

THE *SUPERMANAGER*

A SHORT STORY ABOUT THE SECRETS OF
AN EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL MANAGER

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THE
SUPERMANAGER

It was a typical hot Sunday afternoon in late August in Southern California when Andrew Hernandez got the phone call. When his cell phone rang, he thought it was probably his mom calling to wish him good luck on the first day of his new job or see if the grandkids were excited about starting at a new school the next day.

But instead it was a good friend of his in Nashville telling him that Leon Cook had died in a car accident the day before. The funeral would be on Tuesday.

Andrew was completely stunned by the news.

Despite the horrible timing, Andrew knew deep down that he was definitely going to the funeral. His kids would probably be disappointed that both their mom and dad wouldn't be taking them to school on their first day. And Andrew's new boss was anxious for him to get started in his new position as soon as possible. However, this was something Andrew just needed to do.

There are certain people you spend relatively little time with who make a tremendous impact on your life. For Andrew, Leon was one of these people.

Over the past 12 years, Andrew had spent two years in Nashville, six years in Cleveland, and four years in Dallas before recently moving with his family to Los Angeles. He had been promoted three times and was now the youngest vice president in his company at

34 years old. None of this would have happened if he hadn't met Leon.

Therefore, shortly after receiving the call and getting over the initial shock of the news, Andrew spoke to his wife about going to the funeral. She completely agreed that he should go. Since she and Andrew had met in Cleveland after he was promoted from his position in Nashville, she had never met Leon. But she had listened to Andrew talk about him so much that she knew how special he was and how much he meant to Andrew.

Fortunately, their two young kids took the news well when they were told that Daddy wouldn't be there to take them to school tomorrow, because he needed to say goodbye to a special friend. And Andrew's new boss was very understanding of his need to go to the funeral. He gave Andrew his condolences and said he would see Andrew in the office later in the week after he got back.

Andrew's direct flight to Nashville on Southwest Airlines left Los Angeles just after 8 a.m. on Monday. It would take about four hours to get to Nashville, which gave Andrew plenty of time to reflect on everything that Leon had done for him...

12 YEARS EARLIER IN
NASHVILLE
WHEN ANDREW FIRST
MET LEON

Andrew moved to Nashville a few weeks after he graduated near the top of his class from one of the best business schools in the country. He got a position in a management training program at Harbinger Electronics, Inc., a large, very well respected consumer electronics company.

Although hundreds of recent college graduates applied, only 12 people across the country were selected to be part of the management training program. Andrew had made it his goal to be in the program after he first heard about it during his sophomore year.

Andrew arrived in Nashville full of confidence. He was 22 years old and ready to conquer the business world. But it didn't take long before Andrew was overwhelmed.

The management training program gave each person a lot of responsibility. The idea was to put the people in the program in a difficult situation and see who responded well. Those who did would be promoted. And those who didn't usually moved on to another company.

Each person in the program was given a two-year special project where they would need to hire and manage 6-8 people. When Andrew accepted the position, he had no idea that he would have to hire and manage a group of people so soon. In college, he had

worked on a lot of teams and did very well in them. But this was far beyond what he had ever done in school.

Andrew found out about this on the second day of his four-week orientation program, which provided lots of information about the company and his project. In less than one month, he was going to have to start the process of hiring a group of people who would help him complete the project over the next two years. Within a few days, Andrew went from being filled with confidence to being consumed with fear. He felt completely unprepared for the job he was about to do. And there seemed to be little hope that he would find the right answers.

* * * * *

On Wednesday of his first week of orientation, Andrew went to lunch at a nearby fast food restaurant named Big Todd's Chicken and Burgers that several of his co-workers had recommended. He quickly noticed that Big Todd's wasn't run like a typical fast food restaurant.

When Andrew first got there, the line was so long that he almost left. But he ended up staying and the orders were processed so quickly that it did not take very long for him to get to the front of the line. Furthermore, the cashier who took his order was very friendly and professional. She and the other employees he could see were all very neatly dressed.

While Andrew was eating his lunch in the dining room, he noticed that the employees seemed to be very

motivated and genuinely happy to be there. And when he went to the restroom before he left, Andrew was surprised by how clean it was.

Big Todd's made such a positive impression on Andrew that he decided to go back the next day. He thought there was a pretty good chance that he would not be as impressed as he was the day before.

