5 Skills Every Virtual Manager Needs to Succeed

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Introduction

Being a virtual manager comes with a whole new set of challenges you've never been trained for. Beyond your own work, you're now charged with helping others succeed and develop to help meet your organization's goals without being face-to-face with them. The truth is that being a virtual manager requires its own new set of skills to be learned, so a manager can lead their people and organization to success.

As a manager of people, you are tasked with developing your team. You will need to plan and organize the work to be done as well as coach others and manage conflict. To navigate this in a virtual and remote world is an even bigger challenge.

How can someone be an effective manager when they are not face-to-face with their team?

The good news: With practice, you'll get comfortable with the basic skills needed to be effective in this role. In this download, we'll cover the 5 essential skills you'll need to succeed.

With practice, you'll get comfortable with the basic skills needed to be effective in your new role
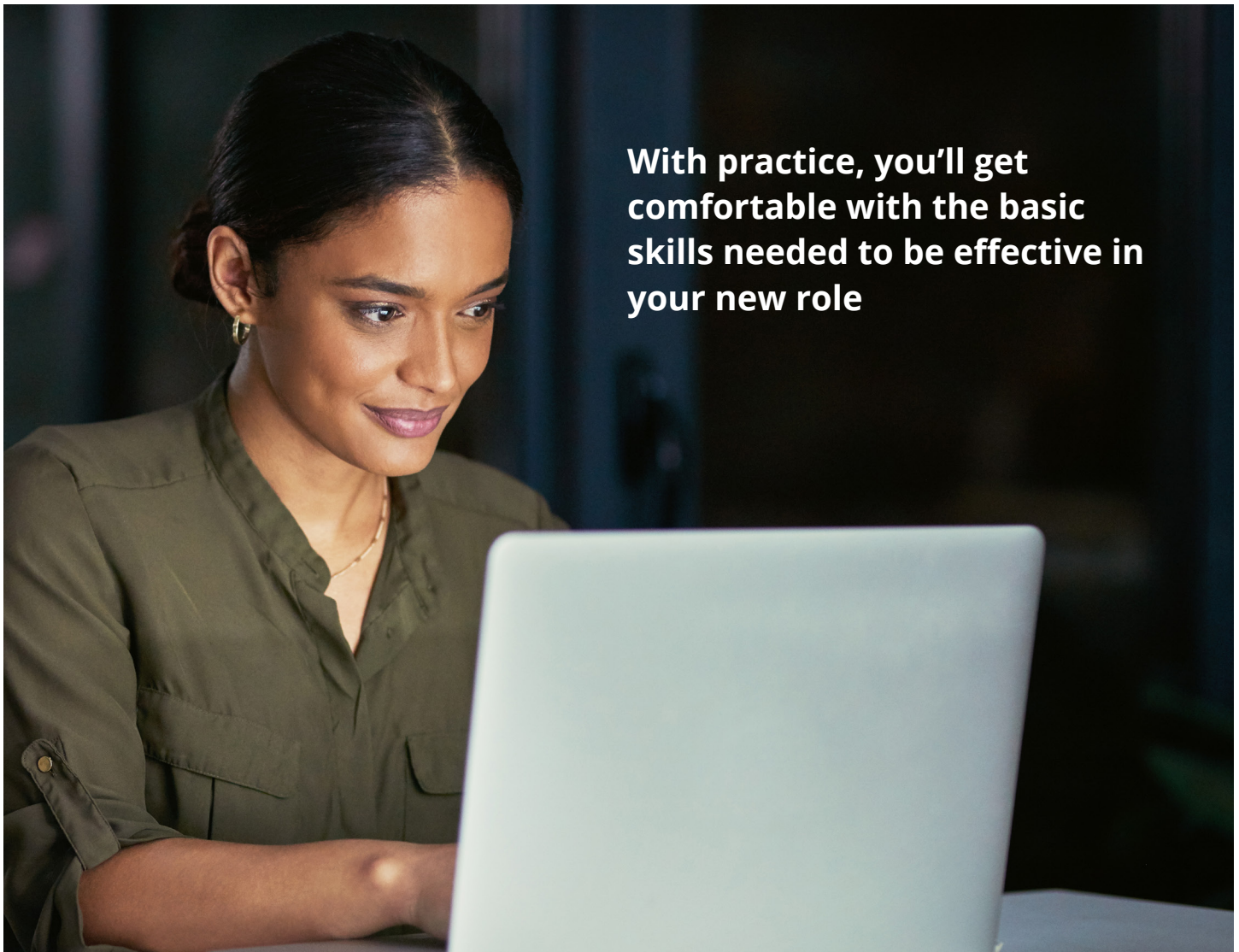
1 Managers Need to Be Comfortable Playing a Variety of Roles

As a manager, you will have to play many roles—wear different hats at different times—to add value. Let's look at the typical roles you must play in order to achieve the right results with and through others.

