

The Down & Dirty Guide
to Management

DON'T BE A
DICK
MANAGER



James Monroe

Don't Be a Dick Manager

The Down & Dirty Guide to Management

By James Monroe

© Copyright 2020 James Monroe
All rights reserved

Copyright © 2020 by James Monroe. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission from the author, except in the case of brief excerpts used in critical articles and reviews.

ISBN 9798630034861

First paperback edition published 2020.

This book is dedicated to everyone who ever worked for me. I have no doubt they're wondering why the hell it took me so long to figure all this out. Thanks for your patience.

Foreword

When Gallup asked US managers what qualified them for their first management jobs, the top two responses were:

“I was successful in a previous, non-managerial role.”

“I have a lot of experience and tenure in my company or field.”

“I have management skills,” isn’t on this list.

According to the Gallup study, 82% of managers are not suited for their roles, and bad managers cost the US economy between \$320 billion and \$400 billion annually.

Miscast managers get frustrated. They become insecure and defensive. They lose focus on the business and they fail to take care of their teams. That’s why so many managers—maybe even the majority—are dicks.

Being a dick manager means letting your insecurities take over and allowing your ego to guide your decisions and behavior. It means putting yourself and your ambitions ahead of your responsibility to your company.

Dick managers are weak and ineffective, and they are doomed to a career of anxiety, unhappiness and ultimately failure. But they’re everywhere.

As a manager, you need to understand how to motivate your team and earn their respect and trust. You need to pay attention to each team member, provide support and have difficult conversations.

You can’t do any of that if you’re a dick.

I’ve managed people for more than 20 years. I’ve worked in giant corporations and tiny startups. I’ve managed teams made up of creative people, technical people, and salespeople, from Millennials to Boomers. I’ve had some amazing victories, been dealt some tough blows and made just about every mistake a manager can make.

And I learned. I learned by being a manager, by watching other managers and by being managed myself.

I’ve seen good managers stabilize teams and turn around companies. And I’ve seen dick managers destroy morale and drive businesses into the ground.

Much of what I learned was counterintuitive, and all of it made me better.

But what a shame that there was no guide to help me get better faster.

That's what this book is about. It's more than two decades of on-the-job management training concentrated into a simple, straightforward, practical guide.

This book deals with basic, human concepts that are common to all teams. Its fundamental nature makes it useful to managers regardless of the ages of their employees or the cultural and economic makeup of their teams. It will help software managers, finance directors, and crew chiefs.

This isn't about setting the vision for a huge corporation, managing change or workplace psychology. It's not based on academic studies or one person's rare, exceptional workplace experience.

It's about how to excel in the trenches.

Introduction

Are You a Dick Manager?

If you manage people in a US company, the answer is very likely to be, “Yes.”

No matter how experienced you are, how much money you make or the title on your business card, it’s likely that you have reported to dick managers and have learned how to manage from dick managers. And now, whether you know it or not, there’s a very good chance that you—regardless of your age or gender—have become a dick manager.

So, this book is for you. Particularly if you are early in your career, this book will help you avoid the mistakes that I and millions of managers like me have made.

This book is also for people who have dick managers. If that’s you, reading this will help you figure out what you’re dealing with and understand that you are not the problem.

It should also be helpful to Human Resources folks as they think about their corporate culture and manager training materials.

But I’ve Taken Management Training

The biggest problem with management training is that in most cases there isn’t any. There’s plenty of training on topics like employment law, discrimination and insider trading, but rarely - if ever - do companies provide training on how to inspire and reward a team, communicate well, or manage a boss.

There’s plenty of training for managers, but there’s precious little training in management.

Most company-administered management training focuses on company policy and employment law because most training is designed to reduce the company’s risk of lawsuits. That’s incredibly important and that kind of training will help keep you and your company out of legal trouble.

But it’s not illegal to be a bad manager. You can follow every company policy and every employment law and still be a terrible manager.

You should absolutely embrace company training programs. These programs are usually very well done and can help you understand the letter and the spirit of employment laws and company policies. You won't find any of that in this book. This book is designed to make you a better manager so you get the most out of your team and grow your career.

