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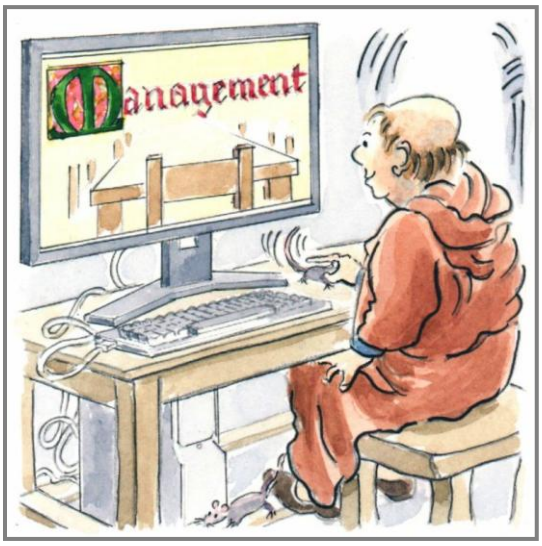

Be creative as a line manager

How to develop paid staff

A32 Articles series: Management

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In my investigations of church staffing and operations over the past few years one theme has emerged with worrying regularity: the poor quality of staff management.

The idea of a church employing staff to support youth work, pastoral care or office administration has been with us for some years. Organists and caretakers were on the scene long before that.

But more recently there have been many new appointments: in children and families work, music and worship, community outreach, operational management and specialist ministries such as debt counselling or managing a coffee shop. The employment of interns is now well established in many larger churches.

As the pressure of modern living intensifies the availability of volunteer workers, especially during normal working hours, has declined and the need for a greater degree of professionalism has increased. Hence the appointment of lay staff. That raises issues in itself but for the purposes of this article the position is assumed.

But our skills in people-management have not grown as the number of appointments increases. I come across stories of staff simply left to get on with their jobs with little discipline or encouragement to develop, often leading to frustration and sub-standard performance. On the other hand I occasionally hear of staff supervised in a heavy-handed way that drains all creativity and leads to real hurt.

There is a widespread ignorance in the whole Christian community as to what line management is all about. Hence this article: an attempt to set out, for managers and staff alike, what I believe management should and could be in a church setting. Most will also apply to Christian mission agencies.

To do this I have taken seven distinct areas. If you manage staff, whether as a Minister, a staff member yourself, a Trustee given specific people to manage, or a 'volunteer', my belief is that if you pay attention in about equal measure to each of these you will do well.

Preparation
1 Attitude
2 Analysis

Documentation
3 Foundations
4 Plan

Engagement
5 Review
6 Encouragement
7 Reprimand

Note that I am not seeking here to cover the specific issue of giving work to an immediate assistant, nor team leadership, nor management structures, nor working with volunteers (though the principles are the same), nor human resource (HR) issues such as record keeping, compliance with legislation and levels of remuneration. My focus is the one-to-one relationship of worker and line manager.

Preparation

The first two sections cover ground that you need to engage with before you meet the one you will manage and as you get to know them. But if that is too late for you now, not to worry. You can still make up the ground. But beware the temptation to skip the two areas of attitude and analysis because every aspect of line management needs to be built on what is described here.

1: Attitude

Of all the world's resources at a church's disposal the most important, and the most expensive if they are paid staff, is people. So it is shocking that those who want to proclaim good news to those outside the Church are often practising bad news with the people within it. This shows itself in both misplaced understanding about what management is and little desire seemingly to do anything about it.

Before you look at practice, there may need to be a distinct change of mindset. Check these four possibilities.

A: Self-starting

"I'm a Christian leader, I'm a self-starter, I don't need to be managed and fortunately I'm not, so I'll just leave you to get on with it because that's what you're paid to do."

This is the attitude of some, in particular Ministers and others who are not themselves being well managed. Many Christian leaders are self-starters. Their whole experience in ministry is one of getting on with it. 'Management' is seen as dangerous and somehow not what Christians ought to be doing. The danger is that this view can become endemic in a church staff team.

But most people you manage are not like that. They need to see that they matter to you, and they need help.

When Jesus chose the Twelve he gave them a job description. It's there in Mark 3:14,15. And point No. 1 was "to be with him". He knew he couldn't let them get on with this fishing for men business without lots of help.

B: Control

Here's the manager who assumes the role of supervisor, the one in charge, who makes sure his or her 'juniors' know not only what to do but exactly how to do it. And there is only one way to do it – the manager's way.

In my experience this comes about from leaders who micro-manage to protect their position, those who are natural controllers (though they will not be aware of this), or those whose experience of management comes from a highly mechanised environment such as a factory floor.