Here are 8 typical roles of effective virtual managers:

1. **LEADER**

   Looks beyond the current day-to-day work requirements and determines where their organization needs to go. Leaders move their organizations forward by thinking strategically about the directions they need to take. They form relationships beyond the organization to build and maintain its reputation.

2. **DIRECTOR**

   Is able to define a problem and take the initiative to determine a solution. Using planning and goal-setting skills, the director determines what to delegate and ensures that individuals understand what they are being asked to do.

3. **CONTRIBUTOR**

   Is expected to be task oriented and work focused, ensuring that their own personal productivity is attended to.

4. **COACH**

   Is engaged in the development of people, helping them to acquire and refine skills, as well as focus their motivation and commitment.

5. **FACILITATOR**

   Fosters a collective effort for the organization, building cohesion and teamwork and managing interpersonal conflict.

6. **OBSERVER**

   Pays attention to what is going on in the unit, determining whether people are meeting their objectives and watching to see that the unit is meeting its goals. The observer is also responsible for understanding what is important for the team to know and ensures that information overload does not occur.

7. **INNOVATOR**

   Facilitates adaptation and change, paying attention to the changing environment, identifying trends that impact the organization, and then determining changes needed for the organization's success..

8. **ORGANIZER**

   Takes responsibility for planning work as well as organizing tasks and structures, then follows up to ensure tasks are completed by attending to technological needs, staff coordination, crisis handling, etc.

Achieve the right results with and through others

2 Managers Need to Communicate Effectively

Communication is the lifeblood of management.

As a manager, communicating effectively is an essential skill to learn and utilize. Although important, it is sometimes difficult when a manager's team is dispersed. Using the most effective method to communicate your message is essential. The quality of a manager's communication affects their ability to:

▸ **DELEGATE AND ASSIGN WORK**

▸ **COACH**

▸ **EVALUATE PERFORMANCE**

▸ **PROVIDE LEADERSHIP**

The list could go on.

Without effective communication, the "right things" simply won't get done successfully in the long run. Without effective communication, a manager can't build a motivational work climate. Without effective communication, there simply is no leadership. Most of the roles managers have to perform absolutely require effective communication. Even though we have all grown up communicating, doing it successfully in a virtual environment takes effort and practice. It is a process that can go off track in a number of ways.

Virtual teams present special communication challenges, and managers must be well-versed in leveraging a diverse set of online tools and appropriate communication methods. A remote manager needs to think about how they are going to communicate just as much as what they are going to communicate, whether it is through a phone call, an instant message, an email, a video conference meeting or another medium.

Communication is the lifeblood of management

2 Managers Need to Communicate Effectively

4 QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

They're common sense, but people don't necessarily practice them.

Clarity

Is your communication specific and descriptive? Remember, if a statement is unclear, its accuracy can't be determined and may leave the receiver with questions.

Accuracy

Is it true? If it is an opinion or assumption, is it labeled as such?

Completeness

Is all necessary information conveyed? Are the emotional elements of the issue communicated, as well as the task aspects?

Timeliness

Is the message delivered, received, and understood within a time period that will allow an appropriate response?

Making yourself clear at the outset reduces misunderstandings

3 Managers Need to Delegate Effectively

Delegation is the allocation of a job or task along with some defined amount of authority to accomplish it. Managers who delegate effectively have direct reports who are more capable and enthusiastic. Their direct reports are seen as competent and committed to taking on more projects or tasks, thereby freeing up the manager's time to work on tasks that cannot be delegated.

QUICK QUIZ: YOUR COMFORT LEVEL WITH DELEGATION

Take the following quiz to gain insight into your skill and comfort level delegating work to others and to gain awareness of areas that you can develop.

