



# 50

**MANAGEMENT  
TIPS OF THE DAY**

***quick, practical, to-the-point***



**Harvard  
Business  
Review**

YOUR COMPLIMENTARY **THANK-YOU** GIFT

# 50

## MANAGEMENT TIPS OF THE DAY

***quick, practical, to-the-point***

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# 2 Critical Leadership Qualities for This Moment

Many important qualities good leaders possess become even more critical during tough times. Especially now, you must demonstrate personal integrity and maintain personal credibility. When faced with unpleasant tasks like downsizing, many leaders lose sight of these and give into the temptation to cut corners.

To combat this, you must tell the truth. Talk to customers, engage employees, find a firm picture of the reality, and then share it, even if it is difficult news. In this environment, your entire company could fail if you don't make hard decisions when they're needed.

And you must be authentic. Across an organization, all leaders must demonstrate rock-solid integrity, honesty, and the ability to confront reality. If you soft-pedal bad news, employees won't trust you, will miss the urgency of the situation, and won't follow you.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "How to Lead Now: An Interview With Ram Charan."



# 3 Questions to Help You Adapt to the New Economy

The new economy doesn't require you to just try harder, sell more, or work longer hours. It requires you to change the way you work. Ask yourself these three questions to assess the current situation and adapt your game to the changed conditions:

- 1. What's the situation?** Remember that in this new reality in which big businesses are failing, trust, reliability, and relationships are the new competitive advantages.
- 2. Who else is involved?** Consider your customers, prospects, and employees and what they want and need in this new economy.
- 3. How can you help?** Determine what you have to offer that is unique – it may be innovative products, a differentiated pricing structure, or a new way of relating to customers and employees.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Three Questions to Help You Adapt to This Economy" by Peter Bregman.



# 3 Tips for Giving Your Boss Feedback

Working closely with someone gives you valuable insight into that person's performance. This is especially true of your boss. But knowing whether — and how — to give your boss feedback is tough. Here are three tips to help you decide when to share your insights and when to keep quiet.

- 1. Wait or ask for permission.** Don't launch into a list of things your boss could do better. Given the nature of the relationship, it's better to wait to be asked for feedback or to inquire if your boss is open to feedback.
- 2. Focus on helping her.** Give input that will help her improve her performance. Avoid telling her what you would do if you were boss.
- 3. When in doubt, hold your tongue.** If you think your boss will not be receptive or if she has been known to lash out at constructive criticism, you're better off keeping your mouth shut. Find other, anonymous ways (e.g., 360-degree reviews) to give your feedback.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "How to Give Your Boss Feedback" by Amy Gallo.



# 3 Tips for Communicating the Numbers



Many financial communications are dry and boring at best, confusing and unreadable at worst. The best communicators (for example, Warren Buffet) are able to talk about the numbers in a way that is clear, engaging, and compelling. Here are three tips for more effective fiscal messages:

- 1. Don't overly focus on the numbers.** It's your job to explain the "so what." Numbers should be used only to support your main points.
- 2. Use metaphors and analogies.** You don't need to wax poetic, but using metaphors can help you avoid the jargon that often plagues financial messages.
- 3. Be honest and transparent.** Candidness instills confidence in your audience; they don't want to feel like you're hiding something or trying to gloss over the bad news.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Financial Communication, Warren Buffett Style" by Karen Berman and Joe Knight.



# 3 Classic Strategy Mistakes to Avoid



With the recovery under way, many companies are starting to feel less defensive and more strategic. As you gear up for what's next, be careful to avoid these common strategy mistakes that have hindered many a company in good times and bad:

- 1. Keeping underperforming businesses.** Most companies have businesses that they should not be in. Put these underperformers out of their misery so you can focus on more promising prospects.
- 2. Pushing growth.** More promising prospects, however, may not mean new businesses. Rather than focusing on expansion and growth, think about how you can shore up your existing business and strengthen your position.
- 3. Cutting back on cost-cutting.** When things improve, many companies start thinking less about the economy and some even raise prices. Don't stop being frugal just because it's no longer necessary to survive. Simplicity is an asset in any market.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Stand By for the Same Old Strategy Mistakes" by Walter Kiechel.





