



**JAKADA IMANI  
MONNA WONG  
BEX AHUJA**

# **Management** in a **Changing** **World**

**HOW TO MANAGE FOR  
Equity, Sustainability, and Results**

**WILEY**



# **Management** in a Changing World



**JAKADA IMANI  
MONNA WONG  
BEX AHUJA**

# **Management** in a **Changing** **World**

**HOW TO MANAGE FOR**  
Equity, Sustainability, and Results

**WILEY**

Copyright © 2023 by The Management Center. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.  
Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the web at [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com). Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permission>.

Trademarks: Wiley and the Wiley logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Further, readers should be aware that websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. Neither the publisher nor authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic formats. For more information about Wiley products, visit our web site at [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

***Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is Available:***

ISBN 9781394165797 (Paperback)  
ISBN 9781394165827 (ePub)  
ISBN 9781394165841 (ePDF)

Cover Design: Wiley  
Cover Image: © Kiely Houston

# CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: THE FUNDAMENTALS OF EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: DELEGATING EFFECTIVELY</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: DEFINING ROLES AND GOALS</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: MAKING DECISIONS AND PRIORITIZING</b>	<b>91</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6: HIRING AND BUILDING YOUR TEAM</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7: GIVING FEEDBACK AND EVALUATING PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>CHAPTER 8: INVESTING IN PEOPLE</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>CHAPTER 9: ADDRESSING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS</b>	<b>173</b>
<b>CHAPTER 10: MANAGING UP AND SIDEWAYS</b>	<b>197</b>

**vi** Contents

**CHAPTER 11: BUILDING A HEALTHY CULTURE** 207

**CHAPTER 12: CONCLUSION** 225

**About the Authors** 229

**Index** 231

# FOREWORD

This book is a successor to *Managing to Change the World: The Nonprofit Manager's Guide to Getting Results*, which I co-wrote with Alison Green back in 2012. We received really positive feedback about that book over the years, and I reveled in . . . well, as much fame and fortune as you get from writing a popular nonprofit management book.

Why, then, am I so excited to welcome this new book—even as it pushes aside the original one (and all the glamor that came with being its author)?

Don't get me wrong: I think the previous book did many things well. As with all of our work at The Management Center (TMC), our book was focused on how leaders can deliver results that move the needle toward social change. It was deeply grounded in the reality that managers face (which Alison and I knew from experience), and it often challenged conventional wisdom. Readers told us they found it supportive, humble, real about how hard things can be—and even funny at times. Above all, people told us they appreciated that our book was deeply practical and filled with concrete ways to put our lessons into action. I still send excerpts of that book to my coaching clients to help them through tough spots. In many ways, I'm still very proud of it.

But it also badly needed an update. In one section on how to stay organized, for instance, we talked about using written lists and paper folders—a little outdated for the digital age! More substantively, TMC's coaching and training content evolved significantly over the years as we developed new insights from our work with clients. I kept a running list of things to add to a revision—like the pros/cons/mitigations chart, the “urgent vs. important” matrix, and the idea of “gold star” vs. “good enough,” all of which you'll find in this book.

Most importantly, the last book had serious limitations that would have been harder to fix with a simple revision and impossible for me to do as well as this book does. Our original book was almost completely silent about race, equity, inclusion, and managing across lines of power and difference. It talked a lot about results (as this book also does), but not nearly enough about how to get them equitably and sustainably. I've always believed that management is about excellence and heart—that managers can and should be able to get great results while also being decent human beings and living their values at work. But the previous book was too easy to interpret as being all about excellence, not so much heart.

Looking back, I didn't take enough time and space to make the implicit explicit (a phrase you'll hear often in this book) about many things. I'm excited, for instance, that this book has an entire chapter on relationships and another on culture (which we

talked about in the previous book, but too briefly). I love that we've turned SMART goals into SMARTIE (adding "inclusive" and "equitable"), and that every chapter has tools to help you check your biases.

The changes I've mentioned are like adding new wings to a house. In many ways, though, this book is more like building a new house from a different blueprint, and so it was important that Jakada, Monna, and Bex began fresh in writing this one. When we wrote the original book, I didn't understand nearly as much about equity and inclusion as I do now (though I still have a long way to go!)—and I learned *a lot* of what I know now from the coauthors of this book.

