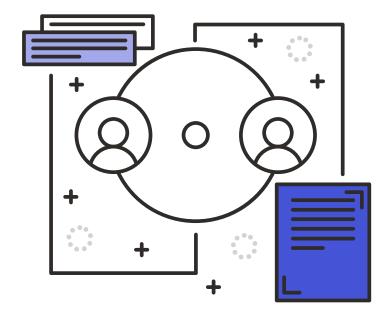## Reflektive

No Bad Managers

51 Hacks to Become a Better Manager

Learn how to improve the employee-manager relationship with these easy-to-implement management hacks today.

Foreword

Anyone who has been thrown into a management position knows that managing people isn't easy. There is no one handbook or guide to becoming a great manager, and depending on the team you are managing, your management skills need to be diverse and flexible. There are thousands of advice articles and guides to management on the internet, but they can be daunting and hard to digest. That's why we made this quick management hacks e-book — to give managers simple, actionable hacks to improve their management practices today.

We gathered our favorite hacks, scoured LinkedIn, asked our Luminary customers, and drew upon personal experience in order to find the best and smartest management hacks for you. Making small daily changes in your habits can lead to great results in management, so try out a few hacks per week and test how well they work for you.

75%
of the reasons people quit come down to their managers.

According to Gallup

hack

[hak]

Verb.

"a strategy or technique adopted in order to manage one's time and activities in a more efficient way, derived from solving a computer hardware or program limitation."

Contents

Managing Yourself

01. **Rise early — get tasks done early in the morning to increase efficiency.**

Intentionally waking up early has been heralded by time management experts for decades. Studies show that humans are more productive in the first few hours of their day, so tackle your most important tasks early on in order to have a more successful day.

02. **Focus on one thing at a time and avoid "task-hopping".**

Multitasking can be a huge trap for managers. Getting more done is not always better than focusing on one thing at a time and often if you focus on one thing, you will do that one thing much better than if you were distracted with other tasks.

03. **Protect your "in the zone" time to make sure you aren't interrupted.**

Make sure your direct reports are aware of any time you want to set aside for heads-down work. By setting the expectation that you will be unavailable during that time, you will be able to get more out of that protected time.

04. **Keep meetings on task and avoid wasting time on tangents.**

This one seems simple, but studies show that about 15% of the time in an hour-long meeting is wasted on tangents. Here's a fun infographic from The Muse about wasteful meetings.

05. **Build support before you propose projects or ideas.**

The hardest part of getting an idea off the ground is getting the support you need. Harvard Business Review compiled an entire guide to winning support for your new idea – you should check it out.

06. **Don't always be right. Show your employees that you can learn from them too.**

Know-it-all's are rarely respected in the workplace. This applies to managers and leaders, too. If you want to be a great manager, you will show your employees that they can teach you just as much as you can teach them.

07. **Strengthen your own skills, always work on developing new skills and mastering old ones.**

Learning doesn't end once you get a promotion or become a manager. The landscape is always changing, which is why managers should always be focused on learning and developing new skills to keep up with their employees.

08. **Ask for feedback yourself.**

The best way to learn about your performance is to ask your coworkers or direct reports. Be sure to consistently ask for honest feedback so you can calibrate your management style accordingly.

09. **Share information.**

Building employee trust is a huge driver of employee retention. One of the biggest ways managers can lose employee trust is by keeping them in the dark by withholding company performance data and other important information. HubSpot has a great guide on how to handle transparency with your employees, you can find it here.

10. **Don't be afraid to cancel recurring meetings.**

Just because a meeting is recurring, doesn't mean it needs to happen every week. Often, recurring meetings force people to meet when they have nothing to discuss, so be sure to define an agenda before all of your recurring meetings to make sure you really need to be holding them.

11. **Admit when you are wrong.**

Great managers see opportunities in mistakes and choose to embrace them instead of deny them. Check out the four reasons great leaders admit their mistakes as outlined by Forbes.

