

SUPERVISING FORMER PEERS

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“The most important single ingredient of success is knowing how to get along with people.”

- Theodore Roosevelt



A good relationship with your boss and co-workers can make for a healthy career. But this is not always easy.



“One of the toughest issues
for new managers is
supervising former peers.”

-- Erin White

“Workplace friendship is said to reduce workplace stress, increase communication, help employees and managers accomplish their tasks, and assist in the process of accepting organizational change.”

- Berman, West & Richter



“Supervising former peers can be a difficult task. As you struggle with your new role as the boss, your former co-workers must adjust also.”

- Joan Lloyd

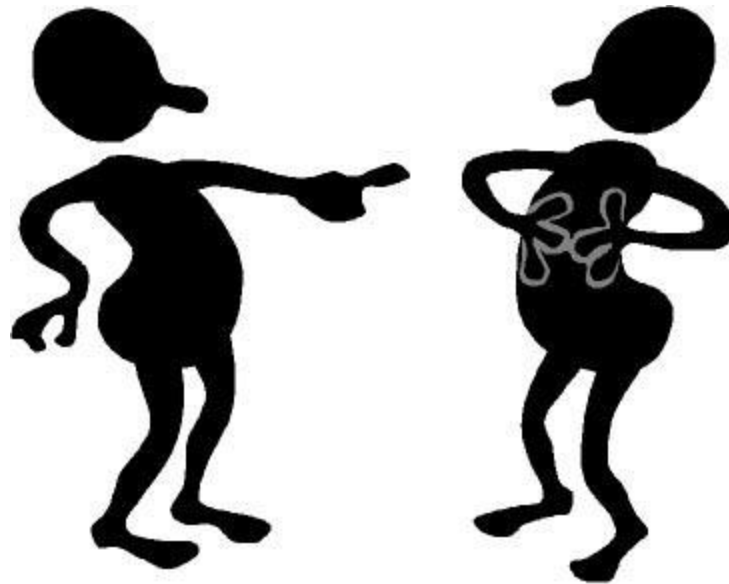


“The old adage that it gets lonelier at the top is true.”

“To maintain your authority and manage effectively, you must pull away.”



“You’re going to be one
of **them** now.”



○

“You’re going
over to the
OTHER SIDE.”



“The Crawdad/Crab Syndrome”



If a crawdad/crab is about to get out of the bucket, the others try to pull it back in.





mistake

Boss's First Steps

Common mistakes made by new managers:

- ✓ **Wanting to stay pals with your former peers and not establishing your credibility as a boss**
- ✓ **Asserting your new authority too harshly and coming down too hard on former peers**
- ✓ Not giving a problem employee honest feedback because you don't like conflict—then surprising him/her at a performance review.
- ✓ Wanting to keep doing the work yourself, rather than developing your employees' skills
- ✓ Assuming employees know exactly what you want them to do without giving the specific direction

Source: WSJ Research

Moving

from

Peer to Supervisor:

Tips for Managing the Transition

Sometimes when you get promoted, you might get more than you bargained for when you inherit some of your former peers and workplace friends as part of your team.

This is a challenge you must face.



By Frits Ahlefeldt

Get a Mentor.



“Having the benefit of the insights from someone who has been through a similar experience can be invaluable.”

Prepare Yourself.



- Seek assistance from your manager in making your transition successful. Ask for suggestions from others in the organization who also supervise former co-workers.
- Take advantage of supervisory training given in your organization. Enhance your leadership skills in every way possible.

Embrace Change.



“Once you gain the power to fire your friends, the dynamics of the relationship have changed forever. You can be friendly. You can be humane. You can be respectful. But in the end, you truly cannot be their best friend. And they don’t want you to be.”

Alliances & Friendships



- Don't treat them differently, but do. Tread lightly. You're being viewed under a magnifying glass now.
- Stay friendly but understand that your relationship has changed. You can't be a "buddy" and a supervisor at the same time. Your new responsibilities and authority do set you apart from the other employees. But you can still treat everyone with warmth and respect.

Socialize Equitably.