I can't believe how lucky I am to have worked as closely as I have with Jakada, Monna, and Bex. All three of them are not only brilliant and deeply knowledgeable practitioners of management and movement-building, but they're also some of the warmest and most genuine people I know. All three of them eventually took on bigger roles at TMC than they started with, and they all played pivotal roles in making TMC a better, more inclusive organization.

I'm forever grateful to Bex for working so closely with me during the steepest part of my learning curve around issues of equity and inclusion. We had many (often difficult) conversations about equity-related topics. Bex always had the strength and courage to keep pushing when I disagreed or didn't get it, and they did so with tremendous grace and patience. I loved every chance we got to roll up our sleeves and work directly together; we played off of each other's ideas and instincts in a way that led us to much better outcomes. As I told Bex multiple times, I don't know that I've ever worked with anyone more talented than they are. Maybe even more impressively and most tellingly, after meeting Bex, my (then-little) kids constantly asked when Bex would come over again to play marching band in the living room.

Then there's Monna, one of the funniest people I've had the privilege of working with, and one of the best at getting to the essence of an idea. Whenever I had an idea Monna had reservations about, she'd ask probing questions that helped me think about it differently and sparked awesome conversations. She thinks deeply and critically, kicking the tires and pulling all the threads until she comes up with the best possible synthesis of all your ideas, *and* the best way to phrase it (often incorporating a hilarious metaphor about food). By making ideas about management funny and palatable, Monna gets readers to do the management equivalent of eating their vegetables. Monna also helped me keep in shape during the isolating days of the COVID pandemic by taunting me through her latest planking challenge.

Finally, I couldn't be more honored that Jakada is my successor as CEO of The Management Center. From the time that Jakada first started at TMC, I was struck by his wisdom, brilliance, and commitment to doing what it takes to bring about justice in the world. Jakada embodies excellence and heart—or love and rigor, as he much more eloquently puts it. He's the perfect messenger for the things I wish I'd done a better job communicating in the first book, *and* the perfect person to take everything The Management Center does to a higher level than I ever could have. He was an

incredible partner during my transition out of my role at TMC after 15 wonderful years, and he has done an *awesome* job navigating the complexities of his new role and leading the organization forward. It can be hard for founders to step away from an organization they created, but with Jakada, I was thrilled to get out of the way and watch him shine.

And now, I can't wait to get out of the way and let you read what these three have written.

—Jerry Hauser, founding CEO of The Management Center



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book couldn't have happened without the labor, time, energy, love, stories, insights, and support of many people.

Thank you to Emily Crockett for wading through this with us. You asked great questions, pushed us to get clearer, found all the footnotes, and stuck it out until the words sang on the page—all with so much heart and humor and sheer determination to get the damn thing done. Thank you for wrangling our ideas until they made sense (and being honest when they didn't!). Most importantly, thank you for being a true partner in the work and caring about this book as much as we do.

Thank you to Jerry Hauser and Alison Green for your incredible work on *Managing to Change the World: The Nonprofit Manager's Guide to Getting Results*, which made it possible for *this* book to exist.

Jerry, thank you for everything from warmly inviting each of us into the TMC fold to kicking off this book with a beautiful foreword. Your consistency, integrity, and sense of responsibility for being extremely helpful and practical have been an indelible part of TMC's "secret sauce." We hope we did right by you in preserving it.

To the TMC team, thank you for sharing stories, reviewing chapters, giving pep talks, and many pomodoros (among countless other things). Thank you for the incredible care that you bring to this work and our TMC community. Thank you Addae Kwakye, Adriana Barboza, Alex McNeill, Alyssa Schuren, Amy Faulring, Amy Sonnie, Andie Corso, Andrea Stouder, Aquiles Damirón-Alcántara, Ashley Pinedo-Carlson, Avione Pichon, Breanna Wright, Carmen McClaskey, Chantá Parker, Charlie Riebeling, Cicely Horsham-Brathwaite, Cindy Kang, Cosmo Fujiyama Ghaznavi, Court Ruark, Deb Sherman, Diana Cerda, Ebony Ross, Emily Hicks-Rotella, Emma Shaver, Hanna Campbell, Jackson Darling-Palacios, Jamilyn Bailey, Janet Namkung, Jasmeet Saini, Jessica Anderson, JK Nelson, Johari Farrar, José Luis Marantes, Justine Xu, Katie Steele, Kevin Carty-Tolentino, Marissa Graciosa, Mattie Weiss, Megan Hanson, Nancy Hanks, Niamoja Morgan, Qasim Davis, Reilly Furellis, Sandra Oliver, Sarah Hodgdon, Sarah Storm, Serena Savarirayan, Stacy McAuliffe, Stephen McClain, Sumaiya Sarawat, Tamara Osivwemu, Valerie Evans, Valerie Jiggetts, Viridiana Safty, Wendy Guyton, and Yamani Yansa.