But didn't Jesus kick his lot off to do a spot of evangelism round the villages when they were ready? In pairs mind you, but otherwise on their own. And didn't he let them get on with a healing – and mess it up? He gave his disciples remarkable leeway to learn from their mistakes. Would we feel self-confident enough to do the same?

C: Busyness

In this case we have Ministers and other Christian workers who are struggling with a workload that would fill every minute of each 24

hours if it could, whether because of poor structures, lack of people or a misplaced view which might be termed 'justification by hours'. Investing time in managing staff comes way down the priority order. But that betrays a misplaced view of what management is all about.

Jesus' ministry ran at a hectic pace: take Mark's Gospel and notice how quickly the action switches from scene to scene and words such as 'immediately' occur. Yet he made time to take the disciples away from the crowds (not always successfully!) He invested real, quality time in their training – in their management.

When you manage someone you are investing in their life. That means that the job is worth doing well with due priority in your diary, and therefore that most people cannot line manage more than two or three people without cutting back considerably on their own role.

D: Relationship

"We're sisters and brothers in Christ on this staff team so what matters above everything else is our family relationship. It would be unwise to spoil that in any way so we'll keep any differences of opinion or unease about poor performance on the back burner. We need to stay as friends and family and in any case we need to worship together next Sunday."

This is a special and very real difficulty for a church staff. But it is built on the false idea that you maintain relationship by avoiding conflict. I have seen problems where the manager of a member of staff is also their pastor. In this situation the employment relationship should come first which might mean finding someone else to be this person's pastor.

You may be family and friends but in the workplace you are colleagues. I found that lesson hard to take years ago when it was pointed out to me, but I believe it was right.

Jesus could challenge his disciples, and especially Peter, in no uncertain terms without breaking relationship.

Your attitude

So what's *your* attitude? Does any one of these four come close to it? Try these five questions, serious questions you'll need to ponder and keep coming back to.

1 **Where do I want the person I am managing to be three years (or whatever makes sense) from now?**

Management is not just for now but for life. You have the privilege of helping someone grow: in skill, in experience, in confidence if necessary, in discipleship.

2 **What do I want them to say at that point about me, their line manager?**

They will be saying something about you to their friends, whether you like it or not. So what would you like that to be?

3 **Where do I want the church/mission they serve to be three years from now as a result of their work?**

Try to think outcomes for the church or mission you are working for. This ought to tie in closely with the stated vision because all staff should be working to that in some way.

4 **What do I want that church/mission to say at that point about the person I am managing?**

It is worth looking at it this way round too. If the worker left at that point, think about what might be said of them at their farewell party.

5 **How much time am I prepared to devote to enable all this to happen under God?**

That means priority time. If it is not already on your job description as one of your priorities, it needs to be added – which may in turn mean that something else needs to be taken off.

If you can answer those five questions well, you will be tuning your attitude correctly. It is worth spending half an hour considering each of them in turn.

What is being a line manager about?

I suggest it's about change. Think in terms of developing the person you have the privilege of being responsible for into the best worker they can be in the service of Jesus.

Ponder the words used there: change – developing – privilege – responsibility – best worker – service of Jesus. This is not supervision in its normally accepted meaning. It is about training someone to be the best that they can be for God in their employment but also in their discipleship because the two are bound up together (check out 1 Timothy 3:13 for example).

There is little point in reading on until you have thought about and, if necessary, reconsidered your attitude to what management is. Once you see it as investment in the future, of the development of a servant of Jesus Christ, you can see it in a different light. The right light.

If you are going to do it, it needs to be a distinct responsibility on your job description with time set aside for it. That is scary. But it gives you a great challenge.

2: Analysis

So you have started to tune your attitude to the correct frequency and you are thinking 'development'. Development of the worker, but also of the human being and Christian disciple.

But you simply cannot manage someone else until you are comfortable with the person God has made you.

When I started managing staff I knew nothing about management and little about myself. No one taught me about either. That was bad news for the people I managed. I hope they have forgiven me, but I still squirm with embarrassment.

Know yourself

Start with you, on your own. I often ask someone I am interviewing as part of a consultancy to tell me first about themselves. So they tell me about their job.

But that wasn't what I asked!

It's amazing how difficult we find it to say something about the real 'me', perhaps because we don't know, perhaps because we are afraid to divulge it.

How much do you really know about who you are? If you are one of those people who quote four letters from Myers-Briggs, that's a start but no more. How do your closest friends and family, if honest, describe you?