But like the day before, the service at Big Todd's was still very efficient, the employees still seemed to be really motivated and genuinely happy to work there, and the restroom was still extremely clean. And as he was leaving, he heard a group of employees in the back singing happy birthday to another employee.

Andrew thought to himself, "Wow, who is the Supermanager that runs this place?!"

That evening when he got home, Andrew could not stop thinking about Big Todd's and how he would love to know what steps needed to be taken in order to have such a highly productive, motivated, and happy group of employees. He decided he was going to go back to Big Todd's the next day to see if he could get some tips from the manager on how to make this happen.

Andrew went back to Big Todd's on Friday for lunch. After he ordered his food, he asked to speak with the manager.

A man who appeared to be in his mid-to-late thirties came up to the counter. And then he said in a very pleasant tone, "Hi, I'm the manager. How can I help you? Is there something wrong with your order?"

"Oh, no," replied Andrew. "My food is just fine. This is actually a little hard to explain. It looks like

you're pretty busy right now. But when you have a few minutes, can you come talk to me?"

"OK, sure," the manager responded. "Just give me 5 or 10 minutes and I will come out to the dining room."

Andrew took his food out to the dining room and began eating. About five minutes later, the manager came out and sat down at his table.

Andrew said, "I'm really sorry to bother you. But I've just been so impressed by your group of employees and how well this place operates."

He went on to tell the manager about his new position and how he would soon be hiring and managing a group of employees.

He continued as the manager listened intently, "Honestly, I'm really worried about this. I've never managed a group of employees before. I have no idea what I should be doing. But what I do know is that whatever it is that you are doing here is obviously working. Everybody seems to be happy, productive, and motivated. It's like you're a Supermanager or something. And I would really appreciate it if you could give me some tips on how to be an effective manager."

The manager replied, "Thanks for the kind words. I really appreciate it. I've been managing fast food restaurants for over 15 years and it took me a long time to figure all of this out. Being a manager is one of the toughest jobs out there. Looking back, I know I've made tons of mistakes over the years. But I think I pretty much know what I'm doing now."

"Yeah, definitely," said Andrew. "Do you think you might be able to help me?"

“Before I respond to your question,” the manager replied, “I would like to ask you a question.”

“Sure,” Andrew responded. “Feel free to ask me anything.”

“OK, forgive me, but I’m going to be very direct with you.”

The manager continued, “Are you serious about wanting to be a good manager? I mean, are you really serious about it? While you sound genuine, there is a very big difference between talking a good game and having the desire and discipline to put the right ideas into practice. I just don’t want to waste my time if you are not going to be fully committed.”

Andrew quickly answered, “I absolutely promise to be fully committed. You have my word.”

The manager could tell by the look in Andrew’s eyes that he meant what he said.

“OK,” the manager said. “Here is how this will work. I have come up with seven principles that I follow as a manager. It would be way too much to try to teach you everything in one day. Therefore, why don’t we meet every day during your lunch break beginning next Monday? I will be out of town next Thursday through the following Monday, so we can meet for three days next week and four days the week after.

“I will teach you one principle each day. And, if you wouldn’t mind, please be here at 1:30 p.m. every day. I know that’s probably later than you usually have lunch. But the lunch rush here doesn’t usually end until about that time and I would prefer to discuss this with you without being interrupted. Does this sound good?”

Andrew exclaimed, “Absolutely, that sounds great! On the days we meet, I think I’ll just eat lunch at my desk around noon while I’m working. And then I’ll have my entire lunch hour open to meet with you.”

Leon responded, “On most days, we will probably only need around 15 or 20 minutes, so I think this ought to work out just fine.”

Andrew then reached out his hand and said, “By the way, my name is Andrew Hernandez. I’ll see you here Monday at 1:30 p.m. I’m really looking forward to it.”

The manager shook his hand firmly and replied, “It’s nice to meet you. My name is Leon Cook. I’ll see you on Monday, Andrew.”

SURROUND YOURSELF
WITH
HIGH-QUALITY EMPLOYEES

No matter how good or successful you are or how clever or crafty, your business and its future are in the hands of the people you hire.¹

Akio Morita
Co-founder and former CEO
Sony

Andrew showed up at Big Todd's just before 1:30 p.m. on Monday. Leon walked out to the dining room when he saw Andrew waiting for him and then they sat down at a table.

"Thanks again for doing this," said Andrew. "I'm really looking forward to learning from you. Also, is it OK if I take some notes?"

