

Determine if
management
could be a fulfilling
career choice.

ARE YOU Management MATERIAL?



BY CARLANN FERGUSON

At some point in your career, you are going to look at your manager and think, “I could do that job.” The next question that often comes to mind is, “Should I do that job?” Before you jump to an answer, consider several questions that will help you determine if a management career is a good fit or a ticket to unhappiness.

The psychological profile of an effective manager

Individual contributors prove their worth by being able to personally achieve outcomes. Managers prove their worth by influencing others to achieve results. Attaining this influence requires a different power motive than that necessary to be a great individual contributor.



Studies by David McClelland and David Burnham demonstrate that highly effective leaders share a unique psychological profile. Having coached hundreds of leaders, I found that this profile is also a great predictor of a leader's comfort and happiness with a management position. There are three components to the profile:

- socialized power
- ego power
- need for affiliation.

As you answer the questions below, be brutally honest with yourself. If you pick the response after *or*, it doesn't mean you can't be an effective leader in the future. It just means you have work to do if you are intent on a management career.

Socialized power. Someone with high socialized power has a strong desire to create outcomes that benefit the collective organization. A manager's job is to influence others to collaborate and achieve a common goal. In contrast, a strong individual contributor may have a high need for personal achievement.

If proving your personal worth to a company motivates you, management may not be a good choice. The best managers share their power and enable others to reach desired organizational outcomes. They make the hard decisions and sacrifice unit resources to support other areas of the business in achieving critical company results.

Are you demonstrating a high amount of socialized power?

- When a team you are on is recognized for results, are you excited about how well the team worked together *or* are you upset if your individual contributions aren't specifically mentioned?
- When it's time to assign tasks for a project you are leading, do you give the tasks with the highest likelihood of impressing upper management to others on the team *or* do you keep the high-visibility tasks for yourself?
- Do you take time to mentor others on the knowledge and skills you possess so the team as a whole can get stronger, *or* do you hold onto your knowledge and skills

because they give you a competitive advantage over your peers?

Ego power. First, let's clear something up: Ego is not bad. We all have egos. And if you want to be a manager, you are going to need a healthy dose of ego. After all, managers have to think that their own skills and abilities are superior enough that others will follow their lead. That takes a moderately strong ego.

Notice I said moderately strong. We do not want egotistical, narcissistic, or psychopathic managers leading our companies. Managers can't think so highly of themselves that their egos take over and create illusions of invincibility. Managers who view themselves as the critical cog in the company wheel or assume they have all the right answers will not create great places to work.

Is your ego moderately strong enough to lead others?

- Are you open to criticism from others, knowing that you can apply the feedback and become an even better leader, *or* do you regularly suffer from feelings of "not being good enough"?
- When an obstacle presents itself, do you attack it with focused determination *or* do you spend time questioning your abilities and worrying about the possible outcomes?
- Do you recognize that individuals have different talents and that your job is to maximize those talents *or* do you think you are the person who has all the right answers and that the company should be grateful they have you?

Need for affiliation. Need for affiliation is a person's need to be liked. Managers need a moderately low need to be liked by those they lead. A manager's score should not be so low that the person is a sociopath or lacks the ability to relate to others. But neither should it be so high that the manager's actions and decisions are based on what she thinks others want her to do.

I have seen this facet derail many well-intentioned leaders. Sometimes the manager's need to be liked results in trying to please every person that works for him. Managers



who focus on being liked will make mistakes, such as letting too many people have a day off without thinking of the consequences, changing decisions several times to accommodate everyone's opinion, or failing to give an employee tough feedback needed to improve. Managers who are trying to please everyone are often perceived as "wishy-washy," "weak," or "scattered."

were not a high-performing group because David would not push the group to do better. It often seemed like the team members had more say in the direction of the work than David did.

David put on a smile at work, but when he got home he complained to his wife about how miserable he was. His energy was low and he dreaded Monday mornings.

IF PROVING YOUR PERSONAL WORTH TO A COMPANY MOTIVATES YOU, MANAGEMENT MAY NOT BE A GOOD CHOICE.

Is your need to be liked low enough to effectively lead?

- Are you thinking and acting in ways that benefit the collective whole of the company or are you basing your actions and decisions on what will benefit those you like or the team you are part of?
- When you are experiencing conflict with a peer, do you address the issue with the individual even though it is uncomfortable or do you avoid the conflict and hope that things will soon return back to normal?
- When deciding on an action to take on a project, do you sort through the input to determine what will best serve the intended outcomes of the project or do you try to incorporate everyone's input?

Your answers to the above questions will help you determine whether a management position is really a good fit. If it is not, you may find that you share some commonalities with the leader described below.

The case of David

David was a manager with a huge heart who was motivated by helping others. He avoided conflict, hated giving bad news, and took it personally when his managers criticized his team's results. He would try to meet every request thrown at him, even if they directly opposed each other. He and his team successfully accomplished most tasks, but they

With coaching and personal insight work, David recognized that his passion was serving others and that management did not fit his personality and the way in which he wanted to make a difference. He stepped down from management and took a specialist role in a different department that was connected more closely with the customer experience.