Are you prepared to find out more about who you are? It may not be very nice, because most of us are mucked-up people. 'Sinners' is the Bible word. We may be saved by God's wonderful grace, but we need to know the reality.

Don't try managing staff until you have some idea about yourself. Those you manage will quickly know quite a bit about you so it would be wise to get in first. Management should turn out to be something of a two-way process: by managing others you quickly discover more about the real you.

I am a controller. I found out the hard way: my staff at the time told me. Then my wife confirmed it. Not nice – but absolutely necessary. Now I hope I know how to handle situations when I go into control mode. But I wish I'd got the message much earlier. It would have saved me from making some dire mistakes.

Controllers have to make sure they do not micro-manage staff. There is a danger that they will leave no scope for initiative, and insist the worker does things the way the manager would do them. So some honest communication between the two of you might check this out.

On the other hand if you have a very laid-back personality you may be weak on offering boundaries and targets to those you manage, some of whom may need a far greater level of discipline than you would ask for yourself. Being aware of the danger is a good start.

Many Christian leaders I meet do not know much about who they are. They value themselves by their ministry. That is dangerous, because when ministry is tough their morale can take a nose-dive. That's not how Jesus sees them.

Know the one you manage

Next, you need to know the one you are responsible for. Who are they?

Are they similar to you – which is dangerous because you will miss out on so much through your limited range of experience? Or are they different – which is also dangerous (but not so much) because you will have to work at the relationship?

I made a big mistake when one person I managed left and another took their place. One was male, the other female. One was younger than me, the other older. One was similar to me, the other different. I just assumed I could carry on as before. Ouch! Big mistake.

You cannot manage someone until you know them, and until you appreciate how they shape up compared with you. So that has immediate implications, especially if you do not work alongside the person you manage and so do not bump into them most days.

For example, if you are a Minister who manages an Administrator but who works from a different location from the church office, you will need to ensure you spend at least some time at the office most days. If you are a Trustee managing a Youth Worker who is based at their home, you will need to be with them for some activities each month.

Not only in these cases do you need to be aware of their working environment, you also need to be spending time with them to get to know them. You cannot do this with just a weekly meeting for contact.

Sometimes management has to be from a distance: such as a regional staff worker for a mission organisation managed by a Trustee. In these cases recognise the difficulties and work to overcome them even if only to some extent.

Consider similarities and differences

Once you know something about yourself and something about them, you can consider what you are going to have to take special care over. If you are both very much task people you may have a weakness in helping them over relationship issues, so may need external advice. If your two personalities are very different, you will both need to acknowledge this and check out whether you are communicating with each other effectively or not.

It is so much better to get this stuff out on the table at the outset than to build up frustrations over time. And, unlike me in the past, be very careful when managing different people or when one worker takes over from another. In this case you have to start back at base with the ideas in this section. The management style may need to be different this time round.

But it is not just about personalities. Consider likely dangers if you are either similar or very different in each of the following areas (in no particular order):

- gender
- lark or owl
- age and life stage
- major issues in your life/family just now
- Christian maturity
- experience of church work
- gifting
- tidy or messy.

So, you may be happily married with children who have flown the nest and no major worries at the moment. The person you manage may have young children keeping them awake at night, or teenagers causing heartache at home, or elderly parents whose health is a concern. They may be going through a crisis of faith, or a messy divorce.

In employment none of these points can become an excuse for poor standards of work, but the manager needs to understand enough about them (without prying in business none of his or hers) to help the worker develop in their role.

You cannot completely separate work and home in Christian service, especially if the worker is based at their home or works for their own church. The one you line manage on Friday is the one you will worship with on Sunday and it is in this area that church employment gets pretty messy when compared with a more normal and secular work environment.

One point to consider carefully is when issues of sexual chemistry might arise (usually, but not always, when the difference between the two of you is one of gender). Take advice: but beware regular meetings in a private home, closed doors and any opportunities for misunderstandings to arise. Affairs on church staffs are not unknown.

Line management is never easy. But now we have thought about (a) developing someone and (b) understanding ourselves and them, we can move on to rather more of the 'how to'.

Documentation

This central part focuses on six pieces of information that set the scene for both the post concerned and the relationship of manager and worker.

3: Foundations

You cannot manage anyone if you do not both understand what they are supposed to be achieving, the kind of person they need to be, and the context of the employment agreement.

If you manage someone, your job is to ensure you both know these three points, check them out regularly, and tweak them from time to time if necessary.

Job description

No surprises here. But is this a *good* job description? Is it a short document that clarifies, explains and breathes life into this post or a boring or confusing listing that has been based on a clumsy pro-forma? Too many I see resemble shopping lists. You need to think in rather different terms.

