

Oops!

During a mid-morning recess back in elementary school, I remember drawing a hopscotch grid in chalk on the asphalt schoolyard. While I was writing the numbers, Mrs. Ostensow called Freddy Fabrini and me over. Obediently, we stopped what we were doing and came to her side.

“I want you two to pick teams for a game of dodge ball,” she informed us. Freddy and I were not overly athletic – in fact, we were both on the nerdy side of the “cool” scale. We looked at each other and I saw a glimmer of fear in his eyes – the same fear I was suddenly overcome with too. In that instant, I was thrown into my first management situation. “Oops! I’m the manager!”

It happens all the time. We fall into opportunities instead of finding our way there through hard work and planning. Whether it’s finding the love of your life as you search for your dropped keys in the grocery store parking lot, discovering an incredible pair of shoes as you stand in line at the Post Office or grabbing a major promotion because you were the first person to show up at a staff meeting, the world really does revolve around the axis of chance and happenstance. Being in the right place at the right time is usually a blessing – but also has its perils.

STUMBLING UP THE CORPORATE LADDER

You won’t believe how often managers tell me they don’t know how they got their job. There was no formal announcement or interview process – all of a sudden, they were managers. In fact, that’s what happened to me. It seemed like one day I was a worker bee and the next day I was the manager. I didn’t ask for the position, but I found myself in a new role anyway.

I like to call this “stumbling up the corporate ladder.” Yes, most of us work very hard and we like to think that we will be promoted to the next level because of our competence, wisdom or skill. But the truth is, climbing the ladder of success is often really stumbling our way up, and not by strategic planning on our part. Stumbling up is not a bad thing – it still represents success through hard work. If you weren’t working hard to begin with, you probably wouldn’t be at the company you’re with. The stumbling is fine – it’s how you stand up and dust yourself off that really matters.

My youngest brother remembers a domestic violence call he received on his first day as a sergeant – the first supervisory level in the Police Department. He called his squad together, hopped into the car and started to drive. When they arrived on the block, he asked, “Who has the street number?” His squad looked around at each other – no one had the information. One of the officers said, “Sarge – what do we do now?” Frustrated, my brother replied, “Whadaya asking me for – I was you yesterday!” As he was about to ream out his squad, a TV came flying through a window – they had stumbled onto the right house.

Now, not everyone stumbles into a management job – some go through the traditional interview process to be hired. But many of these intentional managers were not aware of what they were signing up for – yes, more money and getting off the shop floor might have been great reasons to apply. But if you’re in this spot, you probably didn’t know the harsh reality of what would be expected in the job. Not to worry – this book is for you, too.

THE REPERCUSSIONS

Sadly, many companies promote staff to management positions without adequate training. And even in organizations that do try to offer management training (bless their hearts), they focus on theory rather than practical application. So, as you stumble up the ladder, you keep your balance until you can make your next stumble up. That's why you – and zillions of other managers – are scouring the shelves for management advice, and why you're reading this book. I hear you, "Help! Give me a clue!"

That's what this book will do. In fact, it will give you more than clues – it will give you the knowledge you need to be a happy and productive manager. These are strategies I've learned through my own years of stumbling up the management ladder and the experiences I've had helping my clients.

WALKING IN YOUR SHOES

Believe me, I've been exactly where you are – a frustrated manager wondering what to do.

Early in my management career, my boss – a friend then and even more so today — followed me into the Ladies' Room and furiously harpooned me about my management style. It seemed I had a reputation for quickly shooting down other people's ideas, and everyone on the team was frustrated with me. I distinctly remember her words, "A steamroller couldn't give you feedback!" Who knew? Everyone but me, apparently! The signs were there – I just wasn't seeing them.

So my boss hired a management consultant to facilitate our meetings and figure out why we weren't communicating well. Now, you might think I would be highly offended at an outsider being brought in, but no, I was all for it. Once I got over the sting of the "steamroller" comment, I was eager to make things work. Well, 30 minutes into our first meeting, the consultant stopped the meeting and asked me to step outside. The feedback she gave me changed my work life forever.

"You see things before anyone else sees them, so you're quick to say no to ideas that you know won't work," she said. "But you frustrate people when you constantly shoot down their ideas. Try letting the ideas float instead. Be curious, ask questions and engage in a dialogue rather than 'machine gunning' questions at them."

Huh? Was that really how I was perceived? And what's wrong with being a straight shooter, laying it on the line and calling it as I see it anyway? But, figuring I didn't have much to lose at this point, I tried it her way and guess what? It worked! It was painful for me to change the way I interacted. But when I did, and got positive results for my efforts, things got 100 percent better for me and for the team. It was the best piece of advice I never asked for!

THE CORPORATE NANNY

In the spring of 2008, I was flying to Scottsdale for a two-day senior management meeting and, of course, the plane was late. Everyone was waiting for me in the lobby to board the "corporate limo" – a 15-passenger bus – to take us to a dinner that would kick off the first part of the meeting. I hate being late, and on top of that knowing I was keeping everyone waiting, I was feeling a bit harried (to say the least!). When I entered the lobby, my friend and client – the president of a successful business – greeted me with, "Look everyone – here's

our Corporate Nanny!” We boarded the bus and began our journey.

I was in such a rush and worried that everyone was starving (my Italian heritage peeking through) that the greeting didn’t really hit me until hours later. Maybe I am The Corporate Nanny! After all, I built my business on helping organizations become more effective with regard to the people side of their business; pointing out things that my clients didn’t want to face, but knew they had to fix – all with compassion and humor, of course.

WHICH IS WHY YOU’RE READING ON

So, after your initial shock of “Oh my! What do I do now?!” wears off, your second realization begins – how do I do it?!

The good news is that you already know what to do – but probably haven’t really thought about it from a common sense perspective. Over the years, you’ve learned the skills you need – from the playground to the workplace. What separates comfortable managers from the overwhelmed is the ability to step back, recognize the issue, look around for clues, start working on solving the situation and remembering “The Forgotten Five.”



Excerpt from “Oops! I’m The Manager! Getting Past “What Do I Do Now?!” in 5 Easy Steps” available at Amazon.com

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