He found his joy again, not only at work but also in his home life. David had thought that management would be the best way to be of service to others, but he had underestimated the higher ego needs and lower need for affiliation required to be an effective manager. After David changed jobs, he started looking forward to work and loved the extra time he had on nights and weekends to spend with his family.

Demonstrate management potential

Management can be an extremely rewarding profession for those comfortable with exerting positive control to lead a team to incredible results. It can be challenging, exhilarating, and satisfying. If you are a fit to the needs of a management role, show you have what it takes by demonstrating the following behaviors.

Be other-focused. Being other-focused is foundational to high-socialized power. As a high achiever, you've received many accolades about your skills, technical prowess, and critical thinking skills. Now it's time to step out of

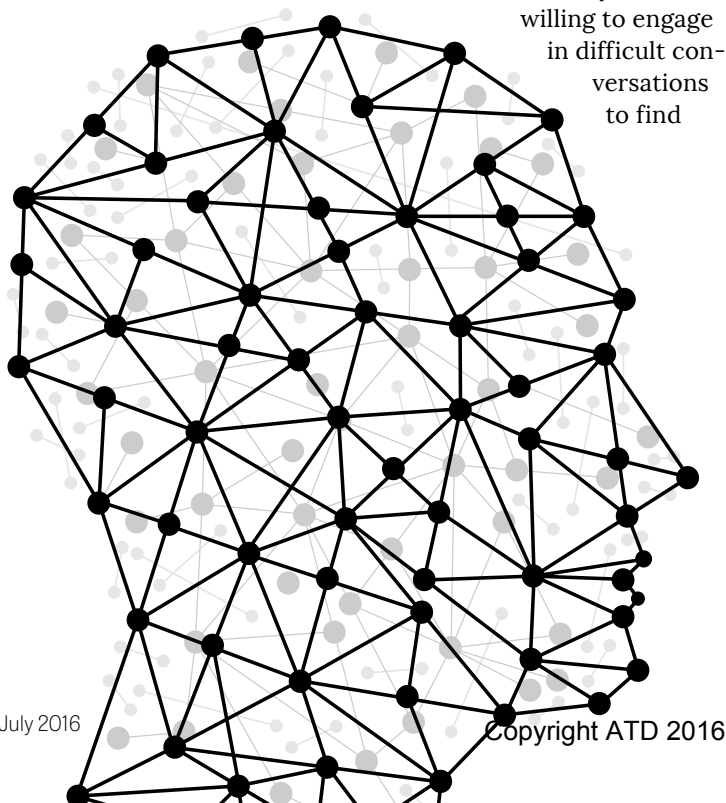
MANAGEMENT CAN BE AN EXTREMELY REWARDING PROFESSION FOR THOSE COMFORTABLE WITH EXERTING POSITIVE CONTROL TO LEAD A TEAM TO INCREDIBLE RESULTS.

the spotlight and show you can help others be equally successful.

Leadership is about coaching, mentoring, and developing others, so succession committees are looking for proof that the aspiring leader is focused on the success of others as well as her own. Take time now to start mentoring peers. Not only will this help prove you want to be a manager, but it also will help prepare someone to take your place when you transition to the higher role.

Constructively address conflict. Conflict is healthy and normal, so you are inevitably going to have conflict with peers, your boss, and other stakeholders. How you handle this conflict is critical to proving you have the emotional maturity to be a leader.

Addressing conflict right away demonstrates that you are willing to engage in difficult conversations to find



solutions and keep moving forward. Avoiding conflict gives the perception that you have a high need to be liked and take conflict personally. Show you have a high need to accomplish outcomes for the organization by raising points of conflict in a calm, empathetic way.

I find that many leaders are missing the tools and personal insight needed to address conflict without gut-wrenching symptoms. Check to see if your company offers workshops on conflict management that also help you gain insights to identify your emotional triggers.

Think bigger picture. At the individual contributor level, it's easy to have limited knowledge of the reasons behind decisions made at higher levels. This leads to jumping to assumptions about executive decisions and actions; often, these are not flattering assumptions.

Stop assuming and start asking. If you aren't certain why a direction was taken or why a key decision was made, ask. Maintain curiosity about the company and its leadership. Learn more about company strategies and figure out how your work connects to them.

When you're a manager, you will be responsible for supporting the higher-level decisions and directions of the company. This will require asking questions so that you can feel confident when communicating your support of those decisions. To prepare, start asking the big questions now.

There are many advantages to both management and specialist roles, but they are only advantages if they fit your personality and your passions. Don't let assumptions about salary cloud your choice. In some cases, specialists can earn more than managers. If you choose management, do it because you love to lead and want to make a difference at an organizational level.

Choose the right path and choose your happiness.

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