A good job description should fit onto one side of A4, or at least not more than one-and-a-half sides, and cover with about equal importance the answers to three questions.

1 **Why am I here?**

The first part answers this key question. This is not the same as a summary of No. 3 below. It is, if you like, one level up from that. Construct it in these terms: "This person's purpose is to …. so that ….". It

needs to challenge, to clarify, to enable priorities to be set and to get the person out of bed each morning.

2 **Whom do I relate to?**
This section should include who the post-holder is responsible to, responsible for, and liaising with. It is a short listing of groups or individuals that the post-holder has to relate to in some way. They cannot work solo. The identity of the line manager should of course be included here.

3 **What do I do?**
A short list of up to ten broad responsibilities for most jobs, giving enough framework to be clear but not so much as to stop the post-holder using initiative.

For more on this, check out Article A6 on this website.

The common mistake is to focus on the third section and go into detail. In doing this the shape of the post gets lost. A short listing of headings for responsibilities to show what the priorities are is what you need for most church positions. You can always reference a more detailed paper or specific lists under each heading, but avoid adding fog to the job description by trying to explain everything here.

So when the line manager wants to review the post with the holder, there is now a clear basis on which such a review can be carried out. There can be an assessment of how well the purpose is being achieved, how the people-relationships are working out, and how each part of the list of responsibilities is being carried out and with what results. Without a clear job description, effective review is simply not possible.

Person profile

This may come as a surprise. Most posts have a person profile for interview which is then filed. But the Bible says little about job descriptions and a great deal about the kind of people we should be.

So why not see this as a current document, to be checked over every year and to challenge the post-holder to live up to whatever is described in it? In my experience such practice is as rare as those blue moons. I would love to see that change.

A typical person profile should

- fit onto one side of A4 if possible;
- set high, but not impossible, standards;
- be adapted as necessary once the post has been filled – and tweaked as necessary later;
- differentiate between what is essential and what is merely desirable;
- be structured under a few specific headings such as character, Christian experience, personal qualities, skills, work experience.

It will show up training needs, challenge the worker to live up to the requirements of the post, and link job performance and discipleship. In Christian service, character matters.

It is time that Christian employers, including churches, took person profiles more seriously and kept them as current documents, setting standards for everyone, including of course those who are the line managers.

Employment terms

My third piece of foundational paperwork may make you wonder if I am really into controlling the worker. Not so! But an athlete does not win races without discipline. An employee will not develop into the best they can be without their contract or, more correctly, their 'statement of contract terms'.

The employment terms and conditions tell manager and worker where the boundaries lie. If they say the hours are 40 a week and leave is taken with certain permissions, the worker cannot just choose to take a day off. This document should only have to be called upon when things go wrong, but it is part of the employment deal.

This is what makes an employed worker a little different from a volunteer because the latter cannot have a legally binding contract in the same way.

There are times when something goes wrong and the contract's disciplinary or capability procedure has to be activated. At this point I often find huge reluctance by church employers to do such a thing. They claim that everyone is a Christian and it will all work out OK eventually.

The trouble is that it is often the opposite that happens. Early adoption of a contractual process can be a healthy and wise way forward. It saves things getting out of hand when relationships start to break down. See Article A8 on this website for more on employment contracts.

So there are my three basic documents on which to build development. Each one has a different use, but each is vital. The manager needs to hold and to know all three. My experience is that they are often forgotten or ignored.

4: Plan

But the three foundations covered so far are not enough to enable you to provide good management. They need to be made specific to a given time period and coupled with a commitment from the employer to the employee. Management is a two-way process.

So here I build on the three foundations of job description, person profile and employment terms to create a plan for the worker that will give them a right balance of challenge and support. Getting that balance just right is your responsibility. It will be different for each person you manage. No, not easy!

Personal aims

I have already noted that you cannot review anyone's work until you know what they are seeking to achieve. But the job description is really a bit too broad for this. Hence the idea for a set of what I call 'aims' that make that job description specific to the next few months. These become a set of current priorities or projects that you both agree and which are:

- fixed in time – typically for a six-month or one-year period and agreed and then checked up on at each review;
- agreed between the two of you – they must be shared and not an imposition;
- broad-brush achievements with some clear way of seeing whether they have been achieved or not;
- clearly fitting within job description, person profile and the vision or direction of the church or mission agency;
- some similar year by year, others completely different;
- no more than seven and perhaps only three or four;
- checked up on regularly.