"You're very welcome," replied Leon. "I'm happy to do it. If you want to take some notes, that's totally fine. So shall we begin?"

"Absolutely," Andrew responded.

Leon said, "Like I mentioned on Friday, I have come up with seven principles that I follow as a manager. And each day, we will cover one of the principles. Today, I want to discuss the first and most important principle which is to surround yourself with high-quality employees."

He continued, "Let me tell you a story. As I mentioned on Friday, I have been managing fast food restaurants for over 15 years. My first promotion was from being a regular employee to being a shift supervisor. And considering I had never managed a group of employees before, I was doing a pretty good job at the beginning. My manager told me that she was proud of how well I was doing."

"That must have felt really good," Andrew replied.

“You bet,” said Leon. “The problem was that I started to get really cocky. After my manager praised my work, I thought I was a big shot. I acted like I was the king of the castle. To be completely honest, I started treating my employees very poorly. They didn’t appreciate this at all.

“And then one day, we got really busy around 8 p.m. We were swamped. But all of a sudden, the five employees I was managing each stopped working for five straight minutes. They just stood there and did absolutely nothing! I couldn’t believe what was happening. I know you work in an office environment where most of the time it wouldn’t be a big deal if everybody stopped working for five minutes. But in a fast food restaurant at a busy time, five minutes felt like an eternity.

Leon continued, “I tried doing all of their work and running the place by myself. But it was impossible. Some customers were getting really mad that it was taking so long for them to get their food. Others could see what was happening and thought it was hilarious. Fortunately, after five minutes, the employees worked really hard to process each order. But they definitely made their point.”

Andrew exclaimed, “That’s crazy! Did you fire all of the employees?!”

“No, I didn’t,” Leon responded. “I guess I figured that I probably got what I deserved considering how I had been treating them. I was taught a very important lesson that day. I realized that I can accomplish almost nothing on my own. While I’m in charge and that needs

to be respected by my employees, I learned that it's not really about me, it's about them. The only way I can be successful is if I can get them to be successful."

Andrew nodded his head in agreement.

Leon continued, "Therefore, I surround myself with the best employees that I can find. The whole process of having a highly motivated, highly productive staff starts with finding high-quality employees. If you don't do that, everything else is going to be a lot more difficult."

"OK, that makes sense," said Andrew. "But what is your definition of a high-quality employee?"

"Good question," replied Leon. "You will have to decide that for yourself. With each position, you will need to come up with a description of exactly what characteristics you want the employee to have and then go find somebody who best fits that description."

Leon pointed to the counter, "For example, Sarah has worked as a cashier here for the past six months. She has done an outstanding job. But if she were to leave, I would need to first come up with a description of what I would want her replacement to be like. Once you define what you want, you can then focus on finding the best person for the position.

"Just thinking out loud, but the ideal replacement for Sarah would be somebody just like her, a person who would:

- Show up to work every day and be here on time;
- Work hard;
- Treat customers well;
- Follow the dress code;

- Be trustworthy;
- Get along really well with the other employees;
- Be calm when things aren't going well; and
- Have the potential to eventually move into a management position."

Andrew inquired, "So where do you find really good employees?"

"Your question can be answered in one word," replied Leon.

Andrew asked, "And that is?"

Leon looked Andrew directly in the eyes and slowly said: "EVERYWHERE."

Andrew smiled and said, "Well, OK, but can you give me some examples of 'everywhere'?"

Leon smiled back and replied, "No, I can't. But you can. I've been doing most of the talking. And now I'm getting hungry. Therefore, I'm going to go get some food and bring it back here. Between now and the time I finish eating, your assignment is to write down in your notebook as many examples of 'everywhere' as you can. I can't wait to hear about all of the places you might find great employees!"

"Oh, you're making me work like a dog," joked Andrew. "But you got it."

Leon left to get his food and then returned to the table a few minutes later. Once he finished eating, he asked to see Andrew's list.

Andrew handed the notebook to Leon and said, "This is what I've come up with so far. Just so you know, the list includes places one might find different types of high-quality employees, not just somebody who would

work in a fast food restaurant. Since I work in an office environment, I also included some ways that one might try to find really good employees for that type of job.”

“That’s totally fine,” replied Leon. “Let me check it out.”
Here is what was written in Andrew’s notebook:

Possible places to find high-quality employees

Current employees

Company website

Customers of your business

Businesses where you are a customer

“Help wanted” signs you put up at a retail location

Friends and family

The local high school or college

Employment websites

Temp agencies

Previous jobs you have held

“Excellent work,” said Leon. “This is a fantastic list.”