Turn to other resources for legal and policy advice that is specific to your company, city, and state. You should have no problem finding them.

For Young Managers

You may think you have a pretty good idea of what it means to be a manager, but you're probably wrong.

Sure, you've had managers before and you've watched as they managed their teams and seen how they motivate employees. You've also seen the perks they enjoy and the magic of an expense account. But unless you've been very lucky, you've probably never been exposed to real management talent.

If you've had a great manager who took the time to mentor you, was open and trustworthy, who led by example and demonstrated excellent people skills (and if you were paying close attention) then you might be OK. But most managers, probably including most of the managers you've had, aren't very good at managing. And many are truly terrible.

Bad managers let their egos get in the way, they focus on the wrong things, they don't respect their teams, they attempt to motivate using fear and intimidation, they're insecure. If any of this sounds familiar, you've had bad managers and you've probably picked up a few bad habits.

But you're reading this, so you realize there's more to learn. You're already showing promise.

This book is the result of years of learning on the job, making lots of mistakes, being managed badly and being managed well, seeing how others manage and experiencing moments of real joy as a manager. It is intended to help you start your management career with the greatest possible chance of success—to evaluate jobs, companies, teams, and bosses, make good career choices, and thrive in your management career.

For Experienced Managers

As I've talked to other managers while writing this book, a consistent complaint has emerged: nobody ever taught any of us how to manage.

There are a few exceptions—usually people who have been informally mentored by exceptional managers—but those are very, very rare.

Experienced managers may see themselves in this book. Maybe not in a flattering way, but that's OK. Reading this book will be the first step to becoming a better manager.

Be warned—it won't be easy. You will need to check your ego and strengthen your convictions. You will need to unlearn much of what you know, and you'll have to be willing to try new things that may be uncomfortable at first. But once you see how your team reacts, you'll discover how rewarding it can be to manage well.

Those rare managers who see their beliefs and behavior reflected here will realize they're not alone in the way they think about management. They may see opportunities to polish their skills, but mostly they may decide to mentor and inspire other managers, which is desperately needed.

For Managers Who Don't Like Managing

If you don't like managing people, it may be because you're doing it wrong. And honestly, that may not be your fault. Most managers are thrown into their roles with no help at all.

If management seems mysterious, your people seem difficult, and you just don't feel comfortable or successful as a manager, this book should help.

In fact, it may completely change the way you feel about your job. It may make you feel successful.

It's also possible you simply aren't cut out to manage people, and this book should help you figure that out too. There's no shame in deciding that management isn't for you, and it's better for everyone—particularly you—if you do.

For Anyone with a Bad Manager

If you work for a bad manager, this book will help you understand what's wrong and give you the language you need to address your manager's shortcomings. Depending on your manager, there may be a way to raise problems and suggest things they can do to improve.

Or you might just want to give your manager a copy of this book. Anonymously, of course.

You may also discover that it's best for you to find a new job. There are some situations that can be neither fixed nor tolerated, so this book may help you decide if you're trapped in one of those.

At the least, this book will help you realize that you are not responsible for your bad boss. Very often there's nothing wrong with you, but like a battered child, you keep trying to improve only to discover that nothing changes. Realizing that it's your boss, not you, is pretty powerful and may make it easier for you to step away.

Part One: The Essentials

This section is about you, and the essential qualities you need to have in order to be a great manager.

To successfully manage others, you first need to be able to manage your own character and ego. This will require you to take a good look at yourself and think as objectively as possible about how others see you.

For some people this won't be easy. For many, it won't be possible. But if you can do it, you will be on your way to becoming a very successful manager.

Here are the essential things you need to do in order to be a good manager:

- Keep your ego in check
- Keep your focus on the business
- Communicate constantly and honestly
- Promote your team
- Admit your mistakes
- Don't be afraid to make hard decisions

These first few chapters will help you accomplish all of this.

Chapter 1: The Laws of Management

Let's start with a few concepts that you'll find to be true over and over. I call them The Laws of Management. These are a lot like laws of nature: they exist and there's nothing you can do about them. They will have a tremendous influence over your job and your career, so don't fight them. Understand them and put them to work for you.