“Don’t stop having lunch with your friends, but don’t go out with them exclusively or it will be perceived as favoritism by the other employees.”

Equality for All



Don't abdicate your responsibilities and accountability as a supervisor in an effort to maintain your close friendships.

- You and your friends have to separate your personal relationships from your professional one.
- No favoritism and no cronyism among the old crew - no matter how tempting that might seem.
- Don't permit those who were your co-workers to intimidate and manipulate you now. If you play favorites, you will be in trouble.

Build Goodwill.



“Publicly acknowledge your friend’s recent accomplishment or give his/her a task that will allow him/her to shine.”

Build Your Team.



- Meet with the people on your team as soon as possible. You may need to meet with everyone as a group and then again as individuals. Be open and honest with everyone.
- Communication is your best ally.

Build a Foundation.



- Consider what you liked and didn't like about your previous supervisor. Do what you can to make everyone's job better than before you became supervisor. Use your experience to improve the workplace.
- Be consistent in giving everyone positive feedback and negative feedback when appropriate. Acknowledge their dependability and the contribution they are making.

Treat Your Friends Like Insiders.

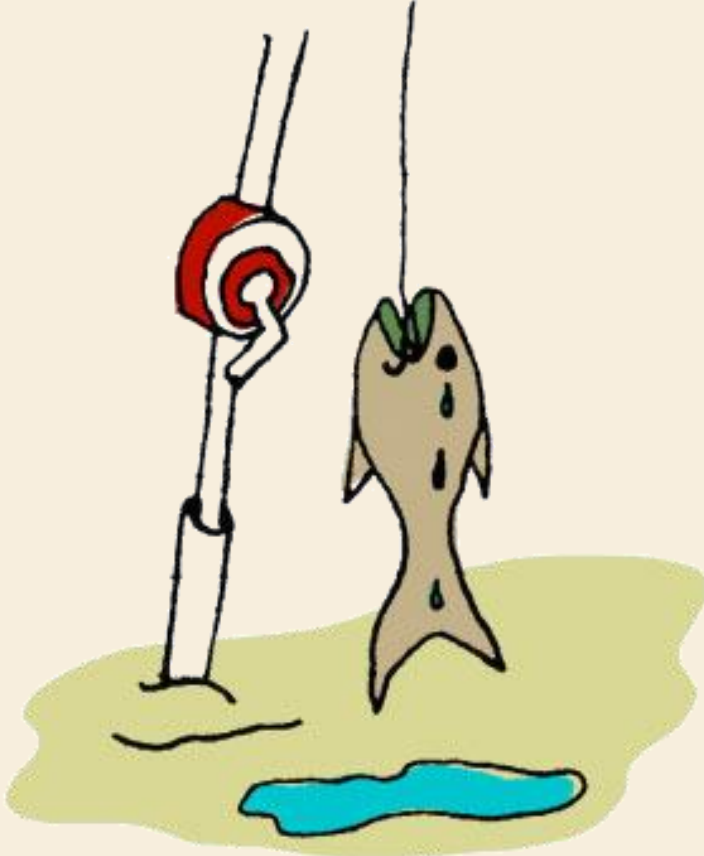


“Without breaking confidences, keep your friends informed about what’s going on in the organization.” BUT, no gossiping. That can come back to haunt you.

“This is just between us...”



How does a fish get caught?



It opens its mouth.

No gossiping or sharing information that you shouldn't be sharing. This is the point that causes the most grief among new managers.

It is now inappropriate for a new supervisor to talk “things through” with an old colleague. Resist the urge - nothing will kill your credibility as a manager quicker than breaches of confidentiality.

Loose lips sink ships...



Conversations you once had during breaks or at lunch need to change. Everyone likes to commiserate and occasionally complain about other people. But remember, the opinions you would express as a friend are now looked upon differently now that you are in a supervisory position.



Expect a Backlash---

but don't take it personally.



“If a friend badmouths you, tell him/her to talk to you directly if he/she has an issue in the future.”