# 3 Ways to Externalize Your Organization's Focus

Organizations that are too inwardly focused often miss important happenings and opportunities in the market. Use these three ways to get your organization to look outward for customer insights, competitor moves, and market changes:

- 1. Listen to customer-facing employees.** Frontline employees are your ear to the pavement. Value them; ask them what they hear from customers; and, if necessary, train them to listen for the right information.
- 2. Get people out.** Send executives on sales calls. Ask directors to train as customer service reps. People calling the shots should meet customers face to face.
- 3. Share data, good and bad.** Some executives protect their employees from troublesome market or customer data. While well-intentioned, this hinders your organization's responsiveness. If there is bad news, deliver it with a well-articulated action plan.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Four Ways to Increase the Urgency Needed for Change" by John Kotter.



# 3 Ways to Win in the Global Talent Market


Smart companies win the right global talent by developing inclusion programs that make them attractive to the broad and diverse market. Here are three approaches that can help you tap into the global talent pool and win the right people:

- 1. Focus on women.** To leverage the full global talent pool, you need to attract and retain women. Develop programs that help women clearly see their career paths and better identify, request, and secure fulfilling work assignments.
- 2. Nurture global networks.** In global enterprises it can be difficult to make meaningful connections. Pair employees across geographies and functions so they can gain exposure to other diverse talent.
- 3. Offer flex.** More and more people are choosing employers based on their flex offerings. Offer flexible work arrangements to all employees as a core benefit.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “Three Ways to Fish in the Global Talent Pool” by Sylvia Ann Hewlett.





# 3 Ways to Spur Innovation to Meet Your Next Challenge

New challenges require new ways of doing things; this means not only a new approach, but a refusal to be bound by the rules that applied in the past. Here are three ways to spur innovation to face your next challenge:

- 1. Look outside.** When faced with the need to innovate, most companies turn to their inside talent. Instead, reach across corporate boundaries to your extended network.
- 2. Mobilize passionate individuals.** There are likely people out there who are passionate about your product, idea, or area of focus. Find those people and connect them so they can share ideas and mobilize one another to innovate.
- 3. Embrace new technology.** Look to younger generations of employees to see what technologies they are using. Support and embrace these technologies; they may be the source of your next innovation.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “Four Ways to Spur Innovation at Your Company” by John Hagel III, John Seely Brown, and Lang Davison.





# 3 Things to Do Before You Disagree With the Strategy

No strategy is flawless, and it's likely you'll disagree with some elements of your company's approach. But no one likes a strategy naysayer. Before you voice your disagreement, do these three things:

- 1. Understand the big picture.** An organization's strategy is often steeped in complex political issues. Don't assume you know how or why the strategy was developed. Use your network to find out more about the process and the assumptions and inputs used.
- 2. Contextualize your concerns.** Ask yourself why you object to the strategy. Are you resisting change? Do you feel you know better? Understand the true source of your concerns.
- 3. Ask others for input.** Look to your peers or other trusted advisers for guidance. Explain your concerns and ask them if they share them too. Hearing what others think can give you valuable perspective.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "When You Think the Strategy Is Wrong" by Amy Gallo.



# 3 Things to Assess Before You Back Down

Leaders who take on huge challenges and win are lauded. But recognizing when a challenge is too daunting or risky is equally heroic. Here are three ways to evaluate whether you should step up or back down:

- 1. Assess the odds.** You need to know what you are up against and be realistic about your chances of success. Weigh the costs against the benefits (recognizing that failure has benefits too). Don't undercount the costs.
- 2. Know your team.** Even the best people have limits to their capabilities. Ask yourself whether your team truly has the skills to overcome the challenge.
- 3. Know yourself.** This takes a huge dose of confidence. Be honest with yourself if you're facing something beyond your abilities.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Know When to Back Down From a Challenge" by John Baldoni.



# 3 Tips for Smarter Cost Cutting


Almost all companies have or will need to cut costs to survive in the current environment. Unfortunately, not all cost cutting is done smartly. Consider these three pieces of advice before making cuts:

- 1. Put strategy first.** Cuts across the board rarely, if ever, lead to effective results. Laying out strategy first helps you decide where to cut and also helps employees accept the cuts as a step toward a goal.
- 2. Focus on good customers.** Rather than cutting valued services to valuable customers, “fire” high-maintenance customers who cause you unnecessary complexity. Focus on serving your more cost-effective customers who are happy with your products and services as they are.
- 3. Keep your business simple.** In a healthy economy, it’s easy to overlook processes and activities that are redundant or overly involved. Simplifying them can save you money, with the added bonus of increasing both customer and employee satisfaction.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “A Better Way to Cut Costs” by Rita McGrath.





