for him to expand his role there, and I think you'll enjoy this new work."

Now that they've accepted the responsibility and you've tried to lay out what they'll be doing, some other reminders are good for you to consider.

Go over deadline and quality standards. When you're covering the work, don't forget to define the quality standards. Remember, the whole point of delegation is that you free up time so that you can do the next big ball that comes in from your boss. If you spend your time improving your direct's work because you didn't explain the quality standard, you've wasted the opportunity.

That's not to say that there won't be a quality dip while your direct gets used to doing the new work. There almost certainly will be. There was a quality dip when YOU started doing this work. But the detriment to the organization of the short-term quality dip is nothing compared to the long-term gain in the expansion of the ability of the team and the organization.

Nail down reporting standards. "I want weekly updates, in our O3, with red/amber/green status and concerns." Whenever we allocate work, we need to also include reporting standards. If you have to chase after your directs to find out whether they've completed the work you've allocated to them, you're, once again, wasting the time you've gained. Include reporting back to you in the work.

Ask for skill/resource needs. "What do you need from me?" If you've briefed properly, your direct won't need anything. You'll have time to get to that project that's been on the back burner for months or to do the next big thing your boss chucks at you.

What if a direct repeatedly says no to delegation requests? This is of course the danger of a model built on relationship power and persuasion rather than role power and giving orders. Your directs can say no. Do remember, though, that their knowledge that you will accept a no means that when they do say yes, they mean it.

When they say no, honor it, initially. As we've said, never ask a question if you don't intend to honor the answer.

This is best proved through the negative. If you ask a direct a question, you're implying their answer has merit, right? If they give you the answer you "didn't want" and you say, "Well, I don't think you understand what's going on here, let's try again. . .," you're essentially saying, "I expected you to say the right thing, what I wanted, and now I am going to get what I wanted all along through the use of my role power."

If you start overruling answers to some of the questions you pose, *you're going to cause directs to tell you what you want to hear even when*

it's false, wrong, or unethical. The overruling of honest answers leads to dishonesty. Full stop.

So, if our direct says no, we're obligated to accept the denial. Usually that means one of two things, tactically. Either asking another direct—which works far better than most expect—or doing the work ourselves. Strategically, of course, it also suggests looking at our relationship efforts and asking, "Did I not see something, or was I unaware of what his situation was?"

The overwhelming majority of no's are based on workload issues. Sometimes they're right; they have too much to do. But that's much more rare than most understand. Most of us are surprisingly elastic when it comes to taking on more work. More can be taken than we think. Eustress sometimes has to become distress to know where the dividing line is.

After two rejections, examine your assumptions. The first time you're told no, accept it. Nothing wrong with probing and trying to overcome the objection. And then, honor the no and walk away.

Second time in a row, same thing, at first. Probe. Try to overcome. Then, if it's no again, step back before you ask someone else. What do I think their workload is? Is it even close to being overwhelming? Is this no part of a weakening of our relationship that has larger implications? Look back over the past few weeks for clues to a change in your relationship.

- Behavior changes
- Tone changes in conversations
- Fewer emails
- Different tone in emails
- Changes in schedule
- Changes in mood
- Changes in attendance
- Changes in meeting behaviors/interactions.

A note here about "in a row." It's not unusual for someone to say yes to several asks, and then say no, followed by more yesses. If you then get another no, those two no's don't qualify as a pattern. (If they did, we'd be saying that a yes is mandated all along.) What we're talking about in this guidance is the direct who says no repeatedly, as a pattern.

Then, after two, we take time in an O3 to ask the direct the previous questions. Actually, you don't have to ask them during an O3, you just have to be ready to have a 5-minute conversation, and it doesn't work to ask these bigger questions right after they've said no. They'll simply defend what they've already said rather than be able to switch gears to analyze the situation. We're suggesting this to give you and them some time and space to reflect. The O3 is simply the natural place to ask the questions.

After three noes, explain the consequences. We've asked once and been told no. We attempted to overcome the objection and were retold no. Fine. Next time, new delegation, told no again. Probe, attempt to overcome, same results. Now we follow up with asking more broadly about workload and relationship.

Third time, another delegation offered, again a no. Probe, attempt, accept the no.

Now, we have to have a different conversation. It's best to have it during an O3. Give up your agenda for this one because it can be a 15–30 minute conversation. (For strategic conversations, it's okay to go over.)