Don't restrict these aims just to work tasks. Try to devise the list so that it includes something of each of:

- work achievements;
- relationship and team improvements;
- personal development.

Examples
In each case, decide which of these last three categories each of these falls into.

- To conduct a review on the estate and prepare a plan for effective outreach.
- To find and train a team of volunteers to run the Saturday coffee shop.
- To work more obviously in harmony with my two colleagues.
- To undertake appropriate training to make full use of the new software.
- To run a Christian enquirers course in the community centre.
- To grow in my understanding of the requirements of Christian leadership.
- To complete a handbook of this role for my eventual successor.

Personal targets

Aims provide specific priorities for this year. But most people need step-by-step markers to enable them to achieve their aims. I call them 'targets' and they will be specific, usually by date but sometimes by amount. Think of them as stepping stones to achieve each aim.

So one aim might have three or four targets assigned to it to give some measurable parameters to enable an assessment to be made of how well the aim has been achieved. During the process they provide a check on whether you are on schedule and at the same time turn a challenging aim into a number of simple actions that follow each other.

If you manage someone, you both need to agree aims and targets – and then it is targets that you keep an eye on month by month to assess progress and adjust action as necessary.

Most people will thrive under the discipline of the right level of challenge. Set it too high and they will become depressed. Set it too low and they will be bored. But in all cases make sure the targets have been agreed by both of you so that you are both crystal clear as to what is expected. Differing interpretations lead to confusion.

Examples (for the first aim above)
Here is a set of dated targets for one specific aim:

- To find a team of three people and plan the review with them by Christmas.
- To carry out the review in February and assess the findings by the end of March.
- To meet together during April and May to prepare recommendations.
- To take these to the July Council meeting and be ready for implementation by September.

One warning: beware changing plans without proper consultation. No one enjoys achieving an agreed target, only to find that the target has been moved. This is often a simple matter of lack of communication from manager to worker, but the damage can be considerable.

Your commitment to them

But if you are challenging the worker to achieve, what level and means of support are you prepared to inject to help them do so? Most people need lots of help if they are to rise to the challenge you have set.

This is the other side of the contract and means that the manager is given challenges as well as the one they manage. This is a statement that will tell the worker what they can depend on from you, and should help them to see that this is a partnership worth investing in.

Here are some ideas to ponder, and then share with the worker (see also section 6 below):

- regular time invested in meeting with them, weekly, monthly, six-monthly – you cannot manage someone effectively if you do not meet with them at regular intervals and also make yourself available to them when they need help;
- regular prayer for and interest in their work, and evidence of this – for example by asking questions about issues you promised to pray for;
- enthusiasm for their success – check out attitude at section 1 again;
- quality communication between you – it is not so much the amount of time you spend together but the level of commitment and understanding within that time;
- helping them understand the big picture so they can see how they fit in – a point often ignored for 'junior' staff but one that provides motivation for everyone;
- offering training and funding for it – a really practical means of support;
- other practical help – equipment, advice, help for their family.

Remember, it is the right balance of challenge (aims and targets) and support (your commitment) that matters. That will differ from person to person and so you need to assess it carefully for each worker you are responsible for. What will be seen as support by one can be seen as being treated as a child by another.

Engagement

And so at last to the times when manager and worker are dealing with each other face-to-face. This is what management is all about – but it all depends on good documentation and the right preparation.

5: Review

"Ah," you say, "the dreaded annual appraisal". To confirm your feelings, watch this clip (ignore the non-appraisal bit!):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkYUDQCYGHA

And that is what appraisal is all about for many line managers, with Christians being little different: a pro-forma set of questions to ask, turning it into a routine set of boxes to tick. It's sad.

Fundamentals

So let's start again. I will avoid the A word and use the broader R one, Review. Here are four key statements about this.

1 **Review is a thoroughly Christian concept**

You do it every time you confess your sins, Revelation chapters 2 and 3 show how God reviews churches, and so on.

2 **Review is about building a person up, not pulling them down**

It is not just going through some motions. It is part of what line management is all about: developing people to be the best that they can be for God. The 'annual appraisal' should be an exciting part of management, not a routine for ticking boxes.

3 **Review is all about the future**

You check out the past and analyse the present with the aim of helping you both to plan ahead. The time may be spent equally between the three tenses, but the focus is on the future.

4 **Review is a two-way process**

The reviewer (being or representing manager and employer) needs to be as vulnerable as the one supposedly being reviewed. It should be the expectation that a better future will involve changes by all parties involved. This is not one person lording it over the other.

Those statements may sound sensible, but you may be battling against different expectations gained in a workplace where this process was not handled well. Or a manager may pay lip service to these four, but then behave in a very different way.

