

Managing to provoke peak performance

Derek Mowbray, Feb 2017

There are a couple of things that seem to characterise many managers these days –

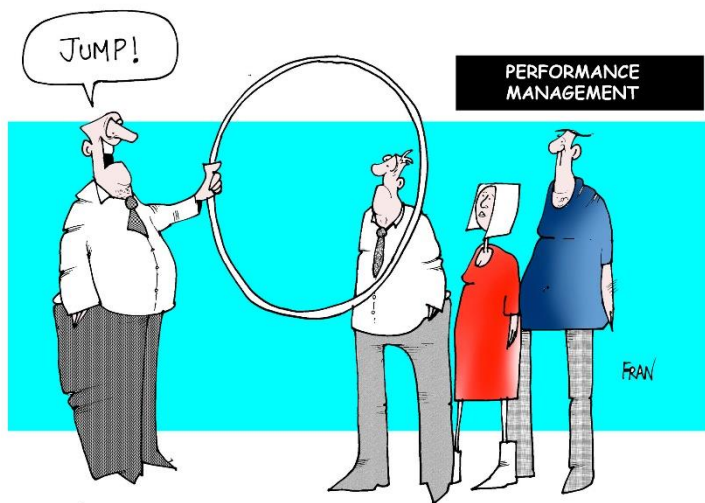
They are appointed to managerial positions after being successful doing something else completely different.

These folk have probably come from a technical background, are used to dealing with ‘facts’ and data, and find interacting with people either a doddle on a social level or very difficult on any level.

Are you one of these managers?

There are three classic functions of a manager – to provide direction, co-ordinate work to move in that direction and control work to ensure that direction is reached.

What is missing from the classic description is the skill needed to persuade people in your team to do what you ask of them without causing them any form of fear or distress. Distress leads to under performance and should be avoided at all costs.



It is a myth that managing people is simple and straight forward, and doesn't need training or support. It doesn't come naturally, even to those who find interacting with people a doddle.

Not many managers get any training. In the UK it is about 30% of the management workforce, and much of the training is devoted to technical matters such as regulation compliance, project management, accounting and budget setting. Very little, if any, is about using behaviour to get the best from team members to enable them to thrive at work.

What is the role of the Leader/Manager?

To get the best possible performance from their teams to do justice to the investment in their intelligence, curiosity, skills, knowledge and experience.

To get the best possible performance from themselves to do justice to the investment in their own intelligence, curiosity, skills, knowledge and experience.

The real role of a manager is to get the best performance from their team members.

This requires managers to build the working environment where team members regard their manager as authentic, trustworthy, and have a positive attitude towards him or her. The manager needs to be able to prevent stress and fear in their team, as this is the major inhibitor to performance.

A focus, therefore, is on how managers behave towards their teams.

The behaviours that are needed are those that provoke psychological wellbeing and performance

This requires applying:

- **intelligent behaviours,**
- **emotional intelligence,**
- sensitive application of **assertive behaviour,** and
- **the art of persuasion - the capacity to seduce others** into doing things they may otherwise not wish to do, and to persuade them without causing a hint of fear or distress.

These behaviours are essential if leaders and managers are to get the best from their workforce.

Intelligent behaviours

These behaviours are the basic requirements for being a successful manager in provoking peak performance from your team. They are the behaviours of persuasion without causing fear or distress.

The **most important behaviour is attentiveness** as it is the starting point of interaction. Being attentive to other people triggers their attentiveness to you. Without this you don't get very far in persuading others to do what you ask. If you rely only on your position of authority to get others to do what you want you will be failing in your ability to be attentive, and probably using fear as the key influence on their behaviour. You may think this is a great idea, but the reality is that it leads to under performance.



It is surprising how many managers don't like people!

It is important for you to **have a positive attitude towards others;** an attitude that can be cultivated by being curious about how others think and why they behave in the ways they do.

Being humorous and witty is an antidote to fear and distress, and is, also, very attractive. It helps you engage with others, providing additional persuasive powers.

Always **provide encouragement.** It gives that extra bit of courage to others to perform at their peak and go the extra mile. 'You can do it' is a nice encouraging phrase to use.

Resolve conflicts as they arise and never allow them to fester.

Always be consistent in your behaviour as this builds a profile of reliability and trustworthiness, both of which are essential to persuading others to perform at their peak. Your team is, essentially, performing for your benefit, and they need trust you to feel that working at their peak performance is worth it for them.

Demonstrate intellectual flexibility - always think on your feet. Your team will expect you to be more intelligent than they; at least, in doing manager tasks; so you need to consistently demonstrate this.