# 3 Ways to Keep Your Cool When You're Ready to Snap

Is the recession making you irritable and short-tempered? It makes sense: the economy is stressed and so are we. When things get tough, we tend to tap into our worst selves. Try these three ways to be your best self and keep your cool under the increasing pressure:

- 1. Stay alert.** Pay attention to what's going on around you and take action. But don't panic—panic only inhibits your ability to make good decisions.
- 2. Focus on must-do's.** It's easy to feel swamped with a to-do list a mile long. Decide what is absolutely necessary and focus on those items. Try not to let the fire drills creep onto your must-do list. Balance it with those things that will ensure your company's survival in the long term.
- 3. Ask people about what they're going through.** Demonstrate care and concern. It may not be in your power to fix others' problems, but you may hear a story that helps you feel less alone in your own thoughts.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Are You About to Snap? Snap Out of It!" by Annie McKee.



# 3 Ways to Get Through Your To-Do List Faster

Self-discipline is hard. Try these three things to make your work more efficient every day.

- 1. Get three things done before noon.** Statistics show that the team ahead at halftime is more likely to win the game. Try to enjoy your lunch knowing that you achieved at least three things in the morning.
- 2. Sequence for speed.** Break projects into parts. Take on longer pieces at the beginning and make sure each subsequent part is shorter. If you leave the longest parts for last, you are more likely to run out of steam before the end of the day.
- 3. Tackle similar tasks at the same time.** The mind thrives on repetition. You can build momentum by taking on similar projects at the same time.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "The Art of the Self-Imposed Deadline" by Steven DeMaio.





# Write a To-Do List That Works

If you're like most people, you've got some tasks on your to-do list that you just dread tackling. If tasks seem overwhelming, it's usually because you're looking at them as whole projects, rather than individual tasks. To create an approachable to-do list, break each project down into bite-size, easy-to-complete actions.

For example, planning a launch meeting consists of small tasks like emailing participants and reserving a meeting room. If you write all those small tasks on your to-do list rather than the daunting "plan the launch meeting," you'll find them much easier to take care of because each one won't require much thought or time. Complete enough of these small tasks and your big project will soon be done.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "How to Write To-Do Lists That Work" by Gina Trapani on [hbr.org](http://hbr.org)'s "Conversation Starter."



# 4 Things Your Employees Want From You



Figuring out what your people want can feel like an intricate puzzle, especially when different employees require different things. Here are four things most employees need to be successful:

- 1. Role clarity.** Tell your employees what their roles are, what you want them to achieve, and what the rules are for getting there.
- 2. Autonomy.** People want something interesting to work on and they want to be trusted to do it well.
- 3. Accountability.** Holding people accountable is not just about being fair. It also sends a message about what is and what isn't acceptable. This is critical for employees who are trying to figure out how to succeed.
- 4. Praise.** Everyone wants to be recognized when they've done something right. You can motivate employees by highlighting their strengths and not harping on their weaknesses.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Eight Things Your Employees Want From You" by Melissa Raffoni.



# 4 Ways to Improve Your Team's Performance

Managing your team's performance is a challenge no matter what the environment. Take the extra time and effort to help your team succeed in what will likely be a tough year for all.

- Give your team much-needed perspective. Relieve pressure by encouraging them to have fun, and remind them work is not the only thing in their lives.
- Spend time with all your team members, not just the stars. It's easy to focus on A+ performers, but success relies on everyone doing his or her job well.
- When something doesn't go as planned, acknowledge the setback and move on.
- Focus on team success. Celebrate what you have accomplished together, rather than individual achievements.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Four Ways to Improve Your Team's Performance," posted by Daisy Wademan Dowling on [hbr.org](http://hbr.org).



# 4 Tips for Writing Better Email

Given the number of emails you send every day, you should be an email-writing expert, right? If not, here are a few tips for effective messaging:

- 1. Ask for something.** All business writing includes a call to action. Before you write your email, know what you're asking of your audience.
- 2. Say it up front.** Don't bury the purpose of your email in the last paragraph. Include important information in the subject line and opening sentence.
- 3. Explain.** Don't assume your reader knows anything. Provide all pertinent background information and avoid elusive references.
- 4. Tell them what you think.** Don't use the dreaded "Your thoughts?" without explaining your own. Express your opinion before asking your reader to do the same.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "4 Tips for Writing Better Email" by David Silverman.



# 4 Steps to Loving Your Inbox Again

For many of us, the inbox is a source of embarrassment: it's large, disorganized, and full of unanswered email. Try these tips to stop the shame spiral and better manage your messages:

- 1. Save, but don't overfile.** Rely on your search function to find old email. The time you spend deciding where to put an email – and then later trying to remember what folder it's in – could be spent on replying to today's critical messages.
- 2. Keep only one email per topic.** There's no need to keep every email in a string if the last one has the chain of responses in it.
- 3. Do daily upkeep.** Spend a few moments each day getting rid of emails you don't need.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "How to Keep Your Email Inbox Under Control" by David Silverman.