Many Christian leaders are frightened of review, both receiving and giving it. They fear honest feedback, they are threatened by any form of criticism (I am not talking about the vindictive sort), they are protective of their position.

A Minister may be frightened of anyone criticising his or her preaching and so steps back from reviewing anyone else's up-front ministry. A quiet leader may well be fearful of reviewing the work of an extrovert and volatile staff member because of fear of the response. Peer-to-peer review is unlikely to be robust. Others may worry about Christ's commands about judging others and steer clear.

Perhaps, in a church context, the main fear is of losing relationship and a belief that it is safer not to disturb matters and to keep everyone happy. Relationships trump outcomes every time and so we all fail to be the workers we might become.

But God reviews us and we can join in with his work. If we are all left unchecked to keep going, we pick up and get away with bad habits, we underperform and think it the norm, we fail to be challenged to improve. We need to have the courage to review and be reviewed. In my experience (from both sides) that is not always comfortable but is ultimately satisfying.

Several forms

Here are five different types. You need them all at different times.

1 **A week in the life of…**

You review last week with the Administrator. Are the computers working properly now? How did that tricky interview go? What's on this coming week that needs thought? This is the normal, regular management meeting. Make sure it happens. For most staff it should normally be weekly: for part-timers or those working away from base it may need to be fortnightly or so and even by telephone or, better, Zoom if distances are involved. Monthly will usually be too infrequent.

2 **The one-off event**

You make a special time to review the teens weekend away with the Youth Worker. What do the feedback forms say? Did the team shape up well? Did it actually achieve its aims? So, vitally, what do we learn for next time? And how do we make sure those lessons are brought to the right people's attention?

This provides opportunities for congratulations where appropriate as well as lessons to learn.

3 **One area of work**

Every so often you review one aspect of the Pastoral Assistant's work: perhaps her speaking engagements. You arrange three people to send in feedback, you ask if you are offering enough support yourself, you plan a slightly more challenging assignment next time.

There is no need to wait for the big annual occasion for this kind of meeting – and you might allow the Pastoral Assistant to give their view of your speaking. It might be that they see this in a different light from people of your own Christian experience, age or tradition.

4 **The whole works**

This is what may be known as the annual appraisal, but I suggest you consider six months a better interval. If a staff member is with you for three years, two annual interviews is not going to be that helpful.

This is where you agree aims and targets for the next period. At six-monthly intervals you might even want to combine something of 3 and 4 together so there is a different slant to each main review.

5 **The exit interview**

If they leave, let them do so on a positive note by reviewing their achievements and allowing them to review you as line manager (yes!) and the church or organisation as employer. It is so much better to let people leave with open communication than for them to slink away frustrated or for them to leave feeling their contribution has never been properly recognised. But do not fail to learn the lessons that emerge.

Note that when the worker brings questions to you about how they should deal with a problem or tackle progress towards an aim, help them to answer the question themselves rather than jumping in with your own answer. Your work is to develop their capability. If you spoon-feed answers to them they will never grow.

The major reviews

When you plan a more major review, typically the fourth type in the list above, it is important to do it properly. Here are some guidelines to follows.

- Plan it together and prepare for it carefully in advance. This is not something to impose on a worker with just a day or two's notice. Get it in your diaries and start thinking and praying about how to make it a really worthwhile occasion.

- Give it enough time away from distractions. Start by thinking in terms of at least half a day for a full time member of staff, and hold it away from the workplace if possible on neutral ground where you will not be disturbed by callers through any medium.

- It's a two-way meeting so listening by both parties will be as important as talking. You need to check that you understand each other, so a mirroring technique may be helpful ("What have you just heard me saying to you?").

- Go through the past six months (or year if that is the interval) with some care, checking diaries, achievements, relationships, growth in faith, feelings and, above all, aims and targets set last time. Then move on to analyse the present position: the work, the team, the relationship with the manager, the joys and frustrations.

- But leave plenty of time to use this information to inform a planning process for the coming period. Try to draft out together some aims and for each of them some appropriate targets. But don't rush to specifics: get the direction of travel clear because the detail can always be worked out over the next week or two.

- Agree the output together. Who writes it all up needs to be decided, but the first draft might be in the hands of the one being reviewed. You will need to sign off the agreed aims and targets at some point, but they may take a week or two to work at before being ready for this.

- Keep it confidential. The manager should only pass on points that both have agreed need to be communicated to others (such as training needs, a report to someone in higher authority or actions that involve others).