Act with kindness. Intelligent kindness demonstrates your own humanity as well as being a behaviour that recognises that no one is perfect. You will discover that kindness persuades others that you are part of the human race and not some remote automaton. This helps your team attain peak performance, as they are performing because they want to, not because someone is always on their back.

How good are you at using intelligent behaviours?

Emotional intelligence

Emotional Intelligence is about paying attention to yourself so that you can pay attention and understand others.

It is about **understanding and managing your emotions, feelings and personality** in ways that enable you to interact with others successfully through the process of reciprocity – others responding to you because what you say resonates with them. Others believe you understand them, so respond more readily to what you say.

Curiosity about others is a useful attitude for managers. It stimulates you to adopt thoughts and behaviours that encourages reciprocity in interaction, so that the person with whom you interact reveals more about themselves. This is a process that enables you to play to the other person's interests as a means of persuading him or her to do things you want them to do without causing any distress.

The key ingredients for understanding yourself, and then being able to understand others, are shown below.

Self-awareness – understanding yourself can take many forms, but examining and analysing your own reactions and responses to events and behaviours helps you develop a self-awareness that can translate into understanding why others react and respond in the ways they do.

Empathy – is about sharing the feelings of others by understanding those feelings and how they impact on you. This provides insight into understanding how similar feelings may impact on others, a process that enables you to authentically share the feelings.

Self-confidence – is your ability to control your anxiety. Once you're able to control anxiety to a point that it doesn't interfere with your thoughts and actions you will possess the self-confidence to do whatever you wish. Within emotional intelligence self-confidence enables you to be candid about how you feel and think, which, in turn, helps others to reciprocate and share their thoughts and feelings with you. Your self-confidence in opening up enables others to do the same.

Motivation – is the marriage between you being open to being enticed, and something enticing you. Enticement has an element of excitement about it and can be as general as life itself or as specific as diving off a high board into a swimming pool. If you are open to being enticed by any adventure or experience, this enables you to be open to understanding the specific adventures and experiences of those with whom you interact.

Self-control – is about your capacity to control your negative emotions. Whenever you experience an event or behaviour that may be a threat, you automatically have an emotional or impulsive reaction. You need to be

able to override this impulsive or emotional reaction to be able to think clearly and provide you with the opportunity of interpreting and understanding what is going on. You need to understand how you control your own emotional reactions in order to understand how difficult it is for others to do the same.

Social competence – is having the self-confidence to interact with strangers, such as meeting new people or making a presentation to an audience you don't know. With social competence you are able to interact with anyone you meet. This is a starting point in using your emotional intelligence, as you are provided with the opportunity of becoming curious about others which enables you to bring into play all aspects of emotional intelligence in order to help you satisfy your curiosity. Without using emotional intelligence in your interaction you are unlikely to find the other person revealing anything about themselves that satisfies your curiosity about him or her.

Assertiveness

Assertive behaviour is the capacity to convey a clear message to someone without causing any psychological distress in the process. Assertiveness is high in openness and high in consideration of others.

It's a behaviour that enables you to talk about anything to anyone at anytime without causing a stressful reaction.

The Assertive Message

An approach that helps apply assertiveness is the Assertive Message.

This has four steps. It requires practice before 'going live' and this can be done with a colleague. Once you've applied the process about four times you will find you'll have embedded the process into your daily routine.

Steps to be followed

Step 1 - Always acknowledge something positive about the person you're talking to, and/or the situation they are in. For example - 'I know you want this company to be the best in the world'; or 'I know how successful you are at leading this organisation' or 'I know you are under a lot of pressure right now from the amount of work everyone expects you to complete'

Step 2 - Tell the other person how you feel. For example – 'I feel frustrated' or 'I feel between a rock and a hard place', or 'I don't know how to deal with this', or 'I feel you are bullying me'.

Step 3 - Tell the person why you feel the way you feel. For example – 'you always seem to block what I'm doing', or 'you dismiss my ideas all the time', or 'you are constantly rude to me', or 'you give me no chance to respond to your challenges about my competence'.

Step 4 - Tell the person what you want to happen next. For example – 'I want you to encourage me in my work', or 'I want you to stop telling me off in public', or 'I want you to stop blocking what I'm doing'.

Warning: never, ever link step 1 with step 2 with an 'and' or a 'but' or a 'however', as this negates the power of the positive observation or recognition of the other person, which is the vital aspect of the Assertive Message. The Assertive Message only works because you recognise how great the person is and/or the situation the person is in.

The art of persuasion

The art of persuasion



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These are the behaviours that will help managers persuade others to do what they want them to do, without causing distress in the process. They are the behaviours of seduction – the ability to persuade someone to do something which they might not wish to do, without causing any distress.