# 4 Tips for Asking Better Questions

When presented with a problem, managers often propose a solution by themselves right away. By asking questions instead, you can help team members create their own solutions and build their confidence and skills. Try these tips for asking better questions:

- 1. Keep them open-ended.** Ask provocative questions that encourage team members to think for themselves. Start questions with “why” or “how.”
- 2. Don’t lead.** Avoid asking questions you already know the answer to.
- 3. Encourage solutions.** “What do you suggest we do to get the best results?” is a great question because it elicits ownership.
- 4. Create a question culture.** Ask team members to bring critical questions to meetings, and show that you value their queries.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “How to Ask Better Questions” by Judith Ross.



# 4 Ways to Exceed Client Expectations

Pleasing clients is a no-brainer in any economy. Exceeding client expectations in a bad economy can make the difference in whether or not you win the next job. Use these four tips to go above and beyond and win a client for life:

- 1. Beat the deadline.** Getting work done ahead of time gives the client flexibility and demonstrates you are efficient and customer-focused. When agreeing to a deadline, choose one you know you can beat.
- 2. Ask proactive questions.** Clients appreciate it when you act as a thought partner and demonstrate your concern for the process and its result.
- 3. Know when to defer.** Deference is important, but too much of it positions you as hired help. Inspire confidence by acting collegial and proving yourself to be a competent expert, not a lackey.
- 4. Give feedback.** Every process can be improved, and you are in a unique position to provide feedback. If the circumstances are right, tactfully give thoughtful and constructive criticism.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Four Ways to Exceed Clients' Expectations" by Steven DeMaio.



# 5 Traits of the New Creative Leader

Yesterday's leadership skills will not work in today's fast-moving and evolving world. Only creative leaders who are visionary and empathetic will succeed. Here are five things you can do to succeed as a creative leader:

1. Instead of commanding, coach your team and organization toward success.
2. Don't manage people, empower them. The know-how, experience, and solutions are often out there; it's a matter of helping people discover them.
3. Cultivate respect by giving it, instead of demanding it.
4. Know how to manage both success and failure.
5. Show graciousness in your management, rather than greediness. Be humble about your successes, and whenever possible, give someone else the opportunity to shine.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Why Are Creative Leaders So Rare?" by Navi Radjou.





# Make That IT Project Succeed

Most IT-enabled business initiatives fail to deliver as promised, with much of the blame falling on scarce support and cloudy objectives. No organization can afford this waste of time and money.

If you're managing an IT-enabled project, how can you beat the odds? Identify and fix risky behaviors that sink such projects. Take this test:

1. Is the project team setting deadlines without regard for what's required to make the initiative succeed?
2. Does the project sponsor lack bandwidth to back the effort?
3. Are powerful stakeholders skirting formal approval processes?
4. Are team members failing to report problems?
5. Do you have little say over team staffing?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, your project's in peril. Correct the problem through honest conversations with your sponsor and project team.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “The Right Way to Be an IT Change Agent” by Susan Cramm on hbr.org’s “Having IT Your Way.”



# Market Like a Rock Star

In today's post-label, post-studio world, musicians rely on the Web and other technologies to expand their fan bases and revenues. Here are a few things you can learn from their innovative marketing:

- 1. Let your customers drive.** Forget scheduling concerts and waiting for fans to come. Musicians can ask their fans online where they want them to play before setting their tours. How can you build support from the bottom up for new ventures before launching?
- 2. Get your fans involved.** Some musicians hold contests so fans can help them create music – play a solo, write lyrics, etc. Customers involved in the creative process are more likely to buy and promote products.
- 3. Let fans play with your b(r)and.** By loosening copyright protections, musicians let fans create adjacent products using their brands. These can help win over new customers and generate revenue. If you allowed customers to play with your brand, what new products might you discover?

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Customer Strategy Tips From an Indie Rocker" by Scott Kirsner.



# The Boss Who Loved Meetings

Your boss loves meetings. He's alone in his enthusiasm, however. The gatherings aren't productive and eat up time you and your colleagues need to spend on actual work. To get that work done, some of you have been coming in early, staying late, and working weekends. A few of your coworkers are even looking for new jobs.

