

5 THINGS EVERY **NEW** MANAGER GETS WRONG IN THEIR **FIRST 90 DAYS**

...and the simple shifts that change everything.

Research shows 60% of new managers fail within their first 24 months — not from lack of effort, but from predictable, fixable mistakes. This guide breaks down the 5 most common ones and gives you the practical shifts to get ahead of them.

THIS GUIDE IS FOR YOU IF:

- You were recently promoted into your first management role
- You're 30–90 days in and feeling uncertain about the transition
- You want to lead well — and avoid the mistakes that derail new managers

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Mistake #2 · Skipping the Relationship Foundation

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Closing · Your Next Step Forward + 90-Day Checklist

The transition from individual contributor to manager is one of the most challenging career pivots you'll ever make — and most organizations offer almost no support for it. According to Gartner research, **60% of new managers fail within their first 24 months**. The good news: failure is almost always traceable to a handful of predictable, correctable mistakes. This guide breaks them down — and gives you the tools to get ahead of them.

60%

of new managers fail within 24 months

Gartner / CEBResearch

70%

of engagement variance comes from managers

Gallup

57%

of employees have quit because of their boss

DDI Frontline Leader Project

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MISTAKE #1

Staying in 'Doer' Mode

Refusing to Let Go of the Work

You were promoted because you were exceptional at your job. That's exactly what makes the first 90 days so dangerous. The very skills and habits that earned you this role — doing things yourself, quickly, and right — are now working against you.

Harvard Business Review calls this the 'lingering trap': staying too involved in your previous role instead of fully transitioning into the new one. You rationalize it — 'It's faster if I just do it myself' — but what you're actually doing is blocking your team's growth and signaling that you don't trust them.

"Especially when you're busy, it's easy to stay in your comfort zone and take on the work yourself. But as a manager, your job is now to develop other people."

— Dina Denham Smith, Harvard Business Review (2023)

This shows up in different ways: jumping in to 'rescue' a project instead of coaching through the challenge, being the one who always answers client questions, or re-doing a report rather than explaining what needs to change. Over time, your team becomes dependent, not capable — and you become a bottleneck, not a leader.

71%

of employees say micromanagement interferes with job performance

Forbes

85%

report morale is negatively impacted by being micromanaged

Forbes

THE SHIFT: WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Delegate the result, not the method. Tell your team what needs to be accomplished and by when — then step back and let them figure out how.

Ask before you act. When a team member brings you a problem, try: 'What do you think you should do?' before offering your answer.

Redefine success. Your new metric isn't 'Did I do great work today?' It's 'Did my team do great work today?'

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MISTAKE #2

Skipping the Relationship Foundation

Assuming Authority Comes with the Title

New managers often assume the org chart does the work for them — that people will follow because they're now the manager. They set goals, assign tasks, and start executing. What they skip is the foundational work of building trust.

According to Michael Watkins, author of *The First 90 Days* — the landmark Harvard Business School guide to leadership transitions — new leaders who fail can almost always trace that failure back to 'vicious cycles that developed in the first few months on the job.' The most common starting point: a failure to listen, learn, and connect before charging into action.

"Most new managers don't consider the new stakeholders — like your boss's boss and executive team members — that they need to build relationships with. Failing to do so leads to you and your team missing out on valuable insights."

— Dina Denham Smith, *Harvard Business Review* (2023)

If you were promoted from within the team you now manage, the dynamic is even more delicate. Former peers are now direct reports. Some may feel passed over. Without an intentional investment in those relationships in the first 90 days, resentment quietly builds.

70%

of frontline managers said their promotion was unexpected

DDIFrontlineLeaderProject

41%

have doubts about whether management was the right move

DDIResearch(2019)

THE SHIFT: WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Schedule a 1:1 with every direct report in week one. Don't talk about goals or performance. Ask: What's going well? What's frustrating? What do you need from me?

Map your full stakeholder landscape. Who are the people above, beside, and below you who affect your success? Invest in those relationships before you need them.

Earn trust before exerting authority. Especially if promoted from within, give former peers time to adjust. Trust is built through consistency, not titles.

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MISTAKE #3

Avoiding Feedback Until It's Too Late

Mistaking Silence for Kindness

Giving feedback feels risky when you're new. You don't want to come in too strong or alienate people. So you wait — for the right moment, the right words. Weeks pass. The issue compounds. By the time you address it, it feels much bigger than it needed to be.

Meanwhile, your team is operating in the dark. Gallup's research is unambiguous: employees who strongly agree they receive valuable feedback are **five times more likely to be engaged** — and 48% less likely to be looking for another job.

"Just one in four employees strongly agree they receive valuable feedback from the people they work with. Most leaders and managers need to improve how feedback is given."

— Gallup & Workhuman Research (2024)

HBR warns new managers that they are 'on stage' in ways they've never been before. Your team watches your expressions, tone, and silences. When you go quiet about a problem, they don't interpret that as acceptance — they often interpret it as approval of mediocrity or impending consequence. Ambiguity is not neutral.

