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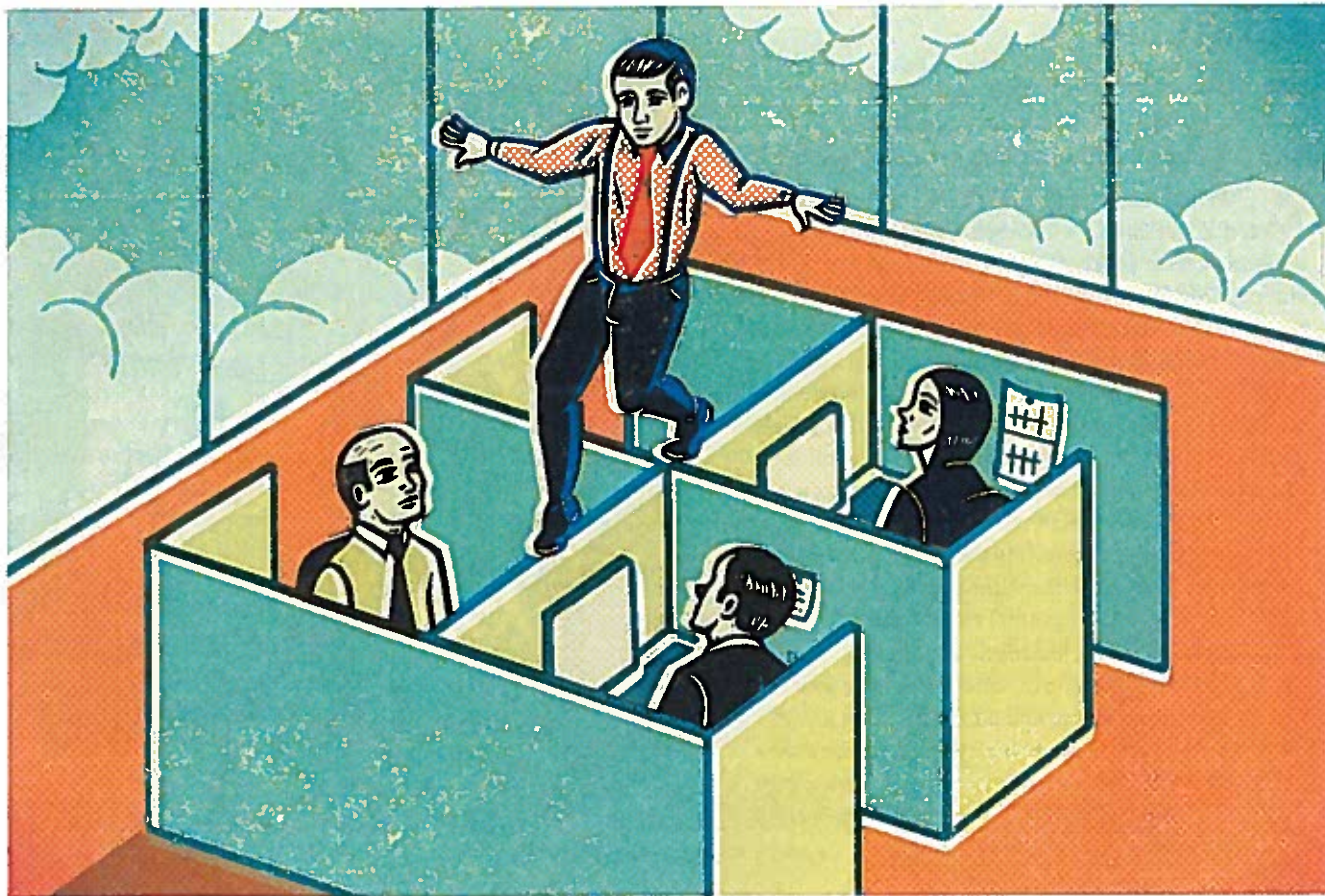
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UP & COMERS

Meet a few of the profession's rising stars,
including Winnipeg's **Nicole Barry**



From Buddy to Boss

The delicate business of managing your former coworkers

ABE ABOU-HAMAD JOINED OTTAWA accounting firm Parker Prins Lebrano a decade ago. He enjoyed the camaraderie with his fellow accountants, most of whom had joined the firm around the same time. But in January, Abou-Hamad was promoted to partner. Suddenly he was the boss. One of *them*.

