

Help for Struggling Managers

Managers are often placed in their positions without regard to whether they have the necessary management or interpersonal communication skills to be successful.

Why Managers Struggle

Some managers never learn, and their employees' engagement, performance, and retention suffer.

Some managers learn what they need to know through trial and error, which is stressful for them and for their employees. In some cases, this approach can have devastating results.

Some managers rely on the advice of more experienced managers or of human resources staff. However, these resources are very busy and may not be available to help the managers in a timely manner.

My partner and I believe that most managers want to do a good job. They want to be successful, and they want their employees to be successful.

How to Get Skills in a Timely Fashion

So, how do managers get timely and effective skill development?

Management training classes offer useful information, but they are not necessarily scheduled around the current work issues that the managers must address. Management coaches can address such issues in a timely fashion, but most managers don't have a coach.

Management development needs to be more flexible, timely, and accessible, so managers can gain the knowledge and skills they need when they need them.

This is where peer learning groups can be most useful. They are easy to set up and schedule immediately when managers are faced with a specific management challenge and want to learn how to handle it.

Peer Learning Groups: Timely and Accessible

When we created The Peer Learning Institute, we knew that peer learning groups would be very effective in helping managers gain management and interpersonal communication skills. The group members could share their knowledge and experience concerning a current issue that they all had to address.

To make it easier to schedule, we would limit the peer learning group meetings to 90 minutes. We would also limit the participation to 5 members so each would have an opportunity to talk.

Confidentiality

We wanted the managers to be able to have an open and honest conversation. Confidentiality was a concern, so we decided to provide workbooks with a timed agenda, discussion points, and alternative management techniques. This way, the managers could conduct their own meetings rather than have a facilitator lead the group.

Accountability

As long-time trainers, we wanted the managers to learn and be held accountable for putting their learning into practice. We solved the accountability issue by having the group convene twice, separated by a month of practice.

During the first meeting, the members would learn and commit to trying out a new technique to handle the specific management challenge. During the second meeting at the end of the month, they would be accountable for reporting back to the group.

Reinforcement of Daily Practice

Since a month is a long time to go between sessions, we had to keep the new techniques fresh in the managers' minds. At the beginning of every week during the practice month, we would send out a microlearning tip that reinforced the content from the first session and asked the managers what they were doing to implement it.

Toward the end of every practice week, we would send out a resource that provided more information about the topic. The resources would include an article, a TED talk, a video, and a podcast.

On a weekly basis, we would have the managers touch base with a peer buddy drawn from the group, to discuss what they were doing and how it was working for them.

We would also give the managers a brief log to complete each week. They could jot down what they did, what happened, and what they learned from that experience. We anticipated that the

managers would be able to use this log when they returned to the second session and reported on their practice experience.

Proven Benefits

Managers have found that participating in peer learning groups has made a positive difference to both their ability to manage and their relationship with the other members of their management teams.

They have identified five key benefits: (1) gaining a more thoughtful focus on specific skills and techniques, (2) having accountability and deliberate follow-through, (3) increasing their competency and confidence, (4) learning from their peer group members, and (5) gaining stronger relationships with their peer group.

Question: If you have struggling managers in your organization, would participating in a peer learning group be helpful?

If you would like more information about how to set up peer learning groups in your organization, please contact Deb Laurel, Chief Learning Officer, The Peer Learning Institute at deborah@peerlearninginstitute.com or schedule a brief meeting using this link: <https://calendly.com/peerlearninginstitute/discoverycall>