Is there anything you can do? Yes, but tread carefully – some insecure managers use meetings to feel in control. Frame your feedback to your boss in positive terms. Tell him you see ways he can save time. Suggest that he give you his decks beforehand so you can brief colleagues and they can develop their thoughts before the meeting. When it takes place, ideas will flow and more will get done – saving your manager valuable time. If your suggestions make your boss feel you're looking out for him, he may ease up on the get-togethers and let everyone get back to work.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “The Case of Too Many Meetings” by John Baldoni on hbr.org’s “Make Your Case.”



# When Your Boss Goes Around You

Your boss did it again: asked one of your direct reports to do a write-up about last month's figures, instead of asking you. Does he think you're out of touch? Is he trying to undermine you?

Before saying anything, step back and look at the context:

- How often does he do something like this?
- With how many of your employees?
- How is your relationship with him? Do you communicate frequently? What's the mood when you talk?
- In general, does he tend to focus on tasks or on people?
- How do your employees see you – as “the boss” or as a member of the team?

Your answers can help you solve the problem – or even realize there's not a problem at all. For instance, in asking your employee to write short reports, he may just be trying to free you up for more important projects.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “The Boss Who Went Behind Your Back” by Gill Corkindale on hbr.org’s “Make Your Case.”



# Put Customers at the Top of Your Boss's List

Is your company missing out on critical customer insights?  
Are you having trouble getting your boss to pay attention to what customers care about?

Show your boss that his or her peers are making the effort and reaping the rewards. If your boss knows that Robert Dotson, the CEO of T-Mobile, took two weeks to train and work as a sales rep in a T-Mobile retail store, he or she may be inspired to make a similar investment. If that doesn't work, find ways to bring customers to your boss. For example, you might host an event that allows senior executives to interact directly with customers or invite a loyal customer to your headquarters to give executives frank feedback on your products or services.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Get Your Boss to Pay Attention to Customers" by Rita McGrath.



# How to Handle the Silent Treatment

We've all had emails or voicemails go unanswered. Whether it's a prospective client, a potential employer, or a colleague from another department, you're left with the same feeling: what did I do wrong? Here are three tips for handling the silence:

- 1. Don't take it personally.** Often there is a logical explanation for the silence. Perhaps the employer hasn't gotten funding for the position yet or the colleague has no new information to share. Don't assume you did something wrong, but understand that the person may have other priorities.
- 2. Don't pester.** In the hectic world of work, sometimes all people can do is respond to crises and top priorities. If you are neither, don't pester with repeated follow-up emails or calls.
- 3. Manage your emotions.** Once you've followed up, assume you won't hear back. If you do hear back, it will be a nice surprise. If you don't, you won't have wasted your energy stressing about it.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "When Your Voicemails and Emails Go Unanswered, What Should You Do?" by Peter Bregman.



# How to Fail Cheaply

Failures in the innovation process can be costly and time-consuming. So why not reduce your failure rate to as close to zero as possible? It's a lofty goal indeed, and one very few innovative companies have ever achieved. Plus, failure is important to innovation — how else do you learn? Rather than eliminating failure, focus on reducing the cost of failure by doing the following three things:

- 1. Make your experiments cheaper.** Experiments need not be expensive. You don't need to recreate a concept exactly to test it. Find low-cost ways to test assumptions.
- 2. Change the order of experiments.** Test strategic assumptions before logistical ones. Confirm the market need before perfecting a product.
- 3. Make decisions faster.** Larger organizations often let bad ideas linger. Accelerate decision-making when it comes to innovation, and get rid of flawed projects before they cost you time and money.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "3 Ways to Fail Cheap" by Scott Anthony.



# How to Hire Collaborative People

In today's densely interconnected workplaces, employees work in teams of all types — virtual, task force, and ad hoc combinations. And a company's success hinges on workers' ability to collaborate, share knowledge, and handle conflict productively within teams. As a manager, you need to help foster a culture where these things can blossom.

One way to do this is to hire for collaboration. Make sure candidates are interviewed by as many people as possible. (If all interviewers approve, a candidate is likely promising. And if hired, the newcomer will have an instant network for collaboration.) During interviews, present real-life work scenarios to candidates and ask how they'd respond. Their answers will provide invaluable insight into whether they prefer to work collaboratively or independently.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "How to Foster a Cooperative Culture" by Lynda Gratton for *Harvard Management Update*.





# How to Recover From Your Mistakes

Making mistakes is inevitable — what counts is how you handle them. Some very public mistakes (for example, Tom Daschle’s failure to pay taxes) have demonstrated the power of an apology to make amends and restore reputations. Here’s how to recover from a mistake, gracefully.

