

How to Be a Good Manager

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Among the many interrelated problems that can occur in an economy are people having not enough work, not enough holidays, not enough benefits, and of course, not enough pay. As disruptive and problematic as these issues may become to people, hands down, the most severe problem is when there are no jobs available at all.

Companies and organizations are all out to survive, and the worst thing that can happen is a company or organization finding it can no longer survive. When a company can no longer survive, the jobs disappear with it, which is the absolute worst thing that can happen. I am sure we can all agree that having no job at all is far worse than having a job that is less than ideal.

For as long as I can remember, I have turned on the news and read the paper and seen one story or another about a strike for more benefits, higher wages, more paid holidays, shorter work hours, and so forth. I have heard about workers walking off the job so they can have more of this or that. It is going on across the country, every single day. There is probably not a decent-sized newspaper in the United States that does not contain at least one article per day (and there are usually more) mentioning how workers are upset about this or that, or they want more of this or that, or they are refusing to work because of this or that.

Many workers are, and always will be, angry that they do not receive enough of what they already have. They always want more. However, perhaps the worst possible thing that can happen is for the workers to suddenly lose everything that they do have.

This is more common than you might think.

Companies and organizations everywhere are struggling and in many cases are shutting down. This is what happens in areas of the United States and the world when workers and others demand too much from the companies. The companies simply close down a large percentage of the operation or they go away completely. Everything stops and suddenly those discontented people who formerly handled all of the jobs--are left with absolutely nothing to do.

I remember when I first moved to Bay City, Michigan, in the mid-1990s, to work for a federal judge there. Bay City at one time had employed countless people in the automobile industry, just like Detroit, and scores of other towns scattered around the Midwest. My girlfriend and I were looking for a house and we had a hard time deciding if we wanted to buy or rent, because houses were so cheap. Some houses in the city were so cheap that the owners, instead of hiring a real estate agent, had simply taken bars of soap and written the price of the house on the widows: "\$5,000!" said one house. "**FIRST \$10,000 TAKES IT**" said another house on its windows. Detroit and other areas of the country where people once received great benefits have now literally been driven to the ground by worker demands. Companies and jobs have gotten the hell out of these places because they are incredibly dangerous places for companies to operate.

The [job of a good manager](#) should be to keep a company in business and to keep creating jobs. Very few managers understand this, and this particular misunderstanding has probably killed more companies than anyone could ever count.

If you want to be a manager--and a *good manager*--you need to truly be on the side of the company. Workers and managers can generally be put into two categories: (1) those who are on the side of the company at all costs, and (2) those who are on the side of the worker at all costs. Which worker or manager do you think lasts longer in the job? Which worker or manager do you think is more likely to be let go?

Many people at some point in their careers are interested in going into management. In many respects, management is much easier than not being a manager; however, in other respects, being a manager is much more difficult. The reason being a manager is so difficult is that it requires a completely different orientation from the non-manager. Most people who are working inside of an organization are most concerned with what the organization can do for them. The manager needs to be more concerned with the organization's needs, not his or her own needs. The best managers always focus on the interests of the organization--not so much on the interests of its workers.

Most people out there do not truly understand this concept of management in my estimation, and so most of them fail when given the opportunity to manage. Moreover, the larger a company grows and the more bureaucratic and "professional" its management team becomes, the more likely the company is to fail. This assumes a management team that becomes more concerned with establishing perks and other incentives than the company's need to survive--a common occurrence. Once a company gets large enough, it attracts managers and others who believe that the gravy train will roll on forever. At some point, these same workers choose to overlook the fact that one can only milk a cow for so long--and usually, by the time the people realize this it is too late; they are either already on the chopping block or their company is no longer profitable, and ends up downsizing or shutting down completely.

The best managers are able to take into account and to balance the interests of both--the organization and the people working in them. One of the largest mistakes managers make is deciding that instead of being for the organization and its survival, they are just looking out for the people working inside of the organization, at all costs. More organizations fail due to this type of manager than for any other reason I am aware of. In fact, this sort of manager is among the worst sort of cancer any organization can have. I have seen managers like this ruin numerous organizations, and all around America, each day, organizations both large and small die off due to this style of management.

Several years ago, I was standing in the Camarillo Outlets on a Monday morning. New Year's Day had fallen on a Friday, and our company's [human resources manager](#) had told me that every single company and [law firm](#) he knew of had Monday as well as Friday off so they could have a four-day weekend. I found this hard to believe, so I asked him to research this and to be absolutely sure. Sure enough, he came back later in the day and informed me that yes, every organization out there had this Monday off.

As I stood there in the mall on that Monday, I was at a total loss for words. On almost every other day of the year, it would have been impossible to find any parking. Today, however, the entire mall was like one giant ghost town. There were hardly any people there at all--other than staff, of course. As I walked around the mall, I could not help but feel a bit angry. I realized that this was not a holiday anywhere else but our company. That day, over 150 employees were being paid for a day that was not really a holiday.