The Laws of Management

1. Respect is earned, not granted
2. People are generally good
3. Everybody knows everything
4. You are not a genius
5. The person with the smallest ego wins

Let's take these one by one:

1. Respect is earned, not granted

You don't get to decide whether your people respect you. Your people will decide whether they respect you. It's not in your control.

Regardless of your title, your alma mater or the cost of your suit, you will get no respect until you earn it. A fancy title or impressive resume might elicit a little fear, but that's not even close to respect.

Respect comes from people who see that you're good at your job. It comes from team members who feel you understand their challenges, and who believe you are honest with them and are looking out for their well-being.

Respect comes from lots of exposure to you and seeing you demonstrate these qualities. You can't tell your team you have their backs; you have to show it. You can't tell them how experienced you are; they need to see the results of that experience with their own eyes. You can't say you'll always be honest; you simply must be honest consistently and over time.

And you can't ever trot out your title, experience or connection with the boss.

As soon as you hear yourself say, “I’m the Director of Whatever so what I say goes,” you’ve failed. Worse, you’ve just said you can’t explain why your decision is a good one, so you pulled rank. Dick move. You’ve convinced no one that you are making the right decision, but you’ve shown everyone that you are an insecure weenie.

2. People are generally good

In every part of life, there is ample evidence this is true. Strangers hold doors for each other. Grocery store staff will help you find the coffee filters. People return lost purses and watch for Amber Alert cars and make faces at babies just to see them smile.

So why, in the workplace, do so many managers assume the worst?

Most employees are good. Most want to help make the company successful. They want to do a good job and they want to contribute to a pleasant environment. They want to get along with their manager and their co-workers.

But so many managers think of their employees as ingrates who will try to get away with whatever they can. They believe—and sometimes say out loud—their employees are lucky to have jobs. They treat their people with suspicion and make rules to prevent abuse that wasn’t likely to happen in the first place.

And when they do, they flush any goodwill they might have had down the toilet. Employees who feel they aren’t trusted don’t trust you. People who believe the company expects gratitude are reluctant to give it. Why should they? How does the company show its gratitude to them?

There are certainly sociopaths and narcissists in the world and most of them make it into the workforce. Those people are not generally good, but there aren’t that many of them out there.

You’ll be right more often than wrong if you start each interaction with the belief that your employees are good. More importantly, they’ll believe that about you too.

And if it one turns out to be a sociopath after all, you’ll know soon enough. You’ve lost nothing by assuming the best.

3. Everybody knows everything

It’s human nature to talk. We’re social animals, and we really don’t have many boundaries. We’ll tell a co-worker—in confidence of course—how

much we make, what our score was on our last performance review or that we've played golf with the boss.

And our co-worker will pass all that on, also in confidence, to someone else. In about ten minutes, everyone knows everything.

As a manager, realizing this and thinking about it often will keep you out of trouble.

Before you decide to give an employee a little salary bump or buy them a nice dinner, realize it's not going to be a secret. Even if they deserve the perk, word will get out. If that employee is recognized by his or her peers as a top performer, the extra dough might feel justified, and they'll feel like they can earn it too. But if the employee is an average performer who's particularly charming when you're in the room, it'll backfire on you.

Do what you need to do to motivate and reward your team members, but be careful and realize it will all be public. Don't motivate one employee while accidentally de-motivating all the others.

I once worked for a company going through a particularly contentious time. Many employees felt like they were getting a raw deal and tensions were high. Someone managed to get their hands on the weekly payroll from our accounting office and they mailed a copy to every employees' home. Every one of us saw how much everyone else made, right up to the top, and it was definitely not what most people considered fair. Those were interesting days.

One way or another, everybody knows everything, so act accordingly.

4. You are not a genius

Sorry, but no matter how smart you are, you're not solely responsible for your success.

You have been successful—so far—because of a combination of circumstances. You may have skills, but you also landed this job because of something else—a well-placed connection, a good reference or simply because someone on the executive team was from your old neighborhood.