Coaching and Development ⟶

Coaching and Development

12. **Set aside time weekly to give feedback to your direct reports.**

As a manager, it can be hard to find time to give feedback to your direct reports, but weekly feedback is crucial to your employees' engagement. Creating a culture of feedback starts with management, so don't forget to add some weekly feedback time into your calendar.

13. **Set clear due dates for your employees in order to set expectations.**

Without clear deadlines, important projects and initiatives can get sidetracked and forgotten about. Additionally, by setting due dates, you are ensuring that your employees know a project is important, which will help them prioritize.

14. **Ask your team to write the job description for their dream job.**

How can your direct reports grow if they're not sure what they are trying to grow into? Having employees write up the future job description they aspire to will ensure you are helping them reach their goals.

Luminary Hack

Diana Clough
Learning & Development, Program Manager at MediaMath

15. **Don't micromanage.**

"One of the most important aspects of garnering motivation and true performance is to give your direct ownership of their projects. Micromanaging can stifle opportunities for better solutions you may not have thought of yourself and it also prevents the employee from feeling true ownership in their work which also means they may not be giving you their A game."

16. **Ask for one personal goal to be included quarterly in OKRs.**

Asking your employee to include personal goals in their quarterly goal-setting exercises will show them that you are invested in them outside of work.

17. Set up training programs for new employees.

Simply signing up your employees for training is ineffective because managers cannot fully leverage the benefits of employee training when they are not involved in the process. Be involved in the training process so you can be available to help your employees get up to speed in their new roles.

18. It's never too soon to build professional development goals for your direct reports: Do it early and do it often.

As a manager, you should always be encouraging your employees to develop and learn outside of the direct scope of their work. To increase their engagement, be sure to ask your employees where they want to be in five years, or what new skills they want to acquire to make them stronger team players.

19. Be present – turn away from your laptop, phone and any other distractions when your employee is coming to you for something.

Empathetic leaders and managers truly listen to their employees. One way to do this is to provide your employees your full undivided attention. Be conscious of your body language and eye contact to make sure employees feel like they are being heard.

Kevin Beach
Customer Success Manager, Reflektive

20. Prep for 1-on-1s the way you do for any important meeting: Give it some thought and set an agenda ahead of time.

"Similar to recurring meetings, weekly 1-on-1s can be wasteful if there is nothing to discuss. Setting an agenda for your conversations sets the meeting up for success. It provides structure and ensures the meeting doesn't veer too far off the rails. At Reflektive, we use our own 1-on-1 Agenda tool for our meetings. This intuitive tool lets us collaborate on the agenda, where each of us can update from the Reflektive plug-in or web application."

21. Schedule consistent 1-on-1s with your direct reports to give and receive feedback.

One of our customer success managers, Kevin Beach, wrote a great article about the importance of consistent 1-on-1s. If you view your 1-on-1 meetings are a chore, check out some great ideas to spice them up in his article.

Feedback and Recognition ⟶

Feedback and Recognition

Manager Hack

Jimmie Tyrrell
Co-Founder and Director of Engineering at Reflektive

22. **Use employee engagement surveys.**

Engagement surveys and polls are a great way to make your employees feel heard. Anonymous feedback helps employees give truthful and honest feedback, which can be beneficial to the success of your team.

25. **"Socially engineer" opportunities for people to give feedback to others.**

Example: First week – tell new hires to use your recognition wall to recognize somebody who helped them onboard.

23. **Ask your team to review their peers after a project.**

Establishing a culture of reviews and feedback starts with management. The more employees get exposed to peer feedback, the more open they will be to receiving it in the future, which will create a culture of openness and willingness to be critiqued.

26. **Use a recognition wall to boost morale and showcase employee accomplishments.**

The old adage, "what gets talked about gets done," is especially relevant when recognition is given to team members, since it helps shape their mindset on what is important. Positive feedback and praise are low cost/no cost strategies that help employees stay engaged and satisfied in their work. Read more on the ROI of recognition in the workplace.

24. **Practice "Triple A Recognition."**

Here's how you do it: Acknowledge who they are and what they did. Appreciate them with thanks and specifically pointing out the behavior and why it helps and finally, show some affection for their actions to reinforce your recognition...think high fives, handshakes, fist bumps.