Thank you to our former colleagues who shaped our thinking about effective management through modeling, rigorous discussion, and experimentation. Special thanks to Ben Goldfarb, Delan Ellington, Elizabeth Brown Riordan, Emily Berens, Jen Chau Fontán, Jenny Griggs, Jordan Pina, Kendra Featherstone, Maria Peña, Marilyn Figueroa, Melanie Rivera, Michelle Ngwafon, Naomi Long, Peggy Flanagan, and Shawna Wells.

## xii Acknowledgments

Thank you to TMC's original POC caucus—Imay Ho, Isabelle Moses, Joyce Yin, Melinda Spooner, and Tasia Ahuja Smith—and Amy Faulring and Jackson Darling-Palacios, for planting, nurturing, and sowing the seeds to make equity a must-have for effective management.

Thank you to the TMC board for your vision, support, and guidance.

Thank you to Tanya O. Williams and Terry Keleher for your teachings, consultation, and influence during a crucial point in TMC's racial equity journey. Terry, thank you for choice points. Tanya, thank you for strategies for authenticity.

Thank you to our partners at Wiley—Brian Neill, Deborah Schindlar, and Kim Wimpsett—for your flexibility, support, and patience throughout this process, as well as for the opportunity to share this book with the world.

Thank you to Kiely Houston for capturing the spirit of this book with beautiful illustrations that match the nuance, vibrance, and heart of our advice.

Thank you to Chelsea Judith Wilson, Court Ruark, Jenny Griggs, Melanie Anne Conway, Melanie Rivera, and Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen, for test-driving our manuscript and sharing honest and thoughtful feedback.

Thank you to Becca McKelvy, Benn Marine, Gabe Gonzalez, Jami Westerhold, Kelly Bates, Lily Pham, Linda Seng, Megan Mullay, Molly Griffard, and Rodrigo Heng-Lehtinen for your recollections and insight.

Thank you to everyone we each had the honor and privilege to work with, especially our teammates at the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, Lavender Phoenix, the National LGBTQ Task Force, Rockwood Leadership Institute, and the Mainers United for Marriage campaign. Thank you for the feedback, support, advice, and grace that helped us grow as managers and leaders.

Thank you to the mentors, elders, and ancestors, who asked questions with no easy answers, gave advice (even when we didn't ask for it!), and pushed us to do better. Thank you for laying the groundwork, for being the shoulders on which we stand, and for passing the baton so we could carry the work forward.

Thank you to everyone who's conspiring and aligning, making good trouble, striving to be a more effective manager, and showing up every day to fight for freedom and justice.

And finally, a few personal acknowledgments from each of us:

- **Bex:** To my beautiful and brilliant wife, Tasia Ahuja Smith, whom I met working at TMC back in 2014, who was my teacher on equity back then, and who still is to this day. Thank you for always patiently and lovingly pointing to a deeper level of understanding and nuance in equity work. This book belongs to you. Thank you to my mother, Janet Wu, for your steadfast modeling of humility, responsibility, faith, prayer, and hard work. To my team at Rockwood, thank you for showing me what it means to set a loving table for tired and weary movement leaders, and to Darlene Nipper for scooping me up and allowing me to witness your courageous, visionary leadership every day. To my family, Anita, Randy, Zach, Max, Jim Lia,

Maya, and Jayla; and the Bloat and nibblings, Juno, Mika, and Jerome, thank you for giving me home and hope whenever we gather.

