

# THE NEW MANAGER

HOW TO BECOME A LEADER IN  
**52 SIMPLE STEPS**

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PENGUIN BOOKS

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# FOREWORD

Steven has been a colleague and true friend of mine for over a decade. During coffee and lunch breaks we've debated a multitude of subjects, and right from the start it was clear that his overriding passion was to positively impact people. This book comes out of that vision and, because it is written from his heart, it is authentic and accessible.

Steven is the kind of friend, colleague and leader who will tell you what you need to know and not necessarily what you want to hear. His advice is always spot on. He has a real knack for quickly cutting through all the clutter to provide a clear explanation. Now he has put this clarity of thought into a truly relevant book. After you've absorbed what he has just said in his matter-of-fact way, it will seem so obvious that you'll probably want to shoot back, "I already knew that!" And yet ...

As I read through the manuscript, I was encouraged. I found myself reflecting on my own areas of development, and I couldn't avoid wondering, "What kind of leader am I now?" and "What kind of leader will I become?"

While *The New Manager* flows like a story, it remains a reference piece that you will return to time after time. It doesn't pretend to be an academic work; it is a book about people. Each chapter deals with real issues and, through the vehicle of story-telling, Steven delivers 52 life lessons about leadership. You won't find complex theories here, just solid advice for anybody who is the leader of a family, a leader of 10 or a leader of thousands.

Steven is well qualified to speak on the subject of the new leader. His experience at blue-chip companies (Standard Bank, ABSA, Nedbank and Standard Chartered Bank) has provided him with insight into workplace dynamics and the nuances of team leadership, whether it's in sales, strategy or corporate. There's a clear message: all leaders have a calling that transcends spreadsheets and monthly returns – we are there to uplift the people we lead.

These eloquently described leadership scenarios remind me that Steven, as a young man, posed something of a challenge to his own leaders. About 14 years ago the two of us were sitting in a packed auditorium listening to our leader explain the company's new strategic direction. As soon as the floor was opened for comment, Steven raised his hand and asked a question which, at first, seemed rather silly; it even elicited a few jeers. But after a minute or two, everyone realised that he had just blown the brand-new theory to pieces. That day, I learnt a most important leadership lesson as I watched our leader gracefully welcome the feedback: he at once announced that Steven was correct and their whole idea would require a rethink!

On another occasion, I learned that paintball was not the ideal sport for team building – especially when you have a competitive, strategically astute young leader like Steven. We were successfully outflanking the opposing team and crawling along the left flank when a few paint balls whizzed past my head. I immediately returned fire, just like the SWAT teams do in the movies, and Steven popped up behind the enemy's barrier to shoot the combatants at point-blank range. After the high-fives and manly shouts of victory, the dust settled and Steven and I realised that Combatant A and Combatant B were writhing on the floor in agony. My three short bursts had randomly found a forehead and left a very large bruise, while Steven's attack from the rear had caused equally large bruises (we believe) on their buttocks ... and both combatants just happened to be ladies. We quickly went from hero to zero!

I hope you enjoy this book as much as I have. It is well worth the read and it is the perfect gift for the aspiring leader.

GRANT LOTZ

HEAD: BUSINESS BANKING GAUTENG PROVINCE  
STANDARD BANK

# INTRODUCTION

How do you lead well? What principles must you apply? You need help and you need it fast!

Numerous books have been written to help leaders become better leaders, but they all ignore the rookie: the person who has just been appointed team leader in a call centre, the new supervisor in a workshop, or the new leader of a small group. To fill this gap on the leadership bookshelf and to guide you through the pitfalls of leading a team, I have shared my 20 years of leadership experience in a simple handbook with real-life challenges and solutions to provide you, as a first-time leader, with practical insights and tools for your new role.

Books on advanced leadership can leave you confused on the “what next”. This simple book will help you to lead your team and, more importantly, equip you to get the best out of your staff.

Usually, the person appointed as a new leader has been second in command for a short period, and/or they are the best in their team. After discussions with your leader, the natural career route is to be made team leader as and when the position becomes available. Now the big day has arrived: you know the job, you know what has to be done, and you want to make a good impression. It’s a step into the unknown, but *The New Manager* will be your mentor 24/7.

I realise you won’t necessarily have the time to read through hundreds of pages all at once. This handbook allows you to find the solution to

## INTRODUCTION

typical challenges by using practical examples of what other leaders have faced in similar situations. As you work through daily issues with this book, you will build your leadership skills in a concrete and lasting way. At the end of each chapter there are reflection questions to help identify your current leadership approach – you can also use the questions in your team meetings to get your team members' input.

May your journey as a new leader be an exciting one and may you prosper in every challenge!

# PART 1

## **HOW TO GAIN CREDIBILITY**





# 1

## FIRST THREE MONTHS AS A LEADER OF TENS

I remember the first time I was chosen as team leader, for a group of 10 call agents. All my hard labour had finally paid off – I was so excited!