At three noes in a row, our direct has established a pattern of behavior. The pattern is important because any one delegation doesn't suggest anything other than perhaps a busy schedule or bad timing or a misunderstanding. Even two, we give them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe it's legitimately a schedule issue followed by bad timing.

But three is a pattern that allows us to reasonably infer that they're making a conscious choice to avoid doing the work the organization expects them to do. Additional work, new work, or different work are all signs, assuming the choice is made ethically, of an organization growing or changing. No sustainable organization does not do those things. We as managers end up being the enabler, motivator, and yes sometimes even enforcer of the requirements of the organization. Even if that requirement was created by your own decision.

So, what do we try to say? We explain that they really are authorized to say no—because we asked. But even if they DO say no, the organization is constantly changing focus and attention. And it's constantly trying to grow, which is a form of change. That means all of us have to grow or change. The nature of the marketplace and the company is that they are always changing, and we have to change too, to allow the organization to keep up with the society it serves.

This means all of our decisions and actions, and all of their decisions and actions, lead to the organization's success or failure. The organization feels the consequences of its actions—more profits for better products or lower costs, less profit and more risk for poor products or services. And we feel the consequences of our actions. For them, the consequence of failing to accept the new work that others are having to do, and perhaps less well because of their workload, is a loss of your confidence in them. This has become a failure to be a team player and an indication that they're not committed to the mission.

Here's how it might sound.

I'm worried you're in danger of affecting your performance review. Accepting delegations is part of the development and growth process we all have to go through here. I'm also worried that you're gaining a reputation as someone who isn't a team player. Others are accepting much

more often than you. And finally, I'm worried that I won't be able to give you the kind of ranking on your performance review you might like. The fact is, we're always going to be dealing with more work, and saying no means you're not keeping up with the company, with me, and with your teammates. Let's talk about what's going on. . .

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Delegating to Remote Directs

Delegating to remote directs is not that much different than delegating to those directs who are collocated to you. We have tested the model with remote workers over the phone, and there are no appreciable differences in outcomes (normalized for other factors) for distant versus collocated directs. For the record, we have not tested delegation to remote employees using video, but we are confident the results would be similar.

Because of the distance, you may find it harder to know what your directs want to do, need to do, like to do, or are good at. Because we recommend starting delegation with your better performers, our recommendation here is easy: *just ask them.*

As a general rule, it will probably take you longer to build high levels of trust with your directs who are remote (if you're starting with them already remote). So, you might want to wait longer to start delegating.

On the other hand, top performers tend to be the easiest directs to create relationships with, *and they are most likely to want to be delegated to.* It's a judgment call that we recommend you make with

each individual direct. Don't feel the need to start delegating with everyone all at once—start with your top performers. If you want to get a sense of whether they're ready, just ask them.

For your hybrid workers, delegate to them on days they are in the office when you can. Do it during your One on One (O3)—you don't have to schedule a separate meeting. It can take as little as 5 minutes. It's a richer conversation face to face. You'll want to be able to see their full response. There are directs who will say, "yes," but you might well read concern or even a silent, "no." That's okay—talk about it with them—it's easier face to face.

For your fully remote directs, your O3 is an ideal time to ask for them to accept a delegation. You can prepare for it. You can even tell them a week in advance what you're planning. If that worries you, remember the Middleman Test: What would you want from your boss? If your boss knew she was going to delegate to you next week in her O3 with you, wouldn't you rather know that? Do your directs the same courtesy you would appreciate.

A small additional problem with delegating to remote directs is the more difficult follow-up you might need as they begin to take over your responsibility. The way to handle this is easy. When a direct accepts a delegation, make notes for your next two, three, or four O3s to check on their progress and see if they have questions. Works great.

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How to Start Delegating

Delegation is the easiest part of the Trinity to roll out because you can (almost) start delegating right away. That said, we would still recommend you do Manager Tools One on Ones (O3s) for 12 weeks before you start delegating willy-nilly. Trust is your best friend as a manager. Even if you think you have great relationships with your directs, 12 more weeks of waiting to delegate isn't going to be a problem.

Sometimes managers express frustration to us regarding the long timeline of rolling out the Manager Tools Trinity: *"Eight months before I get to coaching and delegation! You've got to be kidding me!"*

It's a legitimate gripe. Most managers know they're not performing at high levels, and when they see tools that appear to be well thought out and have been tested and proven, they want to implement them quickly. We wish we had data that said you can start changing everything about your managerial "style" and things would quickly change for the better in your results and retention. We wanted that too as we worked through developing and testing all these tools (and many others not covered here).