Although a pro-forma may simply be too stylised, have some basic questions or bullet points you are both working too. For examples see Training Notes TN17 on this website, *Suggested questions for an annual review.*

Review of this kind is normally one-to-one, but it can be done by a small panel if not too intimidating, or it can be carried out in a team context for everyone in the team.

Review develops the worker and challenges the manager. It should be one of the most satisfying features of line management. The next two sections tackle two different aspects of it.

6: Encouragement

Here is the first of two aspects of not only specific reviews but the 24/7 relationship between manager and worker.

An attitude to challenge

When I talk about offering appropriate thanks to workers, I sometimes find someone argues against me. They claim that Christians are motivated to serve Jesus Christ and should not need to be thanked. They get their satisfaction from serving him.

But not to offer praise and support shows a lack of understanding about human nature and flies in the face of the New Testament commands to encourage one another (see Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 4:18 & 5:11; Hebrews 3:13 & 10:24,25).

If your job is to develop the person, you need to spur them on, especially for Christians in solo positions, facing criticism, feeling vulnerable or new to the role.

Of course this can be done in a patronising way (saying they are marvellous when it is not meant) but I meet many church staff who tell me they are rarely thanked for what they do, or congratulated for their achievements, or remembered on their birthdays, or demonstrated that they are being prayed for. Ouch!

Be a care-taker!

Here are some ideas to consider for how to encourage anyone you are responsible for. There is a fine line between taking a genuine interest and being nosey, so be careful. Try these for starters. I hope though that most of them hardly need to be stated.

- **Be available**
  The worker should know that your door is open, and that they can reach you by the most appropriate communication channel whenever they need your support or advice.

- **Take an interest in them as a person, not just as a worker**

  Know something about their family and friends, take an interest in what they are passionate about (whether sport, a particular cause, a political agenda or a geographical area) and remember what they told you they were doing over the past weekend or whenever.

- **Meet with them regularly**

  This point has already been made. There should be both regular and diarised meetings but also day-to-day informal check-ups at the coffee machine or wherever. In churches where pastoral staff work from their homes this point may need to be met in other ways.

- **Remember birthdays and other key events**

  Birthdays may not matter to you, but they probably do to most of those you manage. Ask about holidays or special events.

- **Share in their discipleship and growth in Christian maturity**

  If appropriate see a staff Bible study as part of taking care of people, of helping them to develop as Christians. Discuss a recent sermon with them, or talk about books either of you has been reading.

- **Promise to pray for specific events and then ask afterwards how they went**

  We can all say we will pray, but the encouragement comes later when we demonstrate that we had been praying and are longing to hear what happened.

- **Send an occasional hand-written card to congratulate or thank when appropriate**

  An email or a personal word will do but a hand-written card is better: special, permanent, thoughtful. You encourage by praising them for results or improvements or evidence of courage or of wisdom or of going a second mile. Never make these predictable or too frequent or their power is lost.

- **Regularly thank them in public for their work**

  Make it clear you support and appreciate them when talking to others, when telling people about your church or mission. Drop the occasional mention into a sermon or a report.

- **Send the occasional text message or email just before an event to show you care**

  It will help them through that interview, that difficult task, that talk to prepare. It will demonstrate you are concerned for them and share their feelings.

- **Praise them when they meet a target or achieve an aim**

  Each achievement matters and you need to show that you have noticed that something in their plan for the next six months has been completed.

- **Provide what they need**

  Ensure they have the right equipment, offer them training at the church's expense, provide enough flexibility in their employment to give it a human face.

- **Celebrate a team achievement**

  When a team you lead and manage achieves something together, have an agreed form of celebration, one that everyone would appreciate: a meal out, an activity together, some time off.

If encouragement is a biblical command, it is doubly important for a manager to thank and praise his or her people when appropriate, even if your manager does not do this for you. In all this keep their future career in mind. You are developing them for their future rather than yours or your church's.

Avoid doing it endlessly or it loses its impact. Be looking out for the right opportunities where it is justified.

7: Reprimand

This final section is a partner for the previous one on encouragement. I am still talking about 24/7 review.

I have seen it said, quite correctly, that bad management is to be criticised but never thanked. I would add that it is just as bad to be thanked but never criticised.

The employer-employee relationship is well defined in law and involves discipline. If Scripture is profitable for rebuke and correction as well as teaching (2 Timothy 3:16) you should not shirk your responsibility to challenge what is not right. But of course you can only do this if the standards are clear: hence sections 3 and 4 above.

Jesus was not exactly shy of reprimanding his disciples when necessary even though they would have built up strong ties of friendship. Poor performance has to be challenged at the outset.