Deal with it head-on



- Deal with any resentment from people who didn't get the job you are now in, don't try to bury it.
- In your 1-on-1 conversations with your old colleagues, you bring the subject up. Get to the kernel of their resentment and, where possible/appropriate, instigate action that can improve their chances of promotion the next time.
- Be interested, and seem to be interested, in their careers and you will bring all but the die-hards on your side.

Dealing with Resentment & Hurt Feelings



- One thing you will have to give up is being liked by everyone, however with luck in time this will be replaced by respect.
 - **Communicate with everyone honestly.**
 - **Be empathetic .**
 - **Don't take things personally.**

"The secret of managing is to keep the guys who hate you away from the guys who are undecided."

— Casey Stengel

Stay Humble.



“If former peers sense that you feel you’re better than they are, the relationships may be irreparably damaged. Come across as slightly self-deprecating to bridge the gap in your status.”

Don't Go Changing...



Don't be driven by fear, envy or just serious self-doubt, because these insecurities can manifest and affect your performance.

- **Micromanaging:** Being a perfectionist, terrified of making a mistake, or not being liked can clog up work flow and make your work colleagues angry.
- **Indecisiveness:** Don't shy away from making the tough decisions. That can drag down an otherwise strong team and garners you a reputation for being ineffective.
- **Hide and seek:** You must be able to give your team a sense of purpose, be very visible with employees or students/colleagues. Don't hunker down in your office.
- **Inability to give direction:** You do what the guy once said he wanted, and now it turns out he wanted you to do something else. Worse, he wanted you to figure out that he wanted you to do something else and is angry that you haven't. Huh? Be clear and concise (put it in writing).
- **Overcompensating:** Insecurity can be disguised by bullying, arrogance or power-mongering, and/or going overboard to please those who mistreat you.

Acknowledge Strengths & Weaknesses.



“I should have admitted I didn’t know.”

Making Changes



As with any change, people will naturally require a period of leveling out, and that's usually accomplished by some obvious leadership and honesty from the front.

- Proceed cautiously.
 - If you take the wrong approach with an individual who has been doing the job for a long time, they may resent you and feel that you are saying they don't know how to do their job. Your friends may think the new role has "gone to your head," and that you are coming on too strong.
- Be open-minded and approachable.
- Explain to your friends that you are there to help. Explain that you want to work *with them to find solutions* to some of the more vexing problems you all face and to improve efficiency.
- Solicit their input on how to improve the situation. Maybe they have been looking for such an opportunity to do things differently, but your predecessor had been the one who didn't want to change.

Transitioning



- Recognize that you are the leader of the team. Don't hide from it.
- Meet with colleagues and explain that both of you have to adjust conduct to separate business and personal relationships.
- Once you gain comfort, offer an opportunity to involve your former peers.
- Let them vent to you. It's better that it's being done to you and not about you (and the office) outside the department.

Transitioning



- Explain that everyone has objectives to meet, on which each will be reviewed.
- Acknowledge that knowing the individual as you do, as a supervisor, you are there to support them in their career goals. If you all work together, it can be a smooth transition and a successful one.
- Feeling empathy for his/her situation and taking disciplinary action are not mutually exclusive. You can express empathy for his/her predicament, but your job, and his/hers, is to get the work done.”
- If you do not have the support of your supervisor, the transition will be much more difficult and almost impossible.

An “Action Plan” for Supervising Former Peers



1. Keep the higher echelon informed.
2. Be direct about the state of affairs.
3. Initiate a well-documented training or remedial training program.
4. Take time to review the department’s policies and procedures.
5. Develop a users’ manual if appropriate for your department.
6. Provide documented feedback (positive and negative).
7. Identify your capabilities and limitations.
8. Recognize that you also have room for growth and improvement.
9. Recognize that friendships change and are not always equal.
10. Recognize that it is more important for people to have respect for you than to like you.



As a newly promoted supervisor of your former peers and/or friends, you must walk a fine line.



Remember, if they really are your friends, they will not take advantage of you. In fact, they'll help you succeed. And if they didn't like you before, they're probably not going to like you now.



Questions & Comments



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