“Thanks, I appreciate it,” replied Andrew.

Leon continued, “I think the key is to be open-minded about where you might find a high-quality employee. I also believe that it is very important to be proactive. I think the worst thing a manager can do is expect that really good employees are just going to always show up at your door. If I only hired people who asked to fill out applications and didn’t do anything else, my staff wouldn’t be even close to as good as it is today.”

Andrew responded, “It sounds like it may often take more time to find the right employee, but it is definitely worth the effort.”

“Exactly,” Leon replied.

He continued, “We are almost done today, but there is one more tip I’d like to give you about this. And that is to hire for attitude and train for skill. A person’s attitude is nearly impossible to change, while the skills that an employee needs to acquire can often be learned relatively easily. Somebody who is unfriendly, difficult to work with, and lazy will almost always be a poor hire even if that person has the experience and skills to do the job. It usually doesn’t take long before the person has a cancerous effect on the organization by bringing their negative attitude to the position and adversely affecting everybody they work with.

“However, a candidate with the right attitude should be strongly considered, because many skills can be learned in a short period of time. For example, in an office environment like where you work, perhaps a job may require knowledge of a certain computer program. The employee could be sent to a training class to acquire that skill. It would be a mistake to eliminate an otherwise high-quality candidate, because the person doesn’t have experience with a software program that could be learned in a short period of time.

“Of course, let me emphasize that this is just a general rule. It has limits. Typically, the higher level the position, the less this rule applies. There is a point where the training the employee needs is too costly. And, obviously, technical knowledge is extremely important in a lot of positions. CPAs and professional engineers are good examples of this. Therefore, you can’t always just hire somebody with a good attitude if they don’t

have the skills needed for the position and those skills can't be easily acquired. But it is a good general rule to keep in mind, so you don't rule out a potential employee who could turn out really well with a little training."

Andrew responded, "I remember reading an article in *Fast Company* magazine about Nucor hiring for attitude and training for skill. Nucor is a large steel producer that is known for having a highly productive workforce. I read that one way they find good employees is to observe the construction workers when a new plant is being built. And then the best ones are recruited to stay on once the plant is functioning."

Leon said, "I love it! This is exactly what I'm talking about. I'm sure those construction workers probably knew little or nothing about the steel industry. But it sounds like they have the work ethic that you really can't teach. That's a very creative way to find really good employees."

Leon looked at his watch and said, "Well, I think we're done for the day. Same time and place tomorrow?"

"That sounds good," replied Andrew. "I'll be here."

After Leon left to go back to work, Andrew stayed at the table and wrote down the following notes before returning to his office:

Surround yourself with high-quality employees

- *The people you hire are EXTREMELY important*
- *Define exactly what you want in an employee*
- *Look everywhere for high-quality employees*
- *Hire for attitude, train for skill*

TRAIN EMPLOYEES WELL

Because we entrust the Starbucks brand to the hands of the baristas (employees), it's vitally important that we hire great people and imbue them with our passion for coffee. We do that through a training program whose sophistication and depth are rare in retail.²

Howard Schultz
Chairman and CEO
Starbucks

Leon and Andrew met at Big Todd's the next day at 1:30 p.m.

After they sat down, Leon smiled at Andrew and said, "We're going to have some fun today."

Andrew replied, "That's great. I'm always up for that."

"Actually," Leon responded, "I probably should have said that I'm going to have some fun. I'm not sure how much fun it's going to be for you."

"Uh oh," Andrew said. "Now you're making me nervous."

"Don't worry, it won't hurt," Leon paused for effect and then smiled, "...at least not much."

Leon stood up and said, "OK, can you stand up and come over here next to me?"

Andrew reluctantly stood up and walked over to where Leon was standing. He wondered what was going to happen next.

"Please close your eyes," Leon said.

Andrew replied, "I'll do it. But you've got to promise me that there is a management lesson in here somewhere!"

Leon responded, "I promise!" Andrew then closed his eyes.

Leon continued, "Here is what is going to happen. I'm going to slowly spin you around 3-4 times. And

then while keeping your eyes closed the whole time, I want you to walk out of the door that you just entered a few minutes ago.”

“Oh goodness,” Andrew sighed.