As you'll see, there is some overlap with Intelligent Behaviours and Assertiveness

Attentiveness – is the most important behaviour of all. If someone is attentive to you by demonstrating to you that they are interested in you as a unique individual it is very difficult for you not to be attentive in return. Being attentive to others is the starting point for successful interaction. The manifestation of this behaviour is found in the unique (to you) questions that are asked; the body language you pick up that demonstrates interest in only you; the listening skills that allow the person to pick up on and develop their responses to your discussion; the demonstration of warmth towards you, shown by their smile and the engaging language that is used.

Attentiveness has a purpose of building commitment, trust and social engagement between two or more people. The more a person is attentive to you the more you become committed, develop trust and wish to be socially engaged. The interaction between people becomes enhanced if there is mutual attraction, shared interests, and a mutual understanding of such aspects of people as shared values. Whilst physical attraction requires little dialogue, other forms of attraction require an exploration of interests, best explored using the techniques of attentiveness.

Attentiveness also plays to personal identity. Being attentive to someone means they are important to you, and this has the effect of reassuring the other person that they have a purpose as well as an identity. This runs to the heart of personal psychological wellbeing.

Trustworthiness – requires individuals to want to be seen to be someone to trust. Trust is the absence of second guess the motivations of others. Trustworthiness comes from behaving consistently over time, so that others build a mental picture that becomes sharper and stable.

We tend to trust people until behaviour becomes inconsistent. There is more to be gained by trusting someone than not to trust, and we tend to trust people in the first instant unless their appearance or what they say erodes the initial desire to trust. We give people the benefit of the doubt. We do this because we cannot survive on our own and have to interact, and choose to interact with people we think we can rely on, and who we think will respond to us.

Managers need to be trustworthy. Apart from any other consideration, managers who appear not to be trustworthy cause their staff to wonder about the motivation for everything the manager does. This diverts concentration and leads to under performance. It, also, leads to uncertainty which is a potential stressor.

Wisdom – is the ability to use experience, skills, and knowledge in an interaction as well as in performing a task. Wisdom, also, requires a high degree of emotional intelligence, the understanding of others, and the capability to form judgments based on the application of knowledge combined with common sense. Wise people also exhibit a wide understanding and knowledge of the world around them, and, in interactions, are capable of demonstrating insights that others may not see.

Wise people can show their wisdom in a narrow field, such as a science, for example, but be very unwise in another field, in commenting on other people, for example. The unwise aspects of the person erode the wise aspects, so wise people tend to be careful about when they offer opinions based on their own experiences.

Managers can develop their wisdom by exposure to experiences. Managers who move from a professional role into a management role may be perceived as wise in their profession but lack the experiences to be wise as a manager. Once again, these managers need to be careful about including their professional experiences in a management discussion unless there are general lesson to be learn beyond the professional lesson.

Assertiveness – is the skill to be able to say anything to anyone without causing distress – the aim of successful interaction.

The technique of being assertive relies on the opening statement in an interaction, which uses the attentiveness behaviour. The opening statement needs to convey to the other person that they are of value to you in that you know some unique aspects of the person which you use to convey your knowledge about him or her.

After the opening statement it is possible to say almost anything as long as positive language is used. So, it is possible to say how you feel and the reasons why. Then it is possible to say to the other person what you want.

Intelligence with humour – is about being able to make the other person smile, possibly laugh. It is not possible to laugh and feel stressed at the same time. Laughter enhances a sense of pleasure and joy. All of the attributes of humour are essential in persuasion, as humour is, also, an attractor and helps with the interaction process. People like people who make them laugh, at least, in small doses!

The best way of using humour is in an intelligent manner, in situations where the humour links to the situation or topic of the interaction. The humour could be self-deprecation, which is very attractive, particularly in someone that others perceive as being a little superior in manner. Self-deprecation in relation to a serious topic can help make the topic more accessible and cement the interaction.

Passion – is a demonstration of a strong enthusiasm for someone or something. This is an attractor as we like people with a strong enthusiasm for something, regardless of what it may be. In persuading others to do things they might not wish to do without causing distress to them, passion can be very persuasive, particularly if the other person has a similar interest, but may not be quite so passionate

about it. Being passionate about something opens up opportunities for others to explore further the object of their passion.

Managers who are passionate about the psychological wellbeing and performance of their staff will be high performers in their organisation.

Direction with committed ambition – builds on passion and is the demonstration of wanting to complete something – a task, a project, a change programme, or something else.

Managers who show they are committed to completing something will find their staff following that commitment. Commitment is a promise to do something, and a promise to see something through to the end is very influential in persuading others to follow.

Addressing individual needs – uses attentiveness to discover the needs of other people. This enables the manager to meet those needs and support the individual in whatever they require. This is a demonstration of attentiveness in relation to individuals, and shows that individuals are valued by the manager – an aspect of psychological health and wellbeing. It reinforces in the individual that he or she has a clear identity within the organisation.

