What Great Managers DO

Based on Marcus Buckingham’s article in Harvard Business Review, March 2005, p.70-79
Great Leaders tap into the fears and needs we all share

Great managers discover, develop and celebrate what’s different about each person and what works for them

Here’s how they do it!
Great Managers

- Discover what is unique about each person and capitalize on it
- Know and value the unique abilities and even the eccentricities of their staff, and learn how to best integrate them into coordinated action
- Play chess while average managers play checkers
Checkers

- All the pieces are uniform and move in the same way.
- They are interchangeable.
- They all move in the same pace, on parallel paths.
Chess

- Each type move of piece move in a different way
- You can’t play if you don’t know how each piece move
- You won’t win if you don’t think carefully about how move the pieces
Great Leaders

- Discover what is universal and capitalize on it
- Rally people toward a better future
- Cut through the differences of race, sex, age, nationality and personality
- Use stories and celebrate heroes
- Tap into those very few needs we all share
Great Managers

- Turn one person’s particular talent into performance
- Identify and deploy the difference among people
- Challenge each staff to excel in his or her way
- *Great managers can be great leaders and vice versa, but to excel at one or both, they need to be aware of the very different skills each role requires*
A Game of Chess

- Great managers put people into roles that will allow them to shine and avoid putting clashing personalities together.
- Ability to keep tweaking roles to capitalize on the uniqueness of each person is the essence of great management.
- They also find ways for individuals to grow.
Great Managers Are Romantics

- Capitalizing on each person’s uniqueness is a powerful tool for the following reasons:
  1. It saves time – taking advantage of natural abilities, rather than trying to remedy the weaknesses
  2. Makes individual more accountable
  3. Build a stronger sense of team, because it creates interdependency, helps people appreciate one anothers’ particular skills – makes people need one another
  4. Introduce a healthy degree of disruption into the world
Great Managers

- Focus on uniqueness not just because it makes good business sense,
- Because they can’t help it
- Fascinated with individuality for its own sake
- Fine shades of personality are crystal clear to and highly valued
- Do not ignore the subtleties
- Figure out what makes people tick
“Controlling Insight”

- The elusive “One Thing” which all great managers have
- Helps identify which actions has the most far reaching influence in virtually every situation
- Applicable across a wide range of situations
- Serve as a multiplier and achieve exponential improvement
- Guide action which creates better outcomes consistently
The Three Levers

- To be a great manager you must know about each of your direct reports:
  1. What are his or her strengths?,
  2. What are the triggers that activate those strengths?, and
  3. What is his or her learning style?
Make most of strengths

- Great managers take time and effort to fully appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of their staff.
- They do this by spending a great deal of time outside the office walking around, watching each staff’s reactions to events, listening and taking mental notes about what each individual is drawn to and what each person struggle with.
To identify strengths

- Great managers ask, “What was the best day at work you’ve had in the past three months?” – prompt your staff to start thinking about their interests and abilities.
- Find out what the person was doing and why he/she enjoyed it so much.
- A strength is not just something you are good at, it might be something you aren’t good at yet.
- It might be a predilection – something you find so intrinsically satisfying that you look forward to doing it again and again, getting better at it over time.
To identify weaknesses

- Great managers ask, “What was the worst day you’ve had in the past three months?” – probe for details on what was being done
- A weakness is not just something you are bad at, it might be something that drains you of energy
- Something you never look forward to doing and when you are doing it, you want stop
Great Managers

- Look at both strengths and weaknesses but focus on strengths of their staff to build self-assurance.
- Self-assurance, i.e., self-efficacy is the strongest predictor of the ability to set high goals, to persist in the face of obstacles, to bounce back when reversals occur, and achieve the goals set.
- Great managers understand this and reinforce self-assurance of the staff.
- Focus on strengths might create a sense of overconfidence among staff, but great managers mitigate this by emphasizing the size and difficulty of the goals.
Dealing with failures

Four approaches great managers use:

1. Offer relevant training if the problem is lack of skills or knowledge;
2. Providing a “complementary partner” whose talents are strong in precisely the areas where the staff is weak;
3. Using a technique which helps the staff accomplish through discipline what could not be achieved through instinct,
4. Rearrange the work more effectively to render the weakness irrelevant
Strengths are not always on display and sometimes require precise triggers to turn them on.

Triggers come in myriad and different forms and must be used with care – with the right trigger, staff will push harder and persevere in the face of obstacles, with the wrong one staff may shut down.

A trigger which works with one might not work with another.

The most powerful trigger is recognition not money.
Great managers are aware that staff respond well to recognition. They realize that each staff plays to a slightly different audience and match the staff to the audience they treasure most, for e.g. peers, managers, technical expertise, clients, etc. Tailoring praise to fit a person is what great managers do.
Tailor to learning styles

- Three styles predominate; but they are not mutually exclusive
  1. Analyzing
  2. Doing
  3. Watching
- Attuning to each staff learning style or styles will help focus coaching
Analyzers

- Understands a task by taking it apart, examining its elements and reconstructing it bit by bit, every single component of a task is important
- Craves information; hates mistakes
- Needs to absorb all there is to know about a subject before being comfortable with it
- Teaching an analyzer require giving ample time in the classroom, role playing and post-mortem exercises
- Allow ample time for preparation, break the performance down into its component parts so that it can be carefully built up
- The most powerful learning moments occur prior to the performance
Doers

- The doer’s most powerful learning moment occurs **during performance**
- Trail and error are integral to the doing learning style
- Learns most by figuring out things themselves, see preparation as dry and uninspiring
- To teach the doer, give a brief overview of the desired expected outcomes and get out of the way, and then gradually increase the degree of each task’s complexity
- Mistakes are raw material for learning
Watchers

- Do not learn through role play nor learn by doing
- The watchers are poor students but not necessarily poor learners
- Learn when given a chance to see the total performance - the complete picture, rather than examining the individual parts of a task
- Get the watcher out of the classroom, away from manuals and pair with the most experienced performers
Mediocre managers

- Assume staff are motivated by the same things and by the same goals
- Believe they will desire the same kind of relationships
- Think they learn in the same way
- Define the expected behaviours and tell staff on work on behaviours that doesn’t come naturally
- Praise those who can overcome their natural styles to conform to preset ideas
- Believe the manager’s job is to mold, or transform, each staff into the perfect version of the role
Great Managers

- Their success lies in the appreciation of individuality.
- They play chess, they do not try to change a person’s style – they do not push a knight to move like a bishop.
- They are aware that staff differs in the way they think, how they build relationships, how altruistic they are, how patient they can be, how much of an expert they need to be, how prepared they need to feel, what drives them, what challenges them, and what their goals are.
Individual Differences

- Like blood types, cutting across variations of race, sex, and age
- Enduring and resistance to change
Great Managers

- Invest their time (the most precious resource) to identify exactly how each staff is different and then determine how best to incorporate those enduring idiosyncrasies into the overall plan.
- Bring this insight into their actions and interactions.
Remember!

- Great management is about release, not transformation.
- It’s about constantly managing your environment so that the unique contribution, the unique needs and the unique style of each individual is given free rein.
- Your success as a manager depends on your ability to do this.