27. Ask how they want to be rewarded.

Making yourself aware of your employees preferences and motivations will help you keep them engaged and productive. Some employees will respond differently to rewards, for example rewards of food versus more time to work from home. Asking is a great way to understand each employees' needs and preferences.

28. Engage executives in giving recognition.

Kudos from an executive team member will go a long way with your team. As a manager, you have the ability to communicate more closely with your company's executive or leadership team, so try to use that power to encourage the higher ups to recognize your team.

29. Do a "communication styles" training.

Employees are like a box of chocolates – you never know what you're going to get. Not all employees prefer in-person feedback, and conversely, not all employees prefer feedback via a tool. Hold a quick training with your team to understand each of your individual employees' feedback and communication preferences.

30. Ask your manager and other cross-functional leaders to send a quick thanks or shoutout.

Similar to asking executives to give recognition, making the effort to encourage other company leaders to show their appreciation will have a lasting impact on your team.

Goals and Alignment →

Goals and Alignment

31. Set achievable goals for you and your team.

Set your employees up for success by setting challenging, yet achievable goals for them. In order for a team goal to succeed, it should be accepted and recognized as important by all members of the team. Be sure to revisit progress on the goal in order to keep the deadline on track.

32. Check in on your individual and team goals on a regular basis, and be open to tweaking them so they are both realistic and motivating for your team.

Goals should evolve over time, so don't be afraid to recalibrate your team goals as time passes in order to keep them relevant.

33. Use SMART Goals. Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.

Good managers set goals for their employees, but great managers set SMART goals. SMART goals will provide managers with a framework for evaluating performance, which can help eliminate bias in reviews.

Manager Hack

Erick Tai
Co-Founder and VP of Engineering at Reflektive

34. Be specific with your questions to avoid vague responses.

"Asking people 'so what would you like to be in the future' or 'what would you like to learn,' most people respond just as vaguely: 'I want to work on challenging projects' or 'I want to be promoted.' Instead, ask 'What would do you want on your resume in six months? One, they will have to actually think about how they want to describe their accomplishments. Two, this will translate into actual projects and skill sets, allowing for a great conversation mapping it to real projects.'"

35. Give direct reports visibility into your goals.

This goes back to establishing employee trust. By giving employees insight into your goals, they will feel included in the goals of the organization and feel more connected to the mission. With Reflektive, employees across the company can view their manager's public goals, which helps promote a sense of community.

36. Align employee tasks and projects with team and company goals.

Goal-setting is great, but without alignment to a company's overall goals, your goals can lose sight and relevance. There will always be one-off tasks for employees, but make sure that the bulk of their work and assigned tasks are aligned overall.

37. Ask your employees what they're willing to commit to.

Figuring out what your employees are willing to commit to will help you determine what projects will be the best fit for them. Employees will not be engaged if they are not passionate and willing to commit to something, so being forward with them about it will help both of you.

Manager Hack

Jimmie Tyrrell
Co-Founder and Director of Engineering at Reflektive

38. Set up automatic labels from emails when there are actionable events.

In Reflektive, goal emails are usually a good trigger that a conversation should occur. I make sure those emails have a bright label and bubble up to the top of my inbox.

39. Convert qualitative goals into milestones.

For example, if an employee wants the goal of "better communication," I would convert that into two milestones. One might be, "Participate in a post-mortem to get comfortable speaking in a group setting." A follow-up would be, "Lead a presentation to demonstrate communication skills." This lets us prepare for the big events together, and clarifies expectations for both parties.

Reviews and Performance ⟶

Reviews and Performance

40. **Don't start compiling all of your feedback only at review time; take notes on performance continuously throughout the year.**

Trying to remember a year's worth of performance can be incredibly difficult and lead to bias in the review process. Be sure to document your direct reports' performance continuously throughout the year. This will save you time come review season and ensure that your employees are receiving a fair evaluation. Reflektive's 1-on-1 tools as well as our goals and check-ins products help managers document performance in between review cycles for this purpose.