But we tested doing everything all at once, and it was a disaster. We ended up at the 8-month timeline to get to coaching and delegation by gradually extending the timing, hoping that we could get good results in as short a time as possible. But it wasn't until 12 weeks of MTO3s that the pushback to feedback wasn't too great. And it wasn't until managers had given 12–16 weeks of feedback before they and their directs had the bandwidth to start adding in coaching and delegation.

Could you go a little faster with delegation for a top performer? Yes. They're probably ready, and top performers need to be exposed to your job before they're promoted into a job at your level *and they've never done any part of a job at the managerial level.*

You've probably heard of good performers who get promoted and fail once they become managers. They're the ones who get punished, but it was their previous boss who is to blame. He didn't share enough of his job with them, and when they took over, *everything was new, and it overwhelmed them.*

So yes, you could slide delegation forward a little in the timeline for your top performers. (Don't do that with coaching.) The only thing you might regret is that when they do well (or not), you may not have the feedback model to give them feedback with.

That said, rolling out all of the Manager Tools in the Trinity follows the same basic pattern, one you ought to be familiar with by now.

Brief your team on delegation. Schedule 20–30 minutes during your staff meeting. Walk them through the Delegation model, just as you have been with the other models. If you're a licensee of our work (you can do so on our website), you can share the detailed show notes of our podcasts on delegation in advance and encourage them to read them and come prepared with questions.

Explain that you're going to start slowly, choosing whom to delegate to based on what they're good at, like, want, and need to do.

And remind them again that when you ask if they'll accept, it's okay to say no.

Then, as you start delegating, make sure to keep track of how they're doing. Be careful not to tell them *how* to accomplish their new responsibility—they may surprise you with their ingenuity. If there is reporting, check to make sure it's done.

And when they are successfully handling the new responsibility, give them positive feedback about it. Note that in your O3 notes, and remember to include that success in your considerations as you prepare their performance review. (Think about how valuable your MTO3 notes are going to be preparing reviews! There's a Cast for That.™)

If you want to build the capabilities of your team, you don't need to send them to tons of training. Just ask them to step up by pushing some work down. Your best team members will relish the challenge. And your organization will be better for it.

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The Manager Tools Manager

The Manager Tools manager is an ethical professional. She puts her family first. Professionally she is dedicated to her organization's success. She chooses the harder right instead of the easier wrong. She knows that results matter above all else, but the best roads to results are built by well-managed professionals. She knows, in the end, that it's all about people, and more communication is better.

We've shared a lot of detailed, actionable guidance in this second edition to help you start using the Manager Tools Trinity. We've shared it because we know it works and because it's teachable. And in all the details and recommendations, we hope we haven't obscured what the engine of your greatness as a manager can be: love.

If you want to be a great manager, implement our recommendations with love. What we mean is professional love: the willingness to risk yourself for the benefit of another. It means doing something that may be a little more difficult for you as a way of showing respect for your colleagues and your organization.

You can be demanding while also showing respect for your team. You don't have to withhold positive feedback. Don't be afraid

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to thank people "just for doing their job." Don't believe the cynics who say you can't show appreciation because then your directs will ask you for a raise. That's not so. *The cynics are wrong.* Frankly, over our careers, sometimes we've thought people are mostly good, and it's bad managers who make them cynical.

As the old saying goes: *Be good.*

You can give negative feedback with love in your heart. You can deliver tough messages with kindness. You don't have to be mean, short, or disrespectful to challenge people. You don't have to be brusque or rude. You don't have to "act like the boss."

Nor do you have to skip, or sugarcoat, hard messages. Be direct, and be kind doing it. That takes love. And it's a good thing. If you're going to get in trouble, wouldn't you rather it be for doing the right thing, for the right reason, with the best of intentions? Don't give in to the common wisdom; wisdom isn't common.

Today, part of why management isn't held up in a noble way is because nobody's been teaching us how. And it's also because we've gotten away from loving our colleagues and team members. But it doesn't have to be that way. Choose the harder right instead of the easier wrong. Love is the engine to help you get there.

We are hopeful we have shown you that it isn't that complicated to become a good manager. There's nothing difficult to understand. It just takes discipline and a road map, all of which you've found here.

And the First Step to Being a Good Manager Is to Be a Good Person

If you're just joining the Manager Tools community, welcome aboard. We're glad you're here. When we share our guidance, we think of you and your directs, and we wish you the very best. And when you need help, come see us at https://www.managertools.com.

We'll be there for you.

Mark Horstman, Sarah Sentes, and Kate Braun

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