Key principles

1 **Set the expectation at the start**

Always agree when you take on line managing someone that your role is both to encourage and reprimand them and they should expect both. Never spring a surprise rebuke and always seek to be completely fair.

2 **Be aware that avoidance can lead to trouble**

Reprimand is a healthy, godly way of preventing some situations getting to a point where formal employment procedures have to be introduced (eg. a formal warning under the terms of a disciplinary or capability procedure). It is much better to tackle a problem (relating to behaviour or performance) as early as possible.

3 **Do not put this back to later**

So never delay a reprimand to the next scheduled review meeting – and certainly never to the next six-monthly or annual review. Deal with it as close to the matter that has given rise to it as is possible. The matter is then fresh in everyone's mind and the position may be prevented from deteriorating.

4 **Be clear as your role as manager**

There is a peculiar position that arises in churches when the Minister or a ministry head is both the pastor and the manager of the employee. As already mentioned it is simply not possible to be both together when things go wrong. I would argue that this implies that it is wrong to try to be both anyway. You find yourself torn in two directions. If you manage a member of staff, better to give them a different pastor and agree this at the outset.

5 **Resist feelings of guilt**

Above all, do not feel guilty at the need to reprimand. Christians tend to tie themselves in knots over this because they feel they are supposed to be 'nice'. What we need to be is honest. Love is all about facing up to reality rather than avoiding it. Poor performance must be challenged at the outset.

6 **Do not make a personal attack**

Challenging the performance does not mean attacking the person, and there is no need to criticise workers in public or to belittle them in any way. We are all sinners. A good manager allows failure as a means of learning – but learning there must be.

If you are struggling with this, look at Mark 8:27-30 (a review meeting on one particular issue) and then vv 31-33. Was Jesus being nice to Peter, or developing him into the Christian leader he later became?

Process

When you reprimand an employee it may be because their behaviour has fallen short of the person profile standard, or they have failed to achieve a target because of their own fault, or their overall performance is not up to standard. If you have followed earlier sections in this article correctly, those standards or targets will be clear.

- Make it face to face. You cannot do this by email!
- Check your facts and motives first – so pause before you act. You may have heard a story from one source when there is another side to it. You may not like the worker concerned and too readily blame him or her for something that might not be their fault.
- Be specific as to exactly what the reprimand is about. If the worker is confused but frightened to say so, this will lead to problems.
- Let them give their side – in case there is an aspect you had not appreciated. You point out that they failed to deliver to an agreed deadline. They point out that someone else in the chain of activity had let them down first.
- Once the situation has been clarified, let them know how you feel about this (it's personal). Move it away from failure to your reaction to what has happened.
- When that message has got through, affirm your belief in them. Make it clear that you respect them, believe in the possibility of improvement and want to learn something positive from this experience. If they have failed in one thing, that does not make them a failure.

- Agree, together, a plan to ensure that things that need to be corrected can be, and think of actions to minimise the risk of a repetition. Try to encourage the worker to come up with the solutions rather than imposing your ideas on them.

- Provided you have made a plan, make it clear that it is now all over, once they have understood how this has impacted you. This may need some kind of visual action: a smile, a change in topic of conversation, a definite closure to the meeting.

- Be honest throughout this process about your own failings. Make it clear that you are not perfect but are seeking to learn from your mistakes.

If matters deteriorate and you do need to move to activate a formal disciplinary procedure, do not be afraid to do this. Some Christian managers hope the problem will go away – it rarely does in these cases and to delay bringing in formal disciplinary measures often makes matters worse. But an early reprimand will stop many such problems in their tracks.

Conclusion

So there are seven areas to consider when being a line manager. This is not an easy task to do well, but the rewards can be immense in terms of both output and in developing someone for their life's work from here on.

It is a task to take seriously and to pray about regularly. If you have never been line managed well yourself, do not repeat the mistakes of others. Ensure that those you manage are grateful for the way you go about it, not because you made it easy but because you made their role ultimately satisfying.

This article is available at https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Articles-index then A32. It is an expanded version of seven blogs written for the Willow Creek website and published at the same time as this article.

See also on this website Articles A6, *Job descriptions*, A8, *Worker agreements,* and A17, *Staff selection step-by-step,* and A45, *How to lead a team at church,* plus Training Notes TN17, *Suggested questions for an annual review,* TN20, *Line management in a church staff team*, TN65, *Sharp interview questions,* TN101, *Working with a No. 2,* TN144, *360-degree reviews for churches*, and TN153, *How not to manage volunteers!*

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File A32 under Management.

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