41. **Keep all of your notes on your employees' performance in one place so your meetings are consistent and you can address any issues quickly.**

Paper and Google Docs are not sufficient enough to track employee performance data. We recommend using a tool to keep all of your notes and comments organized and easily accessible.

Luminary Hack

Katie Hopkins
Head of Talent at The Infatuation

42. **Stay away from ratings during performance reviews.**

"At The Infatuation, we're trying to stay away from a rating or "grade" during performance review time. I've found people can get hung up on that number. They fixate on it, instead of focusing on improving the skills or behaviors that will actually create progress. Save grading for goal setting, and keep reviews qualitative."

43. **Always double-check your reviews before you submit to ensure they are not biased.**

Minimize bias in your performance reviews by ensuring that there is no mention to an employees' gender, ethnicity, or economic status in your comments. Consult BiasInterrupters.org's great worksheet on identifying bias in performance evaluations if you are unsure.

44. **Prepare areas of development for employees who are not meeting expectations.**

Recognizing that an employee is falling behind is one thing, but coaching them to improve is something that separates bad managers from great ones. Make sure you head into a performance review with some concrete details about how an employee can improve performance.

45. **Individualize improvement suggestions and plans.**

As a great manager, you recognize that all of your employees take criticism and feedback in different ways. This is why it's important to individualize all of your comments and avoid generalizing their specific behaviors that are impacting their performance.

46. **Recognize when to walk away.**

Sometimes disengaged employees cannot be saved. This is why it's important to recognize when an employee just might not be the best fit for your company.

Grab Bag ⟶

Grab Bag

47. **Encourage group brainstorming.**

Eliminate bias and encourage others to share their viewpoints by having people write down their thoughts initially, then sharing out what they've written. This helps others get their viewpoints out first versus the "loudest" or most senior person in the room dominating.

Manager Hack

Jeff Bieller
VP of Enterprise Sales at Reflektive

48. **If you're remote, call to check in on your employees often.**

"As a remote manager, I am constantly traveling, so when I'm at airports in between flights I make a point to call and chat with all of my direct reports aside from our scheduled 1-on-1 time. These unstructured chats help my employees feel cared for and recognized."

49. **Ask follow-up questions during meetings.**

One of the easiest ways to show you're listening is to ask follow-up questions. Active listening builds trust and respect between managers and employees, so take notes and revisit topics that your employees mention throughout your meetings.

50. **Keep your calendar up to date especially when certain events require team members' help.**

Keeping an organized calendar helps you establish yourself as a reliable manager. If your employees can count on your calendar, they will waste less time trying to track you down and they will be more confident about when you are available for meetings.

51. **Ask your team to always keep a running list topics they want to talk to you about or an agenda.**

Not only will this make your meetings more efficient, but as a manager you're ensuring that your employees feel heard and like they have a platform to bring up ideas with the whole team.

Seven

Conclusion

We hope you enjoyed these 51 management hacks. We threw a lot at you, but hopefully you can quickly begin to change your habits and behaviors to become a great manager. Not sure where to start? Try to identify the category that you think you could start working on today, and get to work on trying those hacks! If your performance reviews are approaching, try a few of the hacks from Reviews and Performance and then gather feedback from your employees about whether your changes helped ease the process. Soon you'll be a management superstar!

About Reflektive

Reflektive is a leader in providing innovative, real-time people management solutions for managers and their agile organizations. Founded in 2014, Reflektive securely delivers Real-Time Feedback and Requests, Goal Management, Performance Reviews, and Check-Ins applications in the cloud for more than 450 clients worldwide including AAR, Blue Origin, Comcast, Dollar Shave Club, Healthgrades, Instacart, Wavemaker Global, and Protective Life. Based in San Francisco, Reflektive secured funding from Andreessen Horowitz, Lightspeed Venture Partners, and TPG Growth and was recognized in Gartner's 2017 Cool Vendors in Human Capital Management report. Reflektive's mission is to create the first people management platform that helps employees and managers work better together. Visit reflektive.com to learn more and request a demo.

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