“Don’t worry,” Leon responded. “I’ll be right beside you to make sure that you don’t get in too much trouble. Now let’s begin.”

After Leon spun him around several times, Andrew just stood there and did nothing for a little while. But then he reached out in different directions with both arms to see if anything was around him. Once he knew nothing was there, Andrew tentatively took his first step, not knowing if he was headed in the right direction. He then reached out with his arms again and did not touch anything.

Feeling a little more confident, Andrew took another step forward in the same direction without hitting anything. However, when he tried to take another step, one of his legs hit an object.

Leon told him, “You just ran into a table, Andrew.”

Andrew then changed directions and reached his arms out in front of him. After taking a few steps, his same leg hit another object.

Leon said, “You just hit a chair. If your arms had been just a little bit lower, you would have felt the chair. By the way, the people in the drive-thru are checking you out. You should see the looks on their faces.”

Andrew replied, “I’m happy to provide the entertainment at Big Todd’s today. Please let them know that I accept tips.”

Leon smiled and said, “Will do!”

Andrew proceeded to turn in another direction. Learning from what just happened, he moved his arms both up and down and to the left and right to make sure he didn't run into any more furniture. After moving several steps forward, he felt his hands press on a door.

Andrew exclaimed, "Yes! I found the door!" And then he continued to push on it expecting to go outside.

Leon burst into laughter and said, "Congratulations, Andrew! You are now entering the women's restroom!"

Andrew gasped, "Oh, no."

He continued, "Well, at least I know where I am now."

Andrew then began walking slowly to the correct door. Within 30 seconds, he made it outside.

Leon started clapping and said, "Yes! You did it! Now you can open your eyes."

"Wow," Andrew exclaimed. "That is definitely an experience that I will never forget."

Leon replied, "Thanks a bunch for playing along and being such a good sport. Now let's go back inside and talk about this."

After Leon and Andrew went inside and sat down, Andrew said, "So what in the world does this have to do with managing employees?"

Leon responded, "One of the things you will need to do as a manager is what I like to call 'turn the light on' for employees."

Andrew replied, "I don't know what you mean."

"Let me explain," Leon said. "When employees start a new job, the experience is a lot like a person trying to walk through a room that is totally dark. I wanted you to have a memorable experience along the same

lines, so you would remember what it felt like for a long time. By closing your eyes, you basically just got to go through the same experience as if you had your eyes open in a very dark room.

“The second principle is to train employees well. When I say ‘turn the light on’ for employees, what I’m talking about is training employees to the point where they can do the job well on their own. It’s like going from trying to walk around a room when it is completely dark versus when the light is turned on. When the light is on, you can obviously move around much faster and you are much less likely to bump into furniture. And when employees are trained well, they can get their work done much faster and will make fewer mistakes.

“Let me tell you a story that will explain why I’m so sensitive about this issue.

“The first job I ever got was at a local pizza restaurant when I was 16 years old. I was so excited on my first day. It was only a couple of weeks after I got my driver’s license.

“Unfortunately, my first day there was absolutely awful. My shift started at 4 p.m. When I arrived, my manager quickly showed me around the restaurant and then took a total of about 3-4 minutes to show me how to do five different tasks. He obviously ran through each one very quickly. And I wasn’t given a chance to practice doing the tasks myself.

“Well, I’m sure you can see where this is going. I started at the front counter running the register. My manager wanted to give me an hour or two of experience

running the register before it got busy. But even though it was early, within a few minutes lots of people came into the store. I was completely overwhelmed.

“I was trying to go fast to keep up with all of the customers. And then I ended up charging the wrong amount to two customers in a row. My manager snapped at me and then told me to start working behind the counter area where the pizzas are taken out of the oven and then packaged.

“Since I really didn’t want to make another mistake, I did my best to make sure I did everything right. Unfortunately, I was working way too slowly. And then the pizzas started getting backed up in the oven. Once he saw what was going on, my manager yelled at me and told me to just go wash dishes. I ended up doing that the rest of the night.

“I know part of what happened was just bad timing. It was very unusual for us to get busy that early even on a Friday. And I should mention that my manager apologized to me the next day. He said he shouldn’t have treated me that way. He told me that nobody else would have done any better with such limited training.

“However, since that was the first experience I ever had on a job, it left a very strong impression on me. Even though that happened a really long time ago, I still have a very clear memory of it. Therefore, I always do my best to train my employees well, so they never have to go through what I did. I thoroughly explain their job to them. And as they are learning to do their job, I am right by their side to guide them in the right direction while providing a lot of encouragement.”