- **Own up.** Don’t use phrases that sound like doublespeak: “I apologize if I hurt anyone.” Be explicit and truthful about what you did wrong.
- **Make things right.** Find out what you can do to remedy the mistake, whether it’s repairing hurt feelings or working harder to undo the damage.
- **Don’t make a scene.** An apology is not an excuse for a stump speech. Make your apology and get out of the spotlight. Demonstrate that you are ready to move on.
- **Prevent mistakes in the first place.** Think about how your actions and decisions will be perceived. Forethought and caution can stop mistakes before they happen.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “What Michael Phelps & Tom Daschle Teach Us About Apologies” by John Baldoni.



# How to Manage Your Gen Ys

If you're like many managers, your employees are increasingly Gen Ys who bring valuable qualities to the workplace. They're willing to work long hours. And they relish working for organizations whose values matter to them.

To attract, retain, and get the most from Gen Ys, create the right kind of work environment. Start by emphasizing your company's values, reputation, and community involvement to Gen Y job candidates. They often prefer to work on their own schedules, so be flexible about asynchronous work. Where possible, performance management should focus on task completion, not time spent.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Guide to Managing Ys" by Tammy Erickson for *Harvard Management Update*.



# Managing Up as a Gen Xer

Managing up is a critical and difficult skill for any employee, but managing up and across a generation is even more challenging. If you're a Gen Xer managed by a boomer, try these three tips for bridging the generation gap and understanding what your boomer boss wants from you:

- 1. Communicate your preferences.** Often boomers assume that Gen Xers are younger versions of themselves. Don't presume your boss knows what you're thinking. Instead, articulate how you like to work and what your expectations are.
- 2. Take initiative.** Before you ask why someone isn't doing something, ask yourself whether it's something you can take on. Boomers admire initiative. Just don't fall short on your objectives because of a new assignment.
- 3. Earn your chips.** Getting what you want or need largely depends on your ability to be viewed as a valuable contributor. Working hard and gaining visible wins can give you chips to trade in later.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Gen-Xers and Their Careers" on the "Ask the Expert: Tammy Erickson" board of the HBR Answer Exchange.



# How to Inspire Your Team

As a manager, one of your key responsibilities is to inspire your team — to motivate them to give their best on the job, make difficult changes, and overcome major obstacles. Your communication skills can make or break your ability to provide inspiration.

To sharpen up, practice framing a call to action as a challenge; for example, “We can turn our struggling business unit around.” This approach lets your people know that if they want a new and better team, they’ll have to work for it. You’ll lead the charge, but you need their support. As you present the challenge, communicate a sense of hope. It will help your team push through the tough choices necessary to survive and succeed in the current climate.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “How to Communicate Like Barack Obama” by John Baldoni on hbr.org’s “Leadership at Work.”



# How to Manage Conflict in Your Team

Conflict is essential to a team's creative collaboration. Without differences of opinion, there's no synthesis of ideas or debate about important issues. But when conflict is mismanaged, it destroys creative collaboration.

Keep conflict productive by establishing ground rules in advance for working through disagreements. Give team members two options: confront the conflict and handle it – or let it go. Agree to put issues on the table as soon as they arise. When feedback raises tempers, don't rush to cool things down. Instead, arrange team members physically to keep things from getting personal: put issues and ideas on a whiteboard and seat people around it in a semicircle so they're allied against the conflict, not each other.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Tension in Teams" by Jim Kling for *Harvard Management Update*.



# Don't Get the Wrong First Impression

In the first week of leading a new team, you'll probably sort your new employees into two groups based on your perceptions of their intellect, cooperation, and initiative: those you'll rely on, and those you won't.

This sorting is necessary but risky. Labels stick. If you've erred in your sorting, mislabeled employees will find it difficult to change your perceptions. You'll manage them according to your beliefs (for example, micromanaging if you think they need it) and they'll disengage.

To avoid this, test your first impressions. Get to know your employees. Find out what they're good at and where they should develop. Your labels will be more accurate and your management approach more effective.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "New Leaders: Stop Downward Performance Spirals Before They Start" by Jean-Francois Manzoni and Jean-Louis Barsoux for *Harvard Management Update*.



# How to Score Early Wins in a New Leadership Role

If you're transitioning into a new leadership role, your actions in the first months can mean the difference between success and failure. Score early wins that produce tangible operational and financial improvements, using these steps:

1. Establish A-item priorities – major objectives you must accomplish in the first few years in this role.
2. Identify a “center of gravity” – a business area or process where early wins are probable and will support your A-item priorities.
3. Initiate pilot projects in the center of gravity to secure swift successes.