You may happen to be in a growing industry with lots of opportunities to succeed. There are times of rapid growth when it's almost impossible to fail. You win just by showing up. To outsiders, you look like a superstar. But really, you're just lucky.

Or you may be part of a new management team and the manager who brought you on has decided you, and by extension they, are brilliant. That

doesn't make it so.

Whatever they may be, remember that there are many factors to which you owe your success. Because the moment you start thinking you're a genius, your fall has begun. Arrogance has taken hold deep in your being, and it will prevent you from repeating your past successes. If you don't acknowledge the support that got you where you are, it's not going to help you get where you're going.

And-not surprisingly—one of your greatest sources of support is your team. They can choose to make you successful or not.

Share credit with your team. Promote individual team members. You're their manager, so you aren't competing with them. Their success is your success.

Everybody likes a manager who builds and supports strong teams. And in turn, your team will support you.

Remembering you're not a genius reminds you why your team is so important. It helps you focus on them and banish that ego monster that is never far away, always willing to take over if you let it. Which brings us to...

5. The person with the smallest ego wins

You know you've been successful when you hear your words coming out of someone else's mouth. No, you're not getting credit for those ideas. Yes, you may be the only one who remembers where they came from in the first place. But you just saw what a big impact you've had on your organization. Your words passed through who knows how many challenges, layers, egos...and now your idea has become real. It's part of the agenda. That's a big deal.

In one of my jobs, I used to say, "I can do anything I want to do in this company, as long as I don't also want the credit." If you keep your ego in check, you can be much more effective than if you grandstand and expect praise. When people see you focused on a project rather than on getting credit for it, they trust you more. They believe you have the right priorities and you're motivated by helping the company, not yourself. They realize if the project is successful, they'll get some kudos too, which motivates them all the more.

Of course, even though you don't seek credit, people will notice. They'll know who was really responsible for getting things done. But the moment

you expect gratitude, you cast doubt on your intentions and push other people's competitive buttons.

And if negotiation is a part of your job, a small ego will serve you very well. Negotiations can be contentious, and you won't take the bait when things get personal. You will be able to keep your eye on the important issues and not sweat the small stuff that may feel good but doesn't really move the business forward.

I've seen arrogant executives finish a negotiation thinking they'd killed it, and a few days later realize they got nothing but a skillfully stroked ego.

Chapter 2: What Does It Mean to Be a Dick Manager?

76% of US respondents said they currently have or recently had a toxic boss.

Monster.com Poll

Managers are supposed to be tough, right? You gotta crack the whip and make sure everyone knows who's in charge. Right?

Well, not really. Good managers are tough, but not in the way you might be thinking.

Good managers are not tough in the way bullies are tough. Good managers aren't abrupt or harsh. Good managers aren't insecure or arrogant or defensive. Good managers aren't dicks.

Good managers have tough characters. They need to function without much feedback, to put their egos aside and to have difficult conversations when necessary. That requires inner toughness and resilience and a willingness to take risks.

And people know who's in charge not because it's the toughest person in the room, but because it's the person they respect and will listen to. That may be their manager, or it may be someone else in the company, even one of their peers. When managers feel they need to remind everyone who's in charge, it's because they're probably not. They've failed to earn the respect of their team.

Being a dick manager means letting your ego guide your decisions and behavior. It means putting yourself and your ambitions above your duty to your company. It means ignoring the golden rule. Being a dick makes you look weak and it nearly always dooms you to a career of misery and failure.

As a manager, your obligation is clear—you are expected to build, maintain and lead your team in a way that benefits the company as much as possible. To do that, you need to get to know your team members and understand how to motivate each of them. You need to earn their respect and their trust. You need to make sure each of your people has the tools they need to do their job. You need to pay attention, provide encouragement and support, and have difficult conversations when necessary.

None of that is possible if you're a dick.

Why not be a dick?

First, it's bad for your reputation. Nobody likes working for a dick and only bad managers like hiring them.

Everybody knows who the dicks are in any organization, so you're not fooling anyone. Dick managers usually have troubled teams. Turnover can be high. Your reputation gets around.