- **Monna:** Thank you to all my people, my family. For the dreams and schemes, lifelong friendships, deep hangs, masterminds, snacks, childcare, commune, chats, dancing, and shenanigans. Thank you for letting me be, even as I am becoming. The Portland Potatoes and my APIENC crew: thank you for the joy, abundance, and badass work, for trusting me, for being my teachers and comrades. Thank you to the TMC content crew, for holding it down and caring for each other. Thank you, Juno, for your freedom and fearlessness. Thank you, Mandy, my ultimate co-conspirator, the one who sees how the sausage gets made. Thanks for enabling me to put my full body, brain, and heart into this project. I could not have done this without your love, labor, and most of all, our two-person psychology. Thank you for the life we've co-created, full of delighting in ridiculousness, possibility, and adventure.
- **Jakada:** Thank you to my family for supporting me to be a leader: Laura, Jael, Tehya, Nyame, Kioni, Phoenix, and Eli, you all give me hope and ground me in what is important. My crew from EBC: Ying-sun, Malakia, Sumayyah, Ian, Nicole, Diana, Zach, Van, Kristin, Glenn, the members of Families for Books Not Bars, and so many more. To all of my mentors and elders who invested in me when I was hard-headed and undisciplined: Shiree, Rev. Liza, Nell, Boots Riley, Raquel, brother Greg, and Elisha. You led by example, offered me wisdom, and reminded me to always root in values. Last, I thank all the young, uncompromising activists and organizers who refuse to settle for conventional wisdom, broken models, or stale traditions. You give me hope that the future can be better than the present. I see you, I recognize you, and I thank Spirit for you. Ashe, ashe, ashe.



# INTRODUCTION

“With great power comes great responsibility.”

—*Proverb*

“Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.”

—*Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

If you’re reading this book, you’re here to make a difference. You’re working for immigrant rights, workers’ rights, healthcare reform, and reproductive justice. You’re fighting to end poverty, voter disenfranchisement, mass incarceration, and climate crisis. You’re striving to improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people; disabled people; and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). You’re pushing to make government work better for people of all identities. You’re shaping the next generation’s minds and lives. You have a vision of change and possibility for the communities you care about—and you feel a sacred responsibility to do all you can to make it a reality.

If you’re reading this book, you also have the great responsibility—and the great power—of being a manager. Maybe you’ve just been promoted to a leadership role at a nonprofit or school. Maybe you were just elected or appointed into office. Maybe you’ve been at this for 30 years. Wherever you are in your career, you’re looking for guidance on using your power and responsibility more effectively.

In today’s rapidly changing world, managers need this kind of guidance more than ever. We’ve seen dramatically shifting expectations of what power and responsibility should look like in the workplace—especially those focused on social justice. A series of reckonings on race, inequality, and abuses of power have forced more people to grapple with questions like:

- How can we exercise power responsibly across racial, generational, gender, and other differences in identities?

## 2 Management in a Changing World

- How can we balance supporting our team members through life challenges with ensuring we meet our deliverables?
- How can we achieve “work-life balance” when video calls in our living rooms and 24/7 email access on our phones have collapsed the boundaries between “work” and “life”?
- In a time of rapidly escalating climate crisis and relentless displays of injustice, how can we avoid succumbing to feelings of overwhelm, numbness, or defeat?

As managers, sometimes it feels like the weight of these questions is on our shoulders all at once. We might feel responsible not only for getting the work done, but also for our team members’ well-being. We might feel unmoored and disoriented by constantly shifting circumstances and continually rising expectations.

We’re not wrong to feel that way. *It’s a lot to deal with.* Management is hard enough work in stable and familiar contexts. It’s harder in times of upheaval when we realize that some of our familiar professional, cultural, and social norms no longer serve us—and maybe never did.

And if you’ve never experienced good management firsthand (as too many of us haven’t), it’s *exponentially* harder. After all, if your past managers were ineffective, how are you supposed to know what effective management looks and feels like, much less how to practice it?

That’s where we come in. We wrote this book to offer a model of effective management. Whether you’re a new or seasoned manager, an executive director, or an organizer working with volunteers, and whether you manage one person or a hundred people, this book offers insights and actionable advice for you. We’ll give you the tools, strategies, and examples you need to learn the fundamentals of effective management. This book can help you lead your team with less stress, more ease, and better results.

