



## The 5 Rookie Mistakes New Leaders Often Make



Starting a business or stepping up into a managerial role requires a person to learn new skills and realities fast. Avoid these common traps

[Merge Gupta-Sunderji](#) || March 31, 2016

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**W**hether you work in an organization for someone else, or you're an entrepreneur running your own business, at some point in your career, you've no doubt come across managers who were dreadful. Indecisive, uncommunicative, demotivating, and just plain hard to get along with, these people were horrible to work for or alongside.

It probably wasn't entirely their fault—they probably just never learned how to be good leaders. Perhaps there weren't any positive role models to observe and emulate, or no one ever taught them what hazards and minefields to avoid. And to their discredit, they never thought to seek out information and resources to help them become better leaders.

The good news is that you don't have to fall into this trap. Making yourself aware of the most frequent mistakes managers make will help you avoid them, whether you're a leadership rookie or an experienced veteran, and whether you're building a company from the ground up, or helping take an established organization to the next level.

Here are the five most common traps leaders fall into, and how to steer clear of them.

### 1. MANAGING OPERATIONS INSTEAD OF PEOPLE

When you transition from an operations focus to managing people, the single most important mental shift you must make is to realize that you have changed occupations.

The skills that made you successful when you depended solely on yourself are now the skills that will actually cause you to fail as a people manager. Your track record for getting things done is no longer important; what's important is how effectively you can get *other* people to get things done. When you

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manage people, you are “leading,” not “doing,” so it’s critical to focus less on activities and more on outcomes.

## 2. TRYING TO CONTROL YOUR STAFF

You can’t make your team do what you want or what’s good for your business. All you can do is create an environment where people can *choose* to excel. As you build your department or organization, your emphasis should be on establishing a positive and productive environment in which your people will act and behave in ways you desire, and produce the outcomes that you want. Concentrate on creating a working climate that encourages people to make sound business decisions, instead of trying to control or manipulate individual actions.

## 3. TRYING TO BE EVERYTHING TO EVERYONE ALL THE TIME

Your natural instinct is to try and please everybody—employees, clients, bosses (if you have them). After all, you want everyone to be happy. But trying to be everything to everyone all the time is an unrealistic goal that only leads to frustration and angst.

Fail to grasp this truth, and you will end up disappointing people because you won’t be able to keep all the promises you make—there simply aren’t enough hours in the day. There will be times when you will have to say “No,” but aim instead to say “Yes” less. Responding to a request with, “I need to give this some more thought as to whether this is the best way to handle this issue. Can you leave that with me until tomorrow?” gives you the time to thoughtfully assess the issue or problem. Plus, there is nothing stopping you from saying “Yes” later if you decide that your active involvement is needed.

## 4. GETTING PUSHED AND PULLED

As a leader, you will be “pushed” into roles you may be uncomfortable with or may not have the skills or training to perform. At the same time, you will be “pulled” back into procedures and activities that you were comfortable with and experienced in doing. For example, if your background is computer programming, it’s a lot easier to write code than to switch gears and focus on strategic or people issues, so you could slip back into old tasks and patterns if you’re not careful. This natural push-pull reality creates stress, so you have to be prepared for it, and deliberately work to overcome it.

## 5. MICROMANAGING

The desire to prove yourself—whether to superiors or to those who have previously doubted you—is always strong. But coupled with a need to see things done your way and to ensure your success, this admirable goal can easily turn into micromanagement, which is very demotivating to those around you.

So what exactly is micro-management? Asking an employee to collect data on a particular subject isn’t, but getting involved in the minutia of the detail is. Sitting beside an employee and offering advice while they create a spreadsheet is micromanaging. Asking a staff member to change the colour or fonts is micromanaging. To avoid this nasty trap, always ask yourself: Will my involvement change the ultimate outcome or results? If the answer is no, you’re micromanaging.

*Merge Gupta-Sunderji is a speaker, author and consultant whose leadership development practice focuses on turning managers into leaders and people power into results. Through large-audience keynotes, small-group training, one-on-one mentoring, and customized consulting, Merge has given over 65,000 professionals in eight countries specific and practical tools to help them achieve leadership and communications success.*

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