

# The Top 10 "qualities" that make a good manager according to Bill Gates.

From the New York Times: What Makes a Good Manager (10/8/97) By BILL GATES. Gates states in the prologue, "recently I wrote about 10 qualities of a good employee, which prompted quite a few people to ask about the attributes of a good manager. There isn't a magic formula for good management, of course, but if you're a manager perhaps these tips will help you be more effective. After stating his ten ideas that are provided below, Bill goes on to say in the epilogue: " I don't pretend that these are the only 10 approaches a manager should keep in mind, or even that they're the most important ones. There are lots of others. Just a month ago, for example, I encouraged leaders to require bad news before good news from their employees. But these 10 ideas may help you manage well, and I hope they do." Copyright 1997 by Bill Gates

## **1. Choose a field thoughtfully.**

Make it one you enjoy. It's hard to be productive without genuine enthusiasm. This is true whether you're a manager or employee.

## **2. Hire carefully and be willing to fire.**

You need a strong team, because a mediocre team gives mediocre results, no matter how well managed it is. One common mistake is holding onto somebody who doesn't quite measure up. It's easy to keep this person on the job because he's not terrible at what he does. But a good manager will replace him or move him to a set of responsibilities where he can succeed unambiguously.

## **3. Create a productive environment.**

This is a particular challenge because it requires different approaches depending on the context. Sometimes you maximize productivity by giving everybody his or her own office. Sometimes you achieve it by moving everybody into open space. Sometimes you use financial incentives to stimulate productivity. A combination of approaches is usually required. One element that almost always increases productivity is providing an information system that empowers employees. When I was building Microsoft, I set out to create an environment where software developers could thrive. I wanted a company where engineers liked to work. I wanted to create a culture that encouraged them to work together, share ideas and remain highly motivated. If I hadn't been a software engineer myself, there's no way I could have achieved my goal. As the company grew, we developed supportive cultures in our international operations and in sales and marketing, too.

## **4. Define success.**

Make it clear to your employees what constitutes success and how they should measure their achievements. Goals must be realistic. Project schedules, for example, must be set by the people who do the work. People will accept a "bottom-up" deadline they helped set but they'll be cynical about a schedule imposed from the top that doesn't map to reality. Unachievable goals weaken an organization. At my company, in addition to regular team meetings and one-on-one sessions between managers and employees, we use mass gatherings periodically and e-mail routinely to communicate what we expect from employees. If a reviewer or customer chooses another company's product over ours, we analyze the situation carefully. We say to our people, "The next time around we've got to win. What will it take? What's needed?" The answers to these questions help us define success.

## **5. You have to like people and be good at communicating.**

This is hard to fake. If you don't genuinely enjoy interacting with people, it'll be hard to manage them well. You must have a wide range of personal contacts within your organization. You need relationships--not necessarily personal friendships--with a fair number of people, including your own employees. You must encourage these people to tell you what's going on (good or bad) and give you feedback about what people are thinking about the company and your role in it.

#### **6. Develop your people to do their jobs better than you can.**

Transfer your skills to them. This is an exciting goal but it can be threatening to a manager who worries that he's training his replacement. If you're concerned, ask your boss: "If I develop somebody who can do my job super well, does the company have some other challenge for me or not?" Many smart managers like to see their employees increase their responsibilities because it frees the managers to tackle new or undone tasks. There's no shortage of jobs for good managers. The world has an infinite amount of work to be done.

#### **7. Build morale.**

Make it clear there's plenty of good will to go around and that it's not just you as some hotshot manager who's going to impress others if things go well. Give people a sense of the importance of what they're working on--its importance to the company, its importance to customers. When you achieve great results, everybody involved should share in the credit and feel good about it.

#### **8. Take on projects yourself.**

You need to do more than communicate. The last thing people want is a boss who just doles out stuff. From time to time prove you can be hands-on by taking on one of the less attractive tasks and using it as an example of how your employees should meet challenges.

#### **9. Don't make the same decision twice.**

Spend the time and thought to make a solid decision the first time so that you don't revisit the issue unnecessarily. If you're too willing to reopen issues, it interferes not only with your execution but also with your motivation to make a decision in the first place. After all why bother deciding an issue if it isn't really decided? People hate indecisive leadership so you have to make choices. However that doesn't mean you have to decide everything the moment it comes to your attention. Nor that you can't ever reconsider a decision.

#### **10. Let people know whom to please.**

Maybe it's you, maybe it's your boss and maybe it's somebody who works for you. You're in trouble--and risking--paralysis in your organization, when employees start saying to themselves: "Am I supposed to be making this person happy or this other person happy? They seem to have different priorities."

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#### **About the Submitter**

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