1. **When I am overloaded with work, I look to my direct reports to take on some of my work.**

   ○ **Always** ○ **Usually** ○ **Sometimes** ○ **Never**

2. **After I have delegated a project, my team members know who is leading the project and what their own level of authority is.**

   ○ **Always** ○ **Usually** ○ **Sometimes** ○ **Never**

3. **When I delegate work to any of my direct reports, I provide them with all the information I have on the subject.**

   ○ **Always** ○ **Usually** ○ **Sometimes** ○ **Never**

4. **In my organization, delegation is perceived as an opportunity for growth and recognition. I consider the skills and knowledge of my direct reports before assigning them a project.**

   ○ **Always** ○ **Usually** ○ **Sometimes** ○ **Never**

Managers who delegate effectively have direct reports who are more capable and enthusiastic

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3 Managers Need to Delegate Effectively

WHEN DELEGATING IS A GOOD IDEA

- When tasks are closely related to the work employees are already doing

- When tasks have clearly defined procedures and end results

- When tasks are repetitive and fit into the normal workflow

- When tasks enable employees to develop

WHEN DELEGATING IS NOT A GOOD IDEA

- When the task falls clearly within the manager's personal responsibilities (e.g., conducting a performance appraisal)

- When the successful completion of the task by the employee will require more assistance than the manager can give

- When the risk of failure outweighs the benefit of delegating for development (e.g., when your job is on the line)

- When the assignment might place the employee or the organization at risk

- When the task is not clearly defined or uncertainty exists

It's important to recognize when you should and shouldn't delegate to others

3 Managers Need to Delegate Effectively

VIRTUAL DELEGATION

Ways to make delegating virtually more effective include:

- Work to create alignment of expectations.

- Overcommunicate the "why" and provide them with the contextual and background information available.

- Be transparent about your intentions. Don't assume that the person being delegated to will understand why you are doing what you're doing or saying. Explain it.

- Become more culturally competent and adjust your style and practices.

- Make mindful, collaborative choices about how to best use technology to communicate and track performance.

- Use screen-sharing apps or meeting management apps when conducting delegating conversations to visually anchor key expectations.

- Take steps to get to know remote employees and actively work to help them know you better as well.

3 Managers Need to Delegate Effectively

THE DELEGATION CONVERSATION

1 **Explain the Assignment:** Be sure to explain the assignment, using an appropriate level of detail to fit the employee's development level. Specify the importance of the assignment, the standards by which the final outcome will be judged, and the reason why they were chosen.

2 **Test for Clarity:** One of the primary reasons delegation goes off track is misunderstanding between the manager and the employee. After explaining the assignment, check to ensure that you have been clear and that the employee has the same picture of the task that you do.

3 **Identify Potential Problems:** Work with the employee to identify and discuss hindrances to the successful completion of the assignment. Ask the employee what might get in the way, and be prepared to help them do some proactive problem solving right then and there.

4 **Identify Milestones:** Employees sometimes feel that a manager supervises too closely after delegating because the manager doesn't have confidence in them. The truth is that it's often the case that the manager is staying in close contact to ensure that the project is on track. One way to avoid all the negatives of over-supervision and still keep track of the status of the assignment is to borrow a tool from project management methodology and build in milestones or checkpoints.

5 **Recap:** To further ensure clarity, ask the employee to summarize their understanding of the assignment, problem contingencies, and checkpoint schedule.
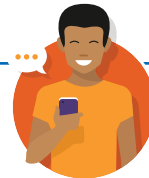
4 Managers Need to Give Useful Feedback

We all need feedback—it is essential for our development. As a managerial tool, it not only helps employees to recognize what they need to do differently, but it also reinforces what they are already doing well. Managers, both in-person or virtually, sometimes don't provide as much—or as useful—feedback as they should.

HOW YOU SAY IT MATTERS

What makes feedback effective is its usefulness to the person receiving it. As a manager, you are providing the feedback to achieve some outcome—either to reinforce a positive behavior and make it more likely to occur again, or to change a behavior to make it more useful. If you provide feedback in a way that makes it difficult for the employee to hear, or if you say it in a way that pushes the employee's emotional buttons, then the likelihood of achieving your desired outcome will be diminished. The employee:

- Won't believe it

- Will be threatened by it

- Will not see a reason to change

It is in your self-interest to provide feedback in a way that the other person can hear and accept it.

We all need feedback—it is essential for our development

4 Managers Need to Give Useful Feedback

GIVING FEEDBACK IN THE MOMENT

It can be difficult to remember the rules and guidelines for useful feedback when you are in the moment and emotionally engaged. Try using a memory tool to help craft feedback "on the fly":

When you…
(Describe the behavior)

What I'd like…
(Describe how you'd like the employee to behave)

I feel…
(Describe the feeling)

Because…
(Describe the benefit of the new behavior)

Because…
(Describe the impact/consequences of the behavior)

What do you think?

It can be helpful to use a memory tool to help craft feedback "on the fly"

4 Managers Need to Give Useful Feedback

GIVING POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

Reinforcing feedback focuses on and identifies what the person has done well. We all need a pat on the back. Your reinforcement of good behavior lets direct reports know that you're observing something positive. Direct reports will feel more secure and motivated knowing you're aware of their efforts.

