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THE BUSINESS NEWSLETTER FROM AUSWILD & CO
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TEN TRAITS OF A GREAT MANAGER

Founded by Larry Page and Sergey Brin in 1998, Google has become one of the Big Five technology companies alongside Amazon, Apple, Meta and Microsoft – and since its founding, the company has studied the habits of its effective managers.

It is no secret that a good manager can make a huge difference in how happy your team is and how well it performs. Now, based on its internal research and employee feedback, Google has identified ten behaviours of its best managers.

1. “Is a Good Coach”

Employees need and appreciate a manager who takes time to coach and challenge them. They guide and share insights at the right time, letting their team gain valuable experience along the way, and not just when they are behind. Every employee needs to be managed – star performer or not – and simply leaving some employees to do their jobs without any type of feedback or guidance is detrimental to their career development.

2. “Empowers Team and Does Not Micromanage”

Micromanaging is a common mistake managers make without even realising it, one that discourages and frustrates employees. Google’s research found that its best managers do not micromanage, instead offering the right balance of freedom and advice, to enable their direct reports to explore new ideas, to experiment, and to develop and adapt their own working style.

3. “Creates an Inclusive Team Environment, Showing Concern for Success and Well-Being”

In Google’s first list, this was described as “expresses interest in and concern for team members’ success and personal well-being.” Later, this was updated to reflect research on psychological safety that allows for risk-taking. As Google puts it – in a team with high psychological safety, teammates feel safe to take risks around their team members. They feel confident that no one on the team will embarrass or punish anyone else for admitting a mistake, asking a question, or offering a new idea. It is not enough just to have a diverse team, good leaders and managers strive to create an inclusive environment every day.

4. “Is Productive and Results-Oriented”

Employees don’t want to work for a lazy boss. They would rather be part of a team that is productive and successful, and that is hard to do if the leader doesn’t set the tone. As a manager, you will be looked upon as a role model. You can’t expect people to give their best at work if they don’t see you doing it, so be sure you’re always on your “A” game – that means putting in the effort and getting results.

5. “Is a Good Communicator—Listens and Shares Information”

Communicating effectively is one of the basics of being a good manager (or a good employee for that matter). But it is also important to remember that great managers prioritize listening – this enables understanding. When you listen to people, they feel personally valued. It signals commitment. They also share what they can, realizing transparency is beneficial for the team as a whole. They share sincere and specific praise, early and often. But they also don't hold back from giving necessary (negative) feedback, making sure to frame it in a way that is constructive and easy to learn from.

6. “Supports Career Development and Discusses Performance”

Google recently added the “discusses performance” component to this behaviour. The company pointed to research from Gallup that found only half of employees know what expectations they should be fulfilling at work. “To free employees to take initiative and inspire high performance,” Gallup concluded, “managers need to set clear expectations, hold employees accountable for meeting them and respond quickly when employees need support.” In other words, managers should not only help their team develop skills and advance their careers, but also be clear about expectations and give honest feedback about performance.

7. “Has a Clear Vision/Strategy for the Team”

Great managers know where they are going, and they make sure the whole team knows, too – rather than keeping them in the dark. They are also careful to communicate “scope,” realistic expectations as to what specific actions are needed to execute a strategy, and each team member's role in delivering. A clear and shared vision can and will help members of your team work well together.

8. “Has Key Technical Skills to Help Advise the Team”

Great bosses understand a job well and are skilled at the work they oversee. If an effective manager is brought into a new department, they take time in the beginning to familiarise themselves with their people's everyday work and challenges. This earns them the respect of their team.

9. “Collaborates Across Google”

Effective cross-organisation collaboration and stronger decision-making were important to Googlers. Whether you are at a large corporation, an early-stage start-up, or a non-profit, managing your team and leading it to success can depend at least in part on how well you can work with other teams.

10. “Is a Strong Decision Maker”

While it is important for a manager to listen and share information, employees also appreciate one who can make decisions. Managers should tell their teams not only what decision they have made, but also why they have made it. The small extra effort will help the team understand context and priorities, improve their own future decision-making, and stay engaged as well as informed.