Achieve these early wins in a manner consistent with how you think your group should work. For example, if you want to see more collaboration, create cross-functional teams to lead the pilot projects you've designed.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “New Leader? Get Early Wins” by Michael Watkins for *Harvard Management Update*.



# How to Innovate With Less

Even large corporations need to innovate like start-ups when resources and time become scarce. Here are four tips for innovating in a tough economy:

- 1. Forget the big budget.** Innovation doesn't have to cost a lot. Rely on open-source software, online market research tools, and virtual prototypes to test ideas cheaply.
- 2. Test in the real market.** Don't waste time endlessly perfecting ideas before you launch. Get a "good enough" design out there, then test and refine in the market.
- 3. Skip the business plan.** Focus on making the idea happen, not planning every detail.
- 4. Make decisions and move on.** Tough times require quick decision-making. Don't be afraid to wind down ideas when they start to fail. You'll free up scarce resources for the next good idea.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Four Lessons from Y-Combinator's Fresh Approach to Innovation" by Scott Anthony.





# Don't Be Afraid to Put Constraints on Innovation

Google has long been the envy of blue-sky thinkers and innovators who admire its world-class and nonbureaucratic approach to innovation. But even Google needs limits.

The company recently announced it would begin using formal processes to be sure the right ideas receive resources and attention from senior leaders. Don't assume that processes and constraints will inhibit innovation – they often accelerate it by focusing creativity and ensuring that funding finds projects with the highest returns. Create a process to structure and guide innovation. Just be sure that the process doesn't become a burden and squash innovative ideas with unnecessary bureaucracy.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Google Grows Up" by Scott Anthony.



# Need to Be Better at Leading Change? Start Small

Change is a constant in today's organizations. Leaders need to be adaptive, flexible, and innovative.

However, trying to be “better at leading change” can be an overwhelming and vague challenge. Instead of taking on a leadership style full force, start with small experiments: try out a new way of delegating; test different approaches to communicating your vision and expectations; experiment with new ways of giving feedback. Reflect on what works and what doesn't. These small steps are manageable, and what you learn from these experiments will help you shape your leadership skills, while modeling how change happens.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “Become a More Creative Leader — Think Small” by Stew Friedman.



# Make the Most of a Bad Job Situation

In this economy, very few people contemplate quitting their jobs. Unfortunately, this means that many people are stuck in jobs they don't like or they even find dehumanizing. To make the most out of a bad work situation, try using these three tips:

- 1. Connect with people.** Relationships often make or break a work situation. Look outside your department and both above and below your level to find people to whom you can relate.
- 2. Use humor.** If you're not happy in your job, find ways to inject humor into your day. Humor passes the time and levity helps you keep perspective.
- 3. Don't be complacent.** Perhaps most important, when you have a free moment, keep working on your résumé, updating your LinkedIn profile, and checking job boards.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "How to Make the Best of the Worst Job" by Steven DeMaio.



# Bad News to Share? Tell It Like It Is

No one likes to be the bearer of bad news. However, with things going as they are, it's likely you'll have to deliver some tough messages. When you do, use these guidelines:

- Don't sugarcoat. Leaders often want to protect their team members or colleagues. Don't assume your team can't handle the news. Telling it like it is will keep you from delivering a second message later.
- Share your plan. When people hear bad news, they want to know how and when things will get better. Be clear and specific about necessary changes and your near-term expectations.
- Ask others to join in the solution. Explain what people can do to contribute. Your news can be the rallying point to bring the team together.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "How a Good Leader Delivers Bad News" by John Baldoni.



# Taking on a New Responsibility? Do It Smartly

Layoffs and cutbacks are forcing more people to take on new responsibilities. Whether you are excited about new challenges you face or feel you have no choice but to say “yes,” use these three tips when starting something new:

- 1. Don't simply do a “hand off.”** If you have access to the person who handled the job before you, interview her. Find out as much as you can about what's required of you.
- 2. Look for overlap.** Chances are you are already doing tasks similar to the new ones you've just taken on. Whenever possible, look for opportunities to kill two birds with one stone.
- 3. Delegate.** Take apart the new responsibility and figure out which components can be delegated to someone who will do them better. This isn't off-loading responsibility, it's good management.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “The Right Way to Take On a New Responsibility” by Steven DeMaio.



# Avoid Bad Decisions by Involving a Third Party

We make countless decisions every day: when to hold a meeting, whom to hire for a critical role, whether to greenlight a new project. For high-stakes decisions where a mistake might be fatal, involve an impartial party in your decision-making process.