Andrew said, “It certainly sounds like you take training employees very seriously.”

Leon replied, “I really do. I’ve found that effective training programs have numerous benefits. They can accelerate the learning process, make employee morale high from the beginning, reduce employee turnover, establish lines of communication between the manager and the employee, and create a bond between the employee and the company.

“On the other hand, training employees ineffectively stunts the growth of new employees by making them go through unnecessary frustrations. When employees start a new job, there is a lot of nervousness, some excitement, and even a little fear. Employees want to blend in to their environment and be accepted as soon as possible. If the initial starting period is too uncomfortable for employees, they may start to wonder if they made the right decision to take the job and may leave soon after they are hired.”

Andrew nodded his head and then asked, “So do you have any specific tips about training employees?”

Leon responded, “Absolutely, I have several. When training, remember that the quickest way for employees to learn a new skill is for them to jump in and do it. You can only go so far by explaining something to the employee. After you go through the process of explaining a task, let the employee get their feet wet while you sit back and give guidance when it is needed. I like to watch employees closely when they are first being trained and then slowly move back over time as they start to understand what they are doing.

“And during this time, I should mention that it is very important to praise employees when they do a task correctly. If a task is done partially correct, then praise what was done right and tactfully let the employee know where a mistake was made and how it should be corrected.

“Also, I encourage employees to ask lots of questions. At times, I think employees can be reluctant to ask questions when they are starting a new job, because they might be worried about wasting the manager’s time or asking what might be perceived as a ‘stupid’ question.”

Andrew replied, “I like the saying that the only ‘stupid’ question is the one that is not asked.”

“Me, too,” Leon said. “I view each question as an opportunity to teach the employee more about their job. Therefore, I encourage employees to ask lots of questions during the initial training. And I tell them that I will always be there to answer any follow-up questions that they may have.”

Leon continued, “In addition, I try to explain the big picture to employees. It can be very easy to only train employees on the specific steps needed to do their job. But I also try to give employees an idea of how what they are doing fits into the overall operation and explain the reasons why things are done a certain way.

“For example, if I were training an employee in a corporate environment like where you work, here is what I would do. I would include information about the overall company as well as the employee’s department and individual job. This might include discussing the

policies and procedures of the company, key executives, and culture. And I would also describe what products and services the company provides as well as give information about its customers and competitors. Finally, I might take the employee around to other departments in the company and provide the names and titles of key people as well as tips regarding their work styles and personalities.

“Well, I’ve covered a lot today,” Leon added. “Do you have any other questions before we finish?”

“I do have one,” Andrew replied. “How long does the training process typically last?”

Leon responded, “That will totally depend on the type of job. I can teach somebody to do certain tasks here really well in less than an hour. Of course, they would still need time to improve by doing the task on their own over and over again. And as I mentioned, I make myself available in case the employee ever has any follow-up questions. But in this scenario, the overall training process doesn’t take very long.”

He continued, “On the other hand, some jobs might take weeks or months to initially learn. Therefore, the range of time it could take to train an employee really varies quite a bit.

“However, with that being said, my approach is that I’m never done ‘turning the light on’ for employees. Even if employees are beyond the initial training phase, I’m always looking to keep them in the loop by sharing information that is relevant. There are always new developments that need to be communicated. And when employees know what’s going on and what we’re

trying to do, they usually do a much better job.”

Leon asked, “Does that answer your question?”

Andrew said, “It sure does.”

“OK, I’ll see you tomorrow,” Leon said.

Andrew said, “Look forward to it.” And then he wrote down the following notes in his notebook:

Train employees well

- *Remember what it is like to be a new employee who needs training*
- *Encourage lots of questions*
- *Explain the big picture to employees*
- *Continue to share information with experienced employees*

COMMUNICATE THE END
RESULT YOU WANT,
THEN EMPOWER EMPLOYEES
TO ACHIEVE IT

*Be like jockey Willie Shoemaker. He's the best in the business because he has the lightest touch on the reins. They say the horse never knows he's there – unless he's needed.*³

Harvey Mackay
Founder and Chairman
MackayMitchell Envelope Company

When Andrew arrived at Big Todd's on Wednesday afternoon, Leon was already waiting for him. He was sitting at one of the tables in the dining room and had a large map of the U.S. spread across it.