Effective management is hard work, but it’s also a privilege, an honor, and a sacred responsibility. Effective management can transform people and organizations. It can make (or break) our work and results. As managers, we are entrusted to be stewards of people’s time and energy, to facilitate learning and growth, and to achieve the goals we need to create change. Effective management is hard work—but it’s worth doing, and you are absolutely capable of doing it.

### WHO WE ARE

We are the current CEO (Jakada Imani, he/him), the current chief content officer (Monna Wong, she/her), and the former managing partner of the training team (Bex Ahuja, they/them) of The Management Center (TMC).

TMC has been supporting managers and leaders in nonprofits, government, and schools since 2006. We have worked with thousands of teams and organizations. We’ve

coached hundreds of senior leaders and trained tens of thousands of people. We've worked to create, curate, and refine best practices and resources about management—so you don't have to reinvent the wheel or reinterpret traditional management concepts for a social justice context.

Here's a bit more about each of us:

- **Jakada** grew up poor in Oakland, California, in the home of the Black Panther Party, mentored by former Panthers and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee leaders. When Jakada became executive director of the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (EBC), he realized two things: first, his knowledge of strategy, organizing, and alliance-building didn't equip him with the management skills to help EBC deliver on its mission; and second, none of the traditional management resources he turned to could help him build and lead a Black-led, multiracial organization like EBC. So he learned by doing—forging a set of management practices rooted in love and rigor. He joined TMC as a coach and trainer in 2017 and became CEO in 2021.
- **Monna** is the daughter of refugees from Cambodia who settled in Queens, New York. She got her career start as a field organizer on LGBTQ campaigns (with Bex as her first manager!). In 2012, as a regional field director of the Mainers United for Marriage campaign, she learned to lead a team to victory without reinforcing the churn-and-burn culture of traditional campaigns. She and her team became excellent at getting people to do hard things together—usually with a healthy dose of joy and laughter. Monna joined TMC in 2018 as the vice president of special projects and has been the chief content officer since 2020.
- **Bex** was raised in a strong matriarchal Chinese immigrant family, bouncing between Long Island, New York, and Manhattan's Chinatown. Bex spent nine years at the National LGBTQ Task Force, where they had a manager who always took the time to teach, and who genuinely understood what was hard about their work. Bex came to understand management through organizing and building people power—which grounded them in the mindset of “I can't do this without you.” Bex joined TMC in 2013 as a trainer and became the managing partner of our training team in 2019. Bex left TMC to join Rockwood Leadership Institute as their managing director in 2021. They returned to work on this book because of their instrumental role in evolving TMC's thinking and curriculum about racial equity in management.

The three of us don't share the same backgrounds, but we have some key experiences in common. We all have deep experience working with and for our communities to advance social justice. All three of us have a talent for getting work done with others. And earlier in our careers, we might have been overlooked by recruiters looking for “traditional candidates.” None of us come with straight, white, middle-class

## 4 Management in a Changing World

experiences or sensibilities. Our parents never crafted résumés, wrote cover letters, or attended networking events. We come from hustlers who paid the bills through seasonal work and cleaning hotel rooms. We didn't excel academically. We learned how to operate in the working world through the grace and investment of mentors, participating in youth development programs, and organizing with queer and trans folks, poor people, and people of color.

All three of us have experienced the downsides of management in the social change sphere: having too much to do and too few resources, experiencing vicarious trauma and firsthand burnout, and putting up with too-low pay and too-long hours. We've worked with inspirational leaders whose management struggles either got in the way of realizing their grand visions or wreaked havoc for their teams in the process (or both). We know that managing can go from feeling amazing one day to feeling so horrible that you're tempted to quit. We have struggled with insecurity, loneliness, and imposter syndrome. We have been tired, overwhelmed, and unsure of how to make it through. (Bex once seriously considered quitting social justice work to become a firefighter!)

But we stuck it out—out of love for our people and commitment to our movements, and because we've also experienced the *best* of what social change work offers. We've witnessed people doing hard work to get great results while caring for each other. We know it's possible to work your butt off *and* preserve a sense of respect and camaraderie. We've seen what a diverse group of talented and committed people can achieve together. And we've seen the critical role that managers play in making this possible.

### HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book aims to demystify effective management by offering concrete advice to help you manage in an equitable, sustainable, and results-driven way. From hiring well to giving feedback to cultivating belonging, we want to help you and your team achieve what you set out to do.

We get it if you don't have time to read the whole book from cover to cover. So here's where to turn if you're looking for help on particular topics:

- **Chapter 1: The Fundamentals of Effective Management**—Explanations of key concepts, including what *effective management* means (hint: it's in the book title!).
- **Chapter 2: Building Relationships**—How to lay the foundations for a strong working relationship, including conducting an effective check-in meeting—and why check-ins are essential.
- **Chapter 3: Delegating Effectively**—How to assign work to others and set them up for success.

- **Chapter 4: Defining Roles and Goals**—How to define people’s job responsibilities and set goals like a SMARTIE.
- **Chapter 5: Making Decisions and Prioritizing**—Advice for making the big and little choices you’ll face as a manager—from major strategic decisions to using your calendar to prioritize.
- **Chapter 6: Hiring and Building Your Team**—How to get great talent by running an equitable hiring process, from the job posting to the interviews to the offer.
- **Chapter 7: Giving Feedback and Evaluating Performance**—How to improve your relationship and results by giving regular, actionable feedback, and how to conduct performance reviews.
- **Chapter 8: Investing in People**—How to develop your staff to grow their competencies. Plus, a bit about retention.
- **Chapter 9: Addressing Performance Problems**—How to identify performance problems and decide what to do about them.
- **Chapter 10: Managing Up and Sideways**—How to get what you need to succeed when you don’t have formal authority.
- **Chapter 11: Building a Healthy Culture**—How to create an environment that instills inclusion and belonging and gets you the results you need. Plus, how to transform an unhealthy culture.

Many of these chapters include appendix sections with sample tools and worksheets. You can find even more resources like this on our website, [www.managementcenter.org](http://www.managementcenter.org).

We don’t promise to have all the answers to your management challenges, but we *do* offer some fundamental tools that can help you craft solutions and meet your team’s needs. As you read this book, remember that even management “experts” like us have been where you are. And even now, we are growing and figuring it out with you.

We appreciate you for every time you pushed through a tough day and did your best. Most of us have had that *one* manager, teacher, coach, or mentor whose impact transformed our lives. You could be that person to someone. Thank you for caring, thank you for picking up this book, and thank you for being on this journey with us.



# CHAPTER

# 1

## THE FUNDAMENTALS OF EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

Management is the art of getting things done *with* and *through* other people. The bigger our aspirations, the more we need to work with others to achieve them.

But under many traditional management approaches, people are treated more like machine parts than, well, people. And this is no accident—many modern-day management practices have roots in U.S. slavery and worker exploitation.<sup>1</sup> They place profit and a narrow definition of *productivity* above all else—including the well-being and dignity of employees, the greater good of society, and the health of our planet.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of Black Lives Matter and other movements for justice, we've seen some long-overdue pushback against this model. More people are reevaluating their priorities. Many are deciding that too much of their time and energy is spent at work.

People are also expecting better from their employers—as they should! Now, more than ever, especially in social justice spaces, people want employers to practice what

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on this history, read Caitlin Rosenthal's *Accounting for Slavery: Masters and Management* (Harvard University Press, 2018). A good excerpt is here: [www.bostonreview.net/articles/caitlin-c-rosenthal-accounting-slavery-excerpt](http://www.bostonreview.net/articles/caitlin-c-rosenthal-accounting-slavery-excerpt)

they preach about equity, sustainability, and justice. Staff and managers alike want to be valued as human beings, not treated like cogs in a machine. We want to do purpose-driven work—*without* sacrificing living wages, good benefits, and reasonable hours for the sake of “doing what we love.” We want to build authentic connections with our colleagues. We want managers who believe in us and help us realize our potential.

At The Management Center (TMC), we believe that truly *effective* management means living up to these expectations—and getting important things done. This chapter covers our overall *approach* to management, the *dimensions* and *mindsets* of effective management, and some of the fundamental *tools* we use to practice it.