Someone with a fresh perspective and without your emotional attachment to the situation can help identify where your decisions may be unduly influenced by past experiences. Ask a colleague from another department or an outside consultant to play this role. For crucial decisions, it will be well worth the time to seek that extra opinion.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “Why Good Leaders Make Bad Decisions” by Andrew Campbell, Jo Whitehead, and Sydney Finkelstein in *Harvard Business Review*.



# Convince Others to Change by Eliminating Choices

Change is more likely to stick when one has the opportunity to experience in advance what the change will be like. By eliminating the choice to do what is comfortable, you can force others (or yourself) to try something new.

For example, one manager who wanted his team members to look to each other for solutions rather than always turning to him took a much-needed three-week vacation. While he was out of the office and out of touch, his direct reports had no choice but to go to each other with critical questions.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “To Help People Choose, Sometimes You Have to Eliminate Choices” by Peter Bregman.



# Focus on Your Core Business

Success is often equated with size, but research shows that most sustained-growth companies actually boast one or two highly focused core businesses.

As an organization spreads itself out and loses focus on its cores, returns decline. Take onetime food conglomerate Pepsi, which trailed for years behind more focused competitor Coke, or Motorola and Ericsson trying to catch phone-focused Nokia in the cellular market. Keep this in mind if you're looking at strategic options for restructuring your business: the few companies that become smaller and still create value are those that restructure to focus on a strong core, often eventually to turbocharge their growth again.

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This Management Tip was adapted from *Profit from the Core: Growth Strategy in an Era of Turbulence*, by Chris Zook with James Allen.





# Measure Inputs, Not Just Results

**Financial metrics are useful and necessary, but they only tell part of a story.**

Number-crunching analysts love financial metrics because they measure results clearly, but as a manager, it's your job to influence the inputs that drive those results. Measure things that contribute to revenue, such as customer retention, product quality, and referral rates, to ensure you get the right financial results in the right way. Keep your people focused on the inputs with the highest correlation to your financial goals. If you keep tabs on these contributing factors, you'll know when something's gone wrong – before it shows up in your results.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "The Fallacy of Financial Metrics" by Anthony Tjan.



# Focus on What's Important, Not Urgent

Checking email every five minutes can make you feel busy, and perhaps even important, but it doesn't help you get through your critical to-do list. In a frenzy of constant urgency, it's possible to lose sight of the real work you need to get done.

Create a list of three things that are important to accomplish each day. Write them down and keep the list visible on your desk. Take the free moments in your day to check on your list, not check your inbox. Most “urgent” items can wait while you take the time you need to focus on these vital projects.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “How to Mitigate the Urgent to Focus on the Important” by Gina Trapani on [hbr.org](http://hbr.org)'s “Conversation Starter.”



# Build Your Resilience

Resilience, decisiveness, adaptability — in these trying and rapidly changing times, leaders need these skills more than ever. The good news is that if these skills are not already in your leadership toolbox, you can develop them by managing your thoughts, actions, and behaviors.

Here are a few simple things you can do right now:

- **Think positively.** Be hopeful and optimistic. Focus on what you want, not what you fear you will lose.
- **Let go.** Accept that change is going to happen with or without you. Know what is beyond your control.
- **Take decisive action.** Tackle problems; don't avoid them.
- **Take a long-term perspective.** Don't get hung up on a specific event or a day on the market.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Resilience: How to Build a Personal Strategy for Survival" by Gill Corkindale.



# Manage With a More Intense Focus

Every day you hear about downward projections and more layoffs. It's not uplifting, but keeping up with this news and tracking its effects is crucial. A cut today initiates cuts elsewhere, and you've got to know what's happening daily to adjust plans and processes accordingly.

This sharper and more frequent focus on execution, or “management intensity,” is a crucial response to the accelerating speed at which things are changing. Big-picture strategic thinking is important, but right now leaders need to be involved, visible, and communicating all the time.

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This Management Tip was adapted from “How to Lead Now: An Interview With Ram Charan.”



# It's Always Time to Learn

**Don't let your ego get in the way of your desire to learn.**

Successful leaders keep their minds open to new things because they know that no matter how high their level of mastery is, there is always more to discover. If you've become an expert in one field, seek out other fields where you can transfer and apply your expertise. When facing challenges, even ones you've faced many times before, adopt a learner's approach – ask questions or find new ways to solve the problem.

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This Management Tip was adapted from "Never Let Your Ego Stop You From Learning" by John Baldoni.



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