5x

more likely to be engaged with frequent quality feedback

Gallup

48%

less likely to job-search with regular feedback

Gallup & Workhuman 2024

61%

engagement rate when feedback + recognition combined weekly

Gallup & Workhuman 2024

THE SHIFT: WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Make feedback a weekly habit, not a formal event. Build it into your 1:1s. A simple 'Here's what I noticed — what's your take?' removes the formality that makes feedback feel like a verdict.

Separate feedback from evaluation. Day-to-day coaching and annual reviews are different things. Frequent small feedback prevents big conversations from ever becoming necessary.

Give positive feedback explicitly. Silence when things go well is a missed opportunity. Name it specifically: 'I noticed how you handled that client call — that was exactly right.'

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MISTAKE #4

Managing Everyone the Same Way

The 'Golden Rule' Trap in Leadership

The Golden Rule says treat others the way you want to be treated. It's good ethics and bad management. People are different. What motivates one person drains another. The best managers operate on the Platinum Rule: treat people the way they want to be treated.

New managers often apply a one-size-fits-all approach because it's simpler and because they haven't yet invested in understanding each person on their team. The result? High performers feel constrained. Newer team members feel unsupported. Everyone feels vaguely misunderstood.

"The best managers can understand and relate to their team members' inherently human motivations. Employees are people first, and they have an intrinsic need for bonding that does not automatically turn itself off between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m."

— Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace*

HBR also identifies the 'judgment trap' — forming premature conclusions about people without enough information. Within the first few weeks, new managers make snap assessments that shape how they treat people, which shapes how people perform, which appears to confirm the initial judgment. It becomes self-fulfilling.

1 in 10

people have natural high talent for management

Gallup Research

32%

increase in manager well-being with training + support

Gallup 2025

THE SHIFT: WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Ask each person how they like to work. In your first 1:1s: 'How do you prefer to receive feedback? How much check-in do you like on projects?' Then honor those answers.

Match your style to their experience level. A new hire needs structure and direction. A seasoned professional needs autonomy and challenge. One team, two different management approaches.

Withhold early judgments. Give people 90 days before you form strong opinions. Curiosity is better than conclusions.

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MISTAKE #5

Going It Alone

Treating Vulnerability as Weakness

There's a quiet pressure new managers feel to already know the answers. You were promoted as a high performer — admitting you're struggling feels like confirming you weren't ready. So new managers white-knuckle it through confusion and self-doubt, rather than asking for help.

DDI's research found that more than one-third of new leaders describe their leadership transition as 'overwhelming or very stressful.' The DDI report also found that only 44% of managers globally have received any formal management training — meaning most new managers are expected to figure it out by trial and error, with their teams bearing the cost of those errors.

"When leaders derail, their failures can almost always be traced to vicious cycles that developed in the first few months on the job."

— Michael Watkins, *The First 90 Days* (Harvard Business School Press)

HBR identifies 'unconscious incompetence' among new managers: the gap you don't know you have. You can't fix what you can't see. And without a coach, mentor, or structured support, most new managers never clearly identify what's undermining them — they just feel the effects.

44%

of managers globally have received formal training

Gallup 2025

1/3+

of new leaders describe their transition as 'overwhelming'

DDI Research

50%

manager well-being with training + support (vs. 28% without)

Gallup 2025

THE SHIFT: WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Find a thinking partner. Whether it's a coach, mentor, or trusted peer, you need someone who can give you honest perspective. Leadership is hard to see from the inside.

Normalize not knowing. Asking questions is not weakness — it's how the best managers build trust and close knowledge gaps. HBR calls 'choosing hubris over humility' a top new manager mistake.

Invest in yourself the way you'd invest in your team. If you believe development matters for your direct reports, it matters for you too. Coaching is one of the highest-ROI investments a new manager can make.

Ready to Make Your First 90 Days Count?

The difference between managers who thrive and those who struggle isn't talent — it's support. That's exactly what Grange Hill Group provides.

We work with new managers and early-career professionals to build the leadership foundation that accelerates success — before the costly mistakes take hold.

◆ Personalized 1:1 coaching

◆ Practical, research-backed frameworks

◆ A thought partner who's in your corner

Book a free 30-minute Clarity Call

grangehillgroup.com

YOUR 90-DAY QUICK REFERENCE

Week 1–2

- Schedule 1:1s with every direct report
- Ask: What's going well? What's frustrating? What do you need from me?
- Identify key stakeholders beyond your immediate team
- Resist making big changes before you've listened first

Month 1

- Start weekly check-ins — make feedback a routine, not an event
- Ask each person how they like to be managed and receive feedback
- Find a mentor, coach, or trusted peer outside your team
- Identify 1–2 quick wins to build team momentum together

Days 30–90

- Review delegation: what are you still holding that you should hand off?
- Assess team strengths — are people playing to what they do best?
- Establish a feedback rhythm you can sustain long-term
- Check in on your own wellbeing — sustainability is a leadership skill

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

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