But it hadn't been an easy path. As the head boy of my school, I took it for granted that I'd immediately assume a leadership role in business, and yet it took eight years before I was given the thumbs up. During the first six years of my working life, I often questioned my ability. What was I doing wrong? My breakthrough came when I realised that **a leader leads even when he or she isn't in a formal leadership role**. From then on, I studied product manuals during my lunch break and assisted colleagues wherever I could. When the position of team leader became available, I was a natural choice, because I was *already* displaying leadership behaviour.

I was bursting with energy: I was going to change the world – or so I thought. And then something totally unexpected happened. Even now I can remember the incident as if it was happening right now. There I was, being congratulated by my colleagues left, right and centre. When one of my new team members walked up to me, I naively presumed that she had come to congratulate me just like the others had. She moved slowly forward until she was almost too close for comfort and, by the time she stopped, she was literally in my face. We were like two boxers facing off in the ring, and I felt incredibly uncomfortable.

“Steven,” she said in a stern voice, “I want you to know that I don’t like you.” It was a massive blow to my ego and an instantaneous reality check. How was I supposed to respond? Surely I was the great guy whom everyone loved! I couldn’t understand why she would say that. Seething with anger, I just wanted to put her in her place.

In moments like these, it is strange how many plans (and how many possible outcomes of those plans) race through your head. *What if she isn’t the only one who feels this way? What if there are others? If I treat her badly, how will it affect the rest of the team? And if I discipline her, on what grounds do I do so?* I thought of all the leaders I’d had. I didn’t like some of them, yet I had never been brave enough to tell them so (I still believe it is a bad idea to do so!). I could see I would have to take it on the chin and accept that it was something I had done.

To bring the stand-off to an end, I needed to focus on common ground, and so, doing my best to show empathy, I said: “I am sorry that you feel that way; it’s okay that you don’t like me. You don’t *need* to like me, but going forward I would like your commitment that you will deliver on your business objectives. I commit to this, too.” The team member seemed taken aback. I am sure she was expecting a fight! When she did not get one, she slowly made her way back to her desk to continue her work.

This was a very difficult experience for me, but it was one of the biggest lessons I learnt about taking up a new position. **Not everyone will be happy that you got the job, and not everyone will like you.** In the first few months it is essential to learn everything you can about your new team members. What motivates them? What discourages them? What do they enjoy? What don’t they enjoy? Where do they live? (This is important, as some may travel two hours to get to work while others live 10 minutes away.) Are they married? Do they have children? Is anyone a single parent? It’s essential to know these variables when assuming leadership of a new team, as your awareness of their personal challenges can save you a lot of pain.

For example, you insist that a staff member stays for an after-hours meeting. You had been getting on quite well with this person, but after

the meeting she seems unfriendly and, shortly afterwards, she resigns. It seems puzzling. What you don't know is that this staff member is a single parent and staying on for the meeting meant that her children were stranded at school until 7 p.m.

The new leader also needs to understand what each team member does. Don't presume that you know just because you did the same job before you became the leader. Each person applies different nuances to their work: they may do steps 3, 6 and 5 first, whereas you did steps 1, 2 and 7.

**In these first three months, do your best to observe, ask a lot of questions and listen as much as possible.** Treat the role as if you were a consultant trying to get a very detailed picture of what the "as is" looks like. I would strongly recommend that you do not make too many changes – and that you definitely do not make any drastic ones. The team has to get to know you and your leadership style, as they, too, are going through a journey. They will be wondering: "Can my new leader develop me? Will my new leader be able to do the job? Does my new leader care about me? Will my new leader be a slave driver? Will my new leader be lenient?"

There are many questions, but the BIG question that every leader needs to answer in the early months is: "Why am I here?" If your answer is anything else but "I am here to develop individuals and the team as a whole", then you will not be as effective as you might have been. Leadership is about leading others, whether from the front or from the back. It is about getting the best out of the individual, as well as the team as a whole. Wherever you find a great leader, you will always find a team of individuals who are growing and performing at a higher level than they thought possible. My personal measure of success (even as a leader of tens) is to discover how many of my former team members have been promoted to more senior or to higher-paying positions. This is a maxim I live by.

You may be wondering what happened to that team member who confronted me. I am pleased to say that almost six months later she came up to me (and this time not as a boxer) to apologise for what she had said. It meant the world to me, and it has been one of the greatest achievements of my entire leadership journey.

My challenge to you, in your first three months as a leader, is to be very sensitive to your new team. Learn as much as possible about them, as well as the environment in which you work. Above all, **commit to being a leader who helps each team member to reach their highest potential.**

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Why were you appointed as the leader?
- How well do you know your new team?
- What are each individual's strengths and challenges?
- What is each individual's background?
- Do you have a team member who doesn't like you?
- How will you treat that person?
- Will you give yourself permission to take three months to get to know the team better before making any drastic changes?
- Will you commit to being a leader who develops the individual, as well as the team as a whole?