Manage like a dick and at some point, you're going to be treated like one. A good manager is going to see you for what you are and boot your ass out the door.

Second, being a dick manager gets in the way of your primary job, which is to get the best performance out of your team.

Dick managers have trouble retaining top talent, so often they're left with "B" players. Building a team of reluctant employees doing the minimum just to get by is pretty much the opposite of what managers are supposed to do.

As employees, we should feel good about what we do. We should feel engaged because we care about our jobs and our companies care about us. Companies that foster that kind of culture deserve our very best work, our innovation and our loyalty.

And yet, bad managers who put their egos and ambitions first, who lead by intimidation and who don't communicate well can't possibly create an engaging workplace culture. Thus, they're left with people who are willing to forego engagement and simply collect the paycheck.

Teams led by good managers are engaged. Engaged teams are more innovative and more efficient.

Make no mistake: in no way am I suggesting you be soft. Being a good manager does not mean letting your people get away with things or standing by quietly as they walk all over you. On the contrary, it means inspiring the team to be good workplace citizens and to treat you and each other with respect. As you'll see later in this book, not being a dick manager means you need to make sure the quality of the team is high, and all its members deserve to be there. Very often that means making hard decisions, having difficult conversations and being unpopular for a while.

Think about some of your past jobs, and what motivated you. Have you had a dick boss? Of course you have. Did you go the extra mile for him or her? Did you offer suggestions to make things run more efficiently? Did you support them when they faced challenges of their own? Probably not.

If you've been fortunate enough to have a really good manager, think about the contrast. You felt valued and listened to. No topic was off-limits if you had an idea or suggestion to help the team. After all you were on the front lines, you saw things your manager couldn't, and they respected that.

You also knew what was going on with the company, the industry and the team because your boss kept you in the loop, and you correctly believed you were a part of the company's success. Your boss let others know of your contributions and may have thanked you or the team publicly in a meeting or email.

Because you were managed by someone who put their ego aside and focused on the team, you were inspired and motivated to contribute to the business in a way that you simply would not have been if your boss had been a dick.

Teams with good managers have less turnover and greater productivity. People who are managed well tend to stay with the company longer. Even when the business is relatively static and opportunities for advancement are not plentiful, people will often stay with an organization in which they feel comfortable and rewarded.

Finally—and this should be obvious—it's better for your career when you're not a dick. As a manager, you will be judged by how well your team performs. If you are a good manager with a productive team that speaks highly of your leadership, you benefit in a couple of important ways.

It's easier to recruit from within your company when word gets out that you are a good manager. Recruiting from within is one of the best ways to build a good team: you may have access to HR information about the applicant's track record and you can get a good idea from their current manager about how they would fit on your team. Your chances of getting a high-quality team player are pretty good.

But before anyone is going to seek you out or be willing to move to your staff, you must have a reputation for being a good manager.

Besides recruiting, earning the respect of your team benefits your career directly.

Remember Law of Management #3: *Everybody Knows Everything*. People talk, and if your team members feel respected and believe they are being treated fairly, they will in turn respect you and say good things about you to their peers. Those comments always circulate within the company and they will get back to your boss.

Given the choice, your manager will prefer a happy, high-functioning team over one that is harboring resentment and anger. Lower turnover, less risk of HR actions or lawsuits, better reputation within the community, easier recruiting—these all result from having a successful, well-managed team.

If you have an innovative and efficient team, if your turnover is low, if your people are happy and aren't suing the company or filing complaints with HR—well, you look like a good manager. You're more likely to get additional responsibilities or a promotion or a bonus or recruited by the competition.

That's why you don't want to be a dick manager.

Things Nobody Will Tell You Warning Signs That You're a Dick Manager

If you ever hear yourself saying any of these things, you are a dick manager:

Don't you know what my title is?

Don't talk to me like that.

You need to show some respect.

Because I say so.

Just do your job and let me worry about the big stuff.

You're lucky to have this job.

Do you know how many people would love to have your job?

Do I need to remind you who's boss?

That's above your pay grade.

I don't have time for this.