

The 'great manager' checklist: How do you rate?

Great managers aren't born, they're made. And becoming a great manager requires honest self-analysis and periodic reassessments. The following checklist was designed to guide you in that analysis. Use it to take stock of your people skills. Be honest with yourself.

Then, tuck it away and revisit it in six months. Ask yourself: *Are you working to maintain those strengths and abilities you already possess? Have you improved where you are weak?*

Place a check mark next to the behaviors that you feel confident you exhibit on a routine basis.

1. Guide, don't control. Don't take a completely hands-off approach, but don't micromanage either. Explain what needs to get done, but don't dictate exactly how you want it done.

2. Utilize employees' strengths. All of your employees have something to offer. Identify, recognize and cultivate their specific skills.

3. Empower employees. Give them the tools they need to succeed and the opportunities to learn new skills.

4. Trust. Don't second-guess your employees' abilities. Believe that you hired good personnel.

5. Take an active interest in employees as individuals. Inquire about their families and hobbies. Remember their birthdays. Offer condolences when necessary.

6. Offer praise. Be quick to give a compliment for a job well done.

7. Respect employees. Your position of authority doesn't excuse belittling, abusing or humiliating workers, no matter how unintentional. Check that your tone isn't condescending or parental, especially when giving instructions or critiques.

8. Admit shortcomings and ask for help. There is no shame in admitting to an employee that they are more skilled in a particular area than you. Asking for help shows that you respect the employee's knowledge.

9. Have integrity. Avoid a "do as I say and not as I do" attitude. Hold yourself to the same standards to which you hold employees. Give credit where credit is due. For instance, if you use an idea from an employee in a proposal you submit to your boss, give the employee credit.

10. Learn from your mistakes. It's not enough to admit when you make mistakes. Learn not to repeat them. Otherwise, employees are going to consider your admissions of error and accompanying apologies as nothing more than lip service.

11. Don't play the blame game. In the face of adversity, look to solve the problem, not place blame. Employees value knowing that you have their backs. That doesn't mean you should insulate them against deserved discipline. Just don't throw employees under the bus when they make honest mistakes.

12. Give employees a voice. Whenever possible, let them have a say in decisions that directly impact them. Also, ask them for feedback. If you cannot implement their suggestions, explain why.

13. Listen, really listen, to what employees are saying. Sometimes, you have to read between the lines or listen for what's *not* said.

14. Keep employees in the loop. Let them know when, why and how decisions are made. Also, explain the reasons behind new policies or changes to existing policies.

15. Keep things in perspective. Don't go crazy over something trivial. Ask yourself, "Will this matter a week from now?" If not, it might be best to just let it go.

16. Don't waste employees' time. Call meetings only when absolutely necessary. Have a clear agenda and be organized. Also, recognize that employees have lives outside of work and give them the flexibility to live them.

17. Compromise. Meeting employees halfway goes a long way! Be careful, however, of compromising too often. If you do, employees may start to think they can bend your will whenever they want, and, in the process, lose respect for your authority.

18. Be blunt, but tactful. Don't beat around the bush. Burying your message in small talk, for example, could result in the message getting lost.

19. Hold all employees accountable, i.e., don't play favorites. Not only will a failure to treat similarly situated employees pit them against each other, but it could also result in a discrimination claim.

20. Open your door, and walk out of it. It's important for employees to know that your door is always open to them. But be careful of waiting for them to come to you. Make a habit of walking around the department and interacting with employees in their workspaces.