### OUR CONSPIRE-AND-ALIGN APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT

If managing is about getting things done with and through other people, most traditional approaches are almost all “through” and no “with.” Staff are treated like highly skilled automatons and are rarely consulted for their input.<sup>2</sup> This is often referred to as a *command-and-control* style of management.

The command-and-control approach is too inflexible and impersonal for those of us doing complex, human-centered work on systemic and social change. This kind of work thrives on collaboration, trial and error, and relationship-building—all of which a command-and-control approach stifles.

We take a different approach. We call it *conspire and align*. It means coming together with our team members for a collective purpose and getting on the same page about realizing that purpose. As managers, we view staff as partners—people we exercise power *with*, not over. We’re not drill sergeants barking orders; we’re in a team huddle, whispering plans and working out plays.

We chose the word *conspire* deliberately. For one thing, we believe folks working for justice, equity, and social change should be getting into “good trouble,” as the late U.S. House Representative John Lewis put it. We’re up to something—and that something usually involves trying to topple a status quo that doesn’t serve us.

*Conspire* is also meaningful for another reason. Back in 2007, Jakada participated in a Rockwood Leadership Institute year-long program. In one of its final sessions, then-president Akaya Windwood led the group in a breathing exercise. She said, “This is the meaning of conspire—to breathe together. To be so deep in it with each other that we share the same air. This is the level of closeness—of alignment—that we aspire to as leaders and as movements.”

It’s true; the word *conspire* also comes from the Latin *conspirare*, which means “to breathe together,” and shares a root with the words *inspire* and *aspire*. When we conspire, we *co-inspire* ourselves and our team with a shared, co-created vision of success. When we align, we get in formation—not like battle formations, but the way birds flock,

---

<sup>2</sup> It’s worth noting that many managers don’t *intend* to treat people like automatons, but when you manage with too heavy an emphasis on outputs and too little a consciousness of people, that’s what happens.

dancers get in their place, and people assemble at marches and actions.<sup>3</sup> When we conspire and align, everyone understands where we're going *and* our role in getting there.

When we reframe management in this way—and create structures and practices to support it—a new world opens up. We're no longer limited to the brilliance of one person. When a team works well together, its members' combined powers are greater than the sum of their parts. It's still up to us to own our power and responsibility—but it's not up to us to have all the answers.

The *conspire-and-align* approach can be used in both nonhierarchical settings<sup>4</sup> and in places with *positional power*—the kind of power most people think of in the workplace, where an executive director has more power within the organization than a middle manager, who has more power than their direct report. *Conspire and align* is about recognizing power, being honest about it, and exercising it thoughtfully.

Many of you might already take this approach. If you've ever brainstormed a vision of success with your team, sought input before making a decision, or tapped your team's knowledge and expertise to solve a tricky problem, you've conspired and aligned.

## EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT AND WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE<sup>5</sup>

Author and activist Tema Okun names 15 “White Supremacy Culture Characteristics” that white dominant culture holds up as virtues.<sup>6</sup> Those characteristics are perfectionism, a sense of urgency, defensiveness and/or denial, quantity over quality, worship of the written word,

(continued)

<sup>3</sup> And, yes, the way Beyoncé told us to in her 2016 masterpiece and tribute to Black feminism, “Formation.”

<sup>4</sup> At TMC, we believe that whatever their structure, all organizations need mechanisms for accountability, support, defining success, and decision-making (all of which come with effective management). We've seen our tools and advice work in all kinds of hierarchical configurations, including in flat structures.

<sup>5</sup> As the National Education Association points out, “white supremacy culture” isn't just about overt, violent racism like the Klu Klux Klan (KKK); it's a culture that generally perpetuates the social, economic, and political dominance of white people over people of other racial backgrounds. “Characteristics of white supremacy manifest in organizational culture, and are used as norms and standards without being named or chosen by the full group. The characteristics elevate the values, preferences, and experiences of white people above all other racial groups, to the detriment of everybody (including white people). Organizations that are led by people of color or have a majority of people of color can also demonstrate characteristics of “White Supremacy Culture Resources” (National Education Association, 2020). More at: <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/white-supremacy-culture-resources>

<sup>6</sup> See [whitesupremacyculture.info](http://whitesupremacyculture.info) for an updated version of Okun's original 1999 article on the subject.