Reinforce good behavior by acknowledging it. A positive comment about behavior will make it more likely to occur again.

THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER WHEN EXPRESSING APPRECIATION:

1. Describe the desired behavior in specific terms.

2. Explain why the behavior is helpful.

3. Actually express thanks. Don't assume they know you feel a certain way. Say it!

We all need a pat on the back

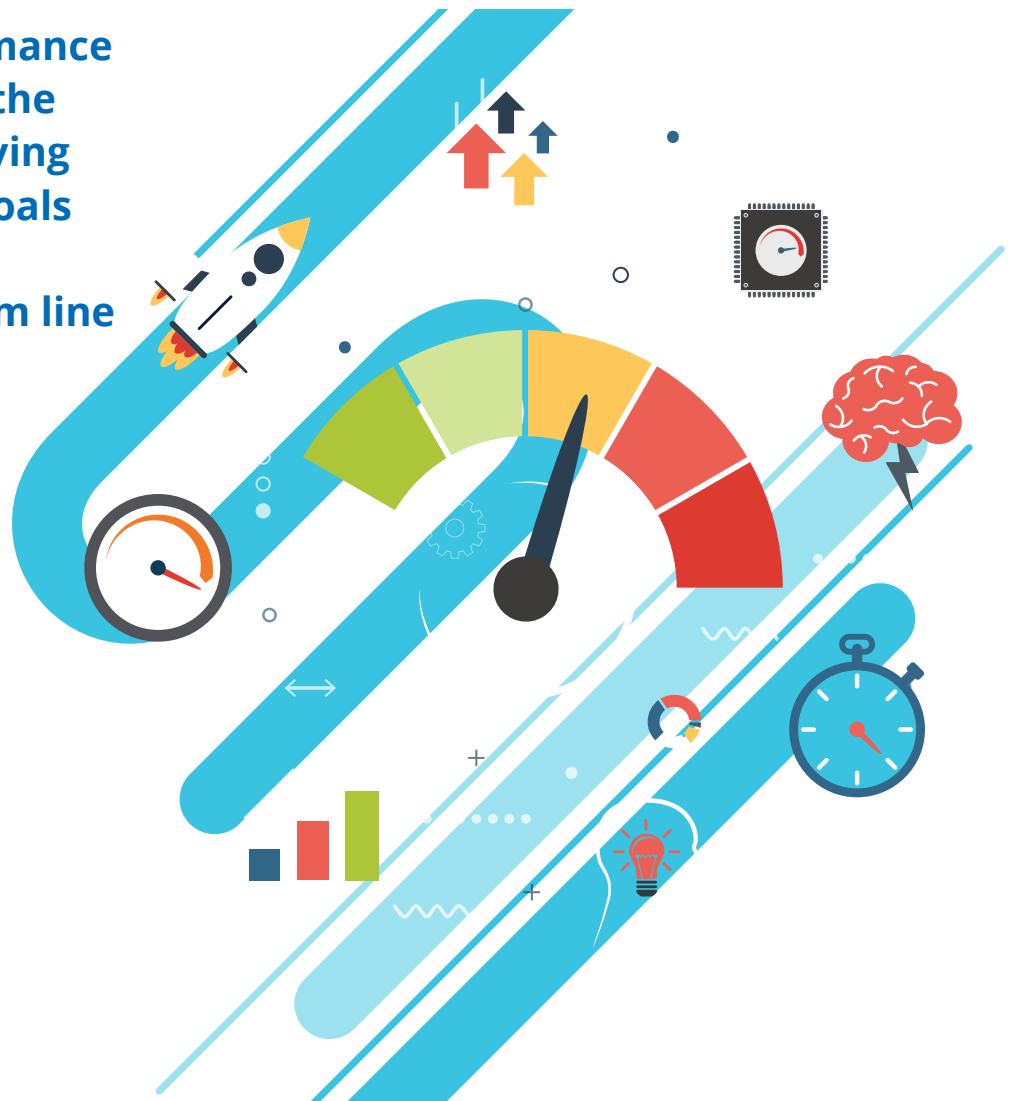# 5 Managers Need to Effectively Manage Performance

Virtual managers must be able to help their direct reports perform at a high level, despite not being co-located. The consequences of not being able to are serious—business goes away; operations are downsized, right-sized, or otherwise affected; plants close; organizations disappear. Even organizations that have discovered a strategic advantage that gives them a leg up on their competition maintain it only through the performance of their workforce.