I am not saying that the employees were not hardworking and did not perhaps deserve a day off. Nevertheless, a business is a business and in order to run a business effectively, it needs to make effective use of its resources. People are a resource and spending tens of thousands of dollars one day to give people a day off when it was not even a holiday, did not make sense.

"Where did you hear yesterday was a holiday?" I demanded to know from the HR manager when he came in on Tuesday morning. He proceeded to tell me that everyone had the day off and it was a "common holiday." I had my assistant do some research and we were unable to find any good-sized companies that had indeed given that Monday off. I was starting to become extremely displeased. I looked at numerous other things that this same employee had done and became quite concerned when I realized the number and extent of benefits and other perks that the [HR manager](#) had created. These perks had become so extreme that they literally put the survival of the company at risk. Moreover, any attempt I made to curtail or cut back on anything was met with so much hostility, I could hardly believe it. I realized right then and there that this person was completely out for his own self interest, and working *against the company*. A company that keeps people like this around cannot survive.

The difference between a good manager and a poor manager can make or break an entire company. Many people go into management and immediately take pride in having an orientation toward helping the people they are supervising. Helping your subordinates is often a good thing; however, it is not good when it ends up destroying the capacity of a company to create and foster long-term jobs for its staff. When there are no jobs, there is only misery, and the misery that is left behind when there are no jobs is extreme.

Drive through places like Detroit that have powerful unions and see what is left behind. There are no jobs and the economy is in shambles. The few workers who remain, however, have tons of rights. A man who works on an assembly line may be prohibited under union rules from picking up a piece of trash. If something needs to be cleaned up, he needs to call a person in another part of the factory to come clean it up. For many managers, an organization is something to be bled dry, just a giant money-making machine. For many managers, the greatest skill they have is how to get money, more perks, benefits, and other things out of the organization for themselves and the people they supervise. Their skill is not in *creating value* for their company. Instead, most managers are skilled in *taking* from the organization.

What these managers do not understand is that you cannot take more than what comes in, and the more you take, the greater the possibility that there will soon be nothing left to take. Eventually, these sorts of managers and this management culture ends up choking the organization completely and it either closes down, or packs up and goes somewhere else to do the work. Managers concerned with taking from the organization typically have no care in the world what happens to the organization, and such managers move from job to job throughout their careers, generally leaving companies worse off than when they joined.

A great deal of our social policy in the world is based on taking. Politicians come into office and believe that companies exist to feed tax dollars into the system. They tax the companies as much as they can and give the workers more and more rights. Pretty soon the companies are gone and the money slows down too. Individual states across the U.S. do the same thing. They tax their most successful companies, and eventually the companies leave and take with them the jobs. Or the companies end up closing.

The greatest distinction between companies that run and continue going forward and those that go out of business is *good managers that care about what happens to the organization*. When a company has good managers who care about what happens to the organization, it is likely to survive. Decisions needed to keep the company going forward are made, despite the fact that they are difficult to make and may be unpopular with the rest of the staff. Any company that is able to make unpopular decisions is more likely to survive than one that is afraid or unable to.

To be a manager, it is extremely important that you be seen as someone who is on the side of the company and out to make the company profitable and do well. The more you are seen and perceived as someone on the side of the company, the more you are likely to grow as well.

If you are a force that is against the company, who is more interested in increasing the expenses of the company--this will be interpreted by the company as something that is counter to its survival. A company needs to survive and companies keep around people whose objective is to help them survive.

Managers who are agitators, protesters for workers' rights, and so forth, often care more for the workers than for the company, and therefore ultimately end up killing the workers' jobs in the process. Managers like this create unemployment, bad economic conditions, and incredible problems in their wake. A prevalence of managers like this in a country or state can actually lead an entire economy toward a serious depression. The health of any company requires that good managers see both sides of the equation and do everything within their power to keep the company healthy and moving forward. A well-run company keeps its eyes open and will steer clear of managers who care more for the worker than the organization.

There are managers and people out there who simply have a strong dislike of organizations in general. You will see them being careless with the company's money, time, and property. They make a major effort to get more of this or that for the people they are working with. These people ultimately end up "doing in" the organizations and people they are working with.

The best managers have a real concern with how much money is spent, how the work is completed, and if workers are being efficient with their time. These managers are concerned about ensuring the organization by continually making progress in everything it does. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are managers interested in selling assets, borrowing money, and refusing to do what is necessary to [increase business](#) in order to make more money for the company. These are the sorts of managers companies should not keep around.

Once you understand these fundamental principles, you can master the art--*and the business*--of being a great manager.

THE LESSON

When a company can no longer survive, all of its jobs disappear; a good manager's job, then, is to ensure the company's survival. As a good manager, you need to truly be on the side of the company and dedicated to its continuance; the more the

company succeeds, the more you will grow along with it. Good managers care about what happens to their organization, but the best managers focus continually on the organization's progress and best interests.

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