

Careers

The new manager on the block

Getting to know your team is your priority, writes **Margaret Harris**

BEING the new kid on the block is daunting enough. But when you are the new manager, you need to find a way to assert your authority without upsetting the delicate dynamics of the team.

Professor Basil Leonard, executive enterprise learning and development at USB Executive Development, says a new manager's approach would depend on whether they had been appointed from within the team or department or from outside.

It is vital to get to know the team as a whole as well as the individuals within it.

"Be aware of what types of relationships may have developed between the team and the previous manager; why the manager left, for example. Be aware of the relationships that may have developed between staff members, especially those who have been there a while."

Those taking over as manager from within the team or department can take a less formal approach.

"I would suggest spending time with the team as a whole (depending on the size of the team), but most certainly also taking time to have one-on-ones.

"From outside of the department or company, the process may have to be more formal, but should also include the informal 'coffee sessions'. Furthermore, it should also involve getting to know people's job specifics,

their interests, how the work 'works' (dynamics) and so on. All of this may take quite a while, and it would be wise to take longer rather than rush the process."

Beyond getting to know how the team works, managers require high emotional intelligence and self-awareness to ensure the team is productive.

"Personal self-awareness — emotionally especially — is crucial. Understand yourself; where you come from — your biases and prejudices. Also be aware of whether others in the team may also have applied for the position and now have to report to you. Again, do not rush the process."

A recent report on research carried out by the UK's Henley Business School showed that about 70% of human resources practitioners were looking for managers who could manage, inspire and lift their organisations, particularly in the wake of the recession.

According to the report: "Softer skills — in leadership styles and coaching, for instance — that bring out the very best in people and facilitate team working, are a priority."

Jenny Carter, director of the New Managers Programme at the UCT Graduate School of Business, says that in the South African workplace there are also "immense challenges and . . . organisations are calling for a new type of manager to give fresh impetus".

However, the focus on getting to

know each other should not mean blurring the line separating the manager from the team.

"Do not become over-familiar. Set your own boundaries, but remain sensitive to the team's needs. This is a fine balancing act and each person must go with what works best for them," says Leonard.

Quick victories from Leonard

- Apply the 100-day rule to yourself and use this time to establish your authority without being authoritarian;

- Become part of the team before introducing any changes to the way things are done;

- When it is time to introduce changes, do so slowly;

- Quick victories are most visible in the relationships you establish with other people, so take time to establish these relationships; and

- Try to always be genuine, sincere and real in your dealings with other people.

This approach may mean the "quick victories" take time, but it will ensure longer-lasting effects and lead to greater trust between you and your team.



GETTING TO KNOW YOU: Informal coffee sessions with his team are part of a new manager's duties as he eases into the job

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