

PROFESSIONAL TRANSITIONS

# 5 Things New Managers Should Focus on First

by Anthony K. Tjan  
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One of the most exciting — and frightening — career transitions comes when you face the prospect of a management role for the first time. Over my career of building businesses, advising CEOs, and, most recent, exploring the philosophies and beliefs of 100 of the world’s most respected leaders for my latest book, *Good People*, I’ve clarified many of the top things a great new manager or leader can do. Whether you’re still in the interview stage or are in the wake of a successful promotion to leadership, there are a few must-know principles that will place you on a successful path. Here are five of them.

**Establish a leadership philosophy.** Leadership and management are both about getting the right followership, right? I believed that once, until I came across an idea attributed to Tom Peters: Real leadership is about producing other leaders. A great leader, Peters said, is someone committed to bringing others along. That's why my first recommendation is think very hard about your leadership philosophy. Do you feel excited and empowered because you now have the positional authority to tell other people what to do — or are you more excited by the prospect of helping others reach that same place?

**Focus on the day to day of management and leadership.** The long-term goal of great leadership is to build a great team around you to create the next generation of leaders who can — just possibly — surpass your own performance. No question, the best leaders are also the best mentors. But the day job of management and leadership involves allocating limited resources, whether it's dollars, time, or people. Are you budgeting dollars in areas that create the best long-term value? Are you scrutinizing your time in terms of its effects and returns? One of the best exercises I practice is doing an audit of my calendar to see how the time I've invested maps (or doesn't) to my top priorities. Speaking of which:

**Be clear about your communication and your top priorities.** No doubt, your communication skills have gotten you far, but now they matter more than ever. During meetings, be as clear as possible about your priorities by asking yourself: Is this meeting intended to inform, get input, or get approval? (By stating that right up front, you'll help others understand the context.) As often as possible during meetings, and also in public forums, take advantage of the opportunity to clarify your overarching purpose and which of your top priorities are required to fulfill that purpose. Be consistent about your purpose and your priorities. Regarding the latter, one of the best CEOs I've ever worked with gave me some advice I've never forgotten: Never have more than five top priorities. Develop those priorities with your team, but remind them that you won't be adding another priority to the list until you knock off one of the existing five. (It's no accident that I'm giving you only five things to focus on in this article! Once these five become comfortable, there will be others for you to tackle.)



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**Set common values and common standards.** Much can be solved if people agree on and practice a set of common values and standards. To my mind, the most important values, the ones I used to define the “goodness” of great leadership in *Good People*, are truth, compassion, and wholeness. With a strong foundation in truth, especially self-awareness, leaders and organizations are more likely to develop the capacity for compassion. Compassionate leadership is about holding back judgment with a mindset that is open, empathic, and generous. (It's a myth that compassion and competition are at odds with one another.) Finally, wholeness. To me, this means redefining success as more than merely winning, expanding it to include the satisfaction leaders feel from knowing their team members performed to the best of their ability toward an agreed-upon set of aspirations.

**Remember that it's okay to be scared and vulnerable.** So much of entrepreneurship, management, and leadership involves walking a tightrope between vulnerability and conviction. None of us can ever be completely confident that we're 100% on the right track, yet from the time we arrive at work in the morning, we're called upon to inspire confidence in others. "Risk taking" is a handy MBA term and euphemism for a condition of self-imposed vulnerability. By recognizing that vulnerability is a component of all jobs and that it creates the potential for positive change, we come that much closer to losing our fear of it. For new leaders and managers, the challenge and opportunity comes from the humble (and humane) recognition that no one is invincible. It comes from giving team members the confidence that decisions are being made in a balanced, thoughtful way. Finally, it comes from showing that, in the end, the most strategic approach is the one with the strongest foundation and potential for success. Business is no different from anything else in life — you can only control what you can control, and if you can't accept that leadership can be lonely and self-doubting much of the time, well, you may not be ready to be a leader. Regardless, celebrate and embrace your vulnerability, because if you don't feel any, you're probably not pushing yourself hard enough.

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