Making the leap from workplace buddy to boss is commonplace these days. But managing the shift well takes some skill. Priority No. 1 on your agenda? Verbally acknowledging the change, says Merge Gupta-Sunderji, a leadership and workplace

communications expert in Calgary. Don't treat your new managerial status as business as usual. The fact is, you're now the team leader. And that's how your former peers will view you.

"The moment you land a power position, you are perceived as having access to more information, getting better perks and having the ear of more senior people," she says. "There's an automatic assumption that you know something they don't know."

Open dialogue

It's a scenario Gabe Hayos knows all too well. When he became the head of the international tax group and then later the leader of the Toronto tax practice for KPMG in 2002, he was responsible for roughly 45 partners and a few hundred staff. His approach was to address the circumstances head-on.

He looked at things in terms of responsibilities. "I would tell people that the only difference between before and after was if we couldn't agree on a course of action, somebody had to make a final decision and that was going to be me," says Hayos, now vice-president, tax, with CPA Canada. "Everyone has different responsibilities, so it's a question of the partners doing their respective roles," he says.

Engage in open dialogue with every member of your team, says Eileen Chadnick, certified coach and principal at Toronto-based Big Cheese Coaching. She suggests starting the conversation with something such as, "Well, I'm in a new role. Let's talk about what changes and what stays the same."

Set boundaries

Professional boundaries are now

essential. While you may want to vent to your former peers about your new role, for example, it's no longer appropriate. "You cannot use your staff as a sounding board," says Gupta-Sunderji. "Because the moment you go to your friend George and start running stuff past him, it's perceived as favoritism. It hurts morale. Your new sounding board has to be someone at your level or higher or someone external."

Some managers may see things as black and white ("either I'm friends with this person with no restrictions, or I can't be friends at all"), but that's not the answer either. "It's all about being cognizant about your new lines in the sand," Chadnick says. "So if there's confidential information, you need to be aware and respect professional boundaries."

Hayos didn't hide the fact that he was closer with certain members of his team. For him, it was all about transparency. So if he occasionally ate lunch with someone on the team before, he continued to, with a caveat — he would schedule lunches with other employees, too. "I made a list of how often I met with each team member," he says. "I didn't want to do what was easy, which was to just meet with those whom I knew well. I needed to communicate with all of them."

Maintaining one-on-one communication is paramount. Hayos, for instance, would ask all team members for feedback on his performance as manager. "Just as you should be giving them feedback, you should seek it as well so they have a say in how things are operating," he says.

Your new trusted advisers

Your next strategy is to ask for managerial advice from your boss, lateral peers, the person you are succeeding or even a professional

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coach. When Hayos first managed a team of former peers, he found it a challenge getting comfortable with the responsibilities of his new role. "I didn't get a lot of coaching on what I should or should not do, so I had to sit down and figure out how I should operate," he says. It was a lot of trial and error.

Coaches can help you to understand your authentic leadership style, says Chadnick, who specializes in helping professionals grow within their new role. Some newly promoted managers feel they must shift 180 degrees to have their staff respect them. Quite the contrary. "If you're somebody who has always been empathetic, for instance, you should still have empathy in your role as leader," she says. "It just may look a little different. So don't lose who you are in the process."

Getting everyone on board

What happens if your peer had applied for the same job that you ultimately landed? There's no question it will be awkward, but how you approach things can mean the difference between moving forward and resentment. Chadnick suggests starting a private conversation this way: "I empathize. This is a disappointment to you, but I hope we can have a productive working

relationship. I want to let you know that I'm here to support your continued career development."

After you've had many discussions with your team members, ask for their support. "The vast majority of the time, people will come around to the idea of you being the manager," says Gupta-Sunderji. "If they don't, they are choosing not to come on board. It's not because there's a misunderstanding or because you haven't held out an olive branch, it's because — for whatever reason — they are ticked off."

With eight months under his belt, Abou-Hamad feels more comfortable in his new position. His former colleagues have all been very supportive. He actually finds the fact that he's already worked with team members — albeit in a different capacity — has made his transition a bit easier. "If I came in as a partner, as an outsider, and tried to give someone reassurance of the work they did, it wouldn't be as easily handled," he says. "But already having that rapport with people and knowing their strengths and personalities made it easier."

Handling the shift to manager isn't easy, but it's better if you don't shy away from talking through issues. And remember, while you're the boss now, there may come a time when you report to one of them! — *Deanne Gage*