

MARK HORSTMAN  
KATE BRAUN | SARAH SENTES



# EFFECTIVE MANAGER

SECOND EDITION

COMPLETELY REVISED AND UPDATED

WILEY



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**KATE BRAUN | SARAH SENTES**

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**MANAGER**

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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](http://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

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## 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.*

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 short-sighted. 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.



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

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## 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.



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.



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.<sup>TM</sup>

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.