From a personal perspective, the consequences of not managing performance can be devastating to a manager. A manager whose unit is **"just getting by"** is a prime candidate to lose resources, thereby limiting the potential for improvement.

Effective performance management is the avenue to achieving organizational goals that impact the business's bottom line. By mastering this important skill, you will be able to create a greater alignment of the organization's interests and those of the individual employees.

The greater the alignment, the greater the success for both the organization and the individual.

Effective performance management is the avenue to achieving organizational goals that impact the business's bottom line

5 Managers Need to Effectively Manage Performance

FIVE FOUNDATIONS OF SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Hint: Performance management is NOT something you do once a year.

Partner with your direct reports
They'll feel they're working with you, not for you, and you'll both be more successful.

Clarify expectations
Don't leave comments or conversation up for interpretation. The greatest gift you can give someone is clarity.

Make open communication an ongoing process
Make the time to interact with your direct reports at least once a day. There are many ways you can virtually check-in with them.

Schedule regular performance conversations
Performance management shouldn't consist of an annual appraisal.... It's an ongoing process.

Provide regular feedback and coaching to help employees develop
Adult learners need to hear things many times and in many different ways. Communicate your messages regularly.

Performance management is NOT something you do once a year

Conclusion and Resources

8 ROLES EVERY SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MANAGER NEEDS TO PLAY

Whether you are managing a virtual team or an in-person team, here are the typical roles you must play in order to achieve the right results with and through others:

1. **Leader:** Looks beyond the current day-to-day work requirements and determines where their organization needs to go.

2. **Director:** Is able to define a problem and take the initiative to determine a solution.

3. **Contributor:** Is expected to be task oriented and work focused, ensuring that their own personal productivity is attended to.

4. **Coach:** Is engaged in the development of people, helping them to acquire and refine skills as well as focus their motivation and commitment.

5. **Facilitator:** Fosters a collective effort for the organization, building cohesion and teamwork and managing interpersonal conflict.

6. **Observer:** Pays attention to what is going on in the unit, determining whether people are meeting their objectives and watching to see that the unit is meeting its goals.

7. **Innovator:** Facilitates adaptation and change, paying attention to the changing environment, identifying trends that impact the organization, and then determining changes needed for the organization's success.

8. **Organizer:** Takes responsibility for planning work as well as organizing tasks and structures.

Conclusion and Resources

4 QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION EVERY MANAGER MUST MASTER

They're common sense, but people don't necessarily practice them.

1. **Clarity—Is your communication specific and descriptive?** Remember, if a statement is unclear, its accuracy can't be determined and may leave the receiver with questions.

2. **Accuracy—Is it true?** If it is an opinion or assumption, is it labeled as such?

3. **Completeness—**Is all necessary information conveyed? Are the emotional elements of the issue communicated, as well as the task aspects?

4. **Timeliness—**Is the message delivered, received, and understood within a time period that will allow an appropriate response?

Conclusion and Resources

5 FOUNDATIONS OF SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Hint: Performance management is NOT something you do once a year.

1. **Partner with your direct reports.** They'll feel they're working with you, not for you, and you'll both be more successful.

2. **Clarify expectations.** Don't leave comments or conversation up for interpretation. The greatest gift you can give someone is clarity.

3. **Make open communication an ongoing process.** Make the time to connect with your direct reports at least once a day.

4. **Schedule regular performance conversations.** Performance management shouldn't consist of an annual appraisal...it's an ongoing process.

5. **Provide regular feedback and coaching to help employees develop.** Adult learners need to hear things many times and in many different ways. Communicate your messages regularly.

From communication to feedback and positive reinforcement, you now have a grasp on the skills you'll need to effectively deal with your team, your boss and senior management virtually. Put these people skills to work, and you'll be equipped to handle new management challenges with confidence.

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Conclusion and Resources

Read More from our Talent Playbook
New Manager? How to Manage Friends and Former Peers
New Manager? Your First Task: Managing Yourself
What Your Managers Need to Know to Conquer Virtual Team Leadership

Infographic
Success Tips for Virtual Team Leaders

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Management Skills for New Managers

ENSURE YOUR ONGOING SUCCESS AS A MANAGER WITH AMA'S TOTAL PROFESSIONAL℠

Building skills in these four areas is key:

Professional Effectiveness
Management Skills for New Managers

Relationship Management
Developing Your Emotional Intelligence

Analytical Thinking
Critical Thinking

Business Accumen
Fundamentals of Finance and Accounting
for Non-Financial Managers

Business Acumen

Professional Effectiveness

Analytical Intelligence

Relationship Management