## 2

# BE YOURSELF

Is this the same guy? What has happened to my star performer who was always energetic, on time and promptly delivered on every request? Surely he has not decided to sit back and relax now that he has been given a full-time leadership position? Did he think that he was appointed as a reward for his diligence and now nothing more is expected?

I was totally confused when my star performer turned out to be a disaster. Had I made a mistake? Why did he change? It only took a couple of weeks of one-on-one coaching to get him back to his old, efficient self. His issue had not been his ability to deliver, but rather his flawed idea of what constituted a full-time leader. I've seen it happen many times in my career, both personally and with those I have led – we fall into the trap of becoming something we are not when we try to live up to an incorrect image of the leadership role.

**We just have to be ourselves.**

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment as a leader. I can assure you that many candidates applied for the position you now hold and, out of all of them, you were chosen. Your leaders based their choice on behaviour, performance, people skills and leadership ability, and clearly you have all of these qualities.

If this is the first time you have been placed in a leadership role, it is absolutely normal to feel excited, nervous and apprehensive all at once. This happens to every leader and is part of the growing process. It is

critically important to experience these perfectly normal feelings – but do not allow them to detract from who you are. I have seen too many leaders process their feelings with a negative energy that results in a desire to change something about themselves. This can be quite dangerous.

A seed needs to grow from something small into something big, and there is a process that it has to go through to get there. The seed will need to grow roots; these roots slowly work their way into the soil and around some obstacles and, as they do so, they grow stronger and stronger until, eventually, they crush obstacles in their path. The roots are the most critical part of the plant's growth, and even though they can't be seen by the naked eye, it does not mean they are not there. In the same way, the stuff that is happening inside of you will determine how strong a leader you will become. You cannot bypass the learning process; it is critical to your individual development as a leader.

In every leadership role, expectations are placed on you from many sources: the colleagues you are leading, your peers and your own leaders. This normally leads to a lot of pressure, and even though you may have been told otherwise, the pressure can cause you to mimic someone you believe is a great leader and, as a result, stop being yourself. Trying to change who you are will only make you feel uncomfortable, and besides, the new role has so many challenges already – why do you want to add to them?

It is imperative that you remind yourself that the so-called “old you” was chosen for the position, not the “new you”. The leader(s) who chose you, chose *you*, so don't fall into the trap of wanting to change into someone you are not!

Here are a few behavioural changes to look out for:

- **Pride:** The new leader is puffed up and walks around as if he/she owns the world and everyone in it. They talk down to people.
- **Arrogance:** Some develop a superior attitude and rule their team like a dictator who has slaves.
- **Control freak:** Being overwhelmed by the challenge of a new leadership position can cause some people to develop a responsibility complex. They micromanage staff and double- and triple-check everything, as

they're convinced something will go wrong unless they do it themselves.

- Popularity complex: Some leaders develop an overly friendly attitude. Suddenly it is as if they are campaigning for parliament, smiling at everyone and being unnaturally cheerful.
- Isolation: Still others develop a "loner attitude". They are unable to ask for help for fear that their manager will doubt their competence, or that their team will look down on them.

The importance of not falling into the above traps cannot be overstated. The good news is that the leaders who hired you did so as a result of the way you conducted yourself and the potential they saw in you. They want you to succeed. Over the first few months they will watch you closely in order to gauge your leadership skills. However, if you suddenly begin to behave strangely and stop being the person you really are, they may come to the conclusion that you were not ready for promotion. No one becomes a great leader overnight. Allow yourself time to grow into your new role; realise that your skills are constantly developing. If you have a great boss, he or she will gladly point out where you need to improve. However, if you believe your new boss has no intention of helping you (this seldom happens), rather approach someone else to be your mentor.

It is wise to take your new leadership journey one step at a time. The first step is to be yourself. Accept who you are and accept that your own leaders have confidence in your abilities. Stop interrogating yourself and start believing that you can do it. There will be many opportunities on the path ahead to grow and change. Instead of trying to take overambitious steps, give yourself the grace to travel this journey one step at a time. If you do so, your internal roots will strengthen to the point that they can withstand any external challenge.

May the journey ahead bring you much success!



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How much pressure are you feeling right now?
- What practical steps are you taking to address it?
- Are you being yourself?
- Do you have a mentor/leader who will help you hone your leadership skills?
- Have you asked for help?
- Does your team believe that you are being yourself, or are they confused with who you really are?
- Do you trust that the leaders made the right choice when they chose you? If yes, then do you trust yourself enough to give yourself space to grow?
- Do you have the patience to take this journey one step at a time?