Addressing individual needs may, also, trigger a reciprocity process which results in the staff member addressing the needs of the manager. If the manager wants a specific task completed, for example, he or she may enter into a 'trade' by addressing the needs of the member of staff in return for the staff member doing the task.

Addressing individual needs consolidates on commitment, trust and engagement, in that the individual whose needs are being met will feel a stronger sense of commitment to the manager, the work and the organisation, if their own needs are met.

Nurturing (coaching) – is a process of caring and supporting others whilst they are in the process of developing themselves. In the workplace, a manager who nurtures a staff member is paying particular attention to him or her as they grow in their job.

This may trigger a reciprocal behaviour of the employee paying particular attention to the requirements of the manager, do what the manager wants, and continue to be nurtured, as this is a supportive activity that confirms the individual's value and identity to the manager, which the employee will not want to lose.

Establishing these behaviours in managers

For managers to be effective they need to embed these behaviours into their daily pattern of behaviour and add them to their personal behaviour profile.

The challenge is 'how to change the behaviours of managers?'. A Manager's Code of Conduct is a useful vehicle for embedding these behaviours within managers and can be a good starting point.

Behaviour change relies on individuals thinking before behaving. Thinking differently occurs when eyes are opened and benefits understood. The motivation to change behaviour arises from the benefits accruing from the "new" behaviours.

The behaviours that have been presented in this paper are those that help individuals feel psychologically well. If you feel psychologically well you can perform at your peak if you're suitably motivated to do so.

The behaviours are those that focus on the positive. Such behaviours reduce the risk of causing stressful events and behaviours, and open the door to the opportunity of the workforce attaining consistently peak performance. The positive element of the behaviours is infectious; they spread. But the behaviours have to be reinforced constantly by managers for a sustained change in atmosphere (and culture) to be achieved.

This should be enough motivation for those managers wanting to achieve peak performance from their teams.

The added economic and productivity benefits are that the huge costs associated with under performance, and with people coming to work in body but not in mind, are substantially reduced, and productivity rises.

There are techniques to help individual managers adopt these behaviours, and these are offered as part of our management development programmes. Techniques are also included in our Guides.

As with all behaviour change, individuals may need mentoring and coaching in the behaviours required.

Therefore, the steps to be taken are:

1. Raise awareness of the benefits of ensuring the workforce is psychologically well, as this eliminates costs of psychopresenteeism, low productivity and substitutes these for increased productivity and stronger engagement.
2. Invite all managers to a programme that provides the background, reasoning and details of the behaviours required to provoke performance through strong psychological wellbeing
3. Offer individuals the opportunity of being coached in the behaviours required.
4. Offer individuals the opportunity of being mentored in these behaviours over a period of time, so they are applied appropriately.

Conclusion

Getting the best from anyone requires knowledge of how to persuade, sustain trust, and create authenticity so that your team builds its confidence and positive attitudes towards you. This enables the team to give its energy, enthusiasm, and total commitment to you, their work and the organisation. Only in this way is peak performance achievable.

To find out more

To find out more about Managing for Performance, talk to us about our [Management Development Programmes](#).

For further information, call 01242 244182 or email barbara.leigh@mas.org.uk



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Derek Mowbray is a Chartered Psychologist and Chartered Scientist with a doctorate in leadership. With CEO experience in public, private and voluntary sectors, Derek has held various top leadership positions prior to turning his attention to helping organisations understand the link between psychological wellbeing and performance.

Derek specialises in the primary prevention of stress at work (a major inhibitor to performance) by focusing on elevating psychological wellbeing in the workforce. He emphasises the requirement for a positive working environment that provokes the workforce to feel well and perform at its peak, by reducing the challenging events and poor behaviours that may trigger stress in others.

With a special interest in organisation health psychology, which aims to harmonise the relationship between organisations and their workforce, Derek's specialties are building organisation-wide positive work cultures, the performance related behaviour of leaders and managers in relation to their employees and strengthening mental resilience.

He is the originator of **Psychological Responsibility**, which places on the individual a responsibility for feeling psychologically well, as well as a responsibility to do no psychological harm to others. He is, also, a sponsor of the method of '**sharing responsibility for the future success of the organisation**' as a principle underpinning organisational success and high achievement.

His work approaches and interventions are well recognised and adopted throughout the UK and internationally.

Derek's mission is to create and sustain 'the workplace as a fabulous, high performing place to work'.

About MAS

Our purpose is to help organisations achieve peak performance and productivity; to strengthen corporate and personal resilience and to prevent stress from occurring in the first place;

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