"Hi Andrew," said Leon. "How's it going?"

"I'm doing well," replied Andrew. "Wow, that's a pretty big map."

Leon responded, "Indeed it is. I'm going to use the map as an example as part of today's lesson. We are going to discuss what the role of a manager is. What is that role? How much should managers be involved with the work done by their employees? A lot? A little? Somewhere in between? This is what we're going to discuss today."

He continued, "So are you ready to start?"

Andrew replied, "Let's do it."

Leon began by pointing at the map and saying, "OK, let's imagine that I'm a manager who needs an employee to complete the task of driving from Los Angeles to New York City in ten days. Let's discuss what the manager's role should be in this scenario.

"But first," Leon added, "please keep in mind that I'm speaking in very general terms here. You will need to adapt this to your specific situation.

"With that in mind, here is one possible approach:

"The manager could decide exactly what route to

take, how many hours of driving are done per day, what time of day the driving is done, where to stop for gas, where to eat, and where to sleep. The manager could also follow the employee all across the country to make sure that the specific instructions are carried out properly.”

Andrew responded, “This sounds a lot like micro-managing.”

“You could definitely call it that,” Leon replied. “I would also call it managing the process.”

He continued, “On the other hand, the manager could tell the employee exactly what needed to be done and then let the employee decide how to complete the task in the allotted time frame. In this case, the manager would be managing the result.”

“Managing the result seems like a much better way to go,” said Andrew. “When you think about it, does it really matter if the employee goes through Denver, Chicago, and Cleveland instead of Phoenix, Dallas, and Washington, D.C. as long as they arrive in New York City safely and on time?”

“That’s exactly right,” Leon responded. “It really goes back to a very fundamental question. What is the role of a manager?”

Leon looked Andrew directly in the eyes and said, “I believe that the role of a manager is to get things done through other people. Therefore, the third principle is to communicate the end result you want, then empower employees to achieve it.”

Andrew pondered what Leon said and then replied, “This seems to make sense. But there are a couple of

things I'm wondering about. The first is that yesterday you told me how important it is to spend time with employees. And now it sounds like you are saying that spending time with employees might not be a very good idea. Can you explain this?"

"Let me clarify what I'm saying," Leon said. "When an employee is new, you definitely want to spend the time necessary to train them well. As I mentioned yesterday, this is extremely important."

He continued, "However, once the initial training period is basically over, you want to empower employees so they can do the job on their own. But you should still be available for employees in case they have any questions.

"The basic answer to your question is that employees must be trained before they can be empowered."

"Yes, now I get it," Andrew said. "Thanks for the clarification."

Andrew added, "I was also wondering how the situation should be handled if the employee in this example chose to drive way off course. For example, what should the manager do if over the first three days the employee drove north from Los Angeles through San Francisco and Portland and ended up in Seattle? While this would defy common sense since New York City is located east of Los Angeles, an empowered employee could choose to do this. Basically, I want to know what should be done if an employee is doing something that is obviously not productive."

"That's an excellent point," Leon replied. "But empowering employees doesn't mean that they have

complete freedom to do absolutely anything they want.

“There are two ways that this should be handled. The first is that the manager should meet upfront with the employee to discuss which route will be taken. They can work together and figure out what options might be best. For example, heavy road construction or adverse weather conditions could affect which route the employee might want to take.

“This discussion will allow the manager to be informed about what the employee plans on doing. The scenario you described with the employee driving to Seattle would not happen if the manager and employee had discussed which route would be taken upfront.

“The second way this should be handled is for the manager to ask the employee to give daily progress reports. This would allow the manager to know where the employee is each day. If the employee ever gets too far off course, the manager can address the issue.”

Leon continued, “This gets into one of the toughest aspects of being a manager which is holding employees accountable by confronting unproductive behavior. If you hire really good employees in the first place, you will have to do this a lot less than if you hire employees that aren’t so good. But this is going to happen no matter what. It’s just part of the job. And it’s obviously not a fun part.

“Confronting unproductive behavior is like stopping the spreading of a disease. Once there is a problem, it is unlikely that it will solve itself. Usually, what ends up happening is that the problem gets worse. Most big problems start out as little ones. Therefore, you pretty

much have the choice of dealing with the problem as it exists now or dealing with a worse problem later.

“Honestly, I’m like most people in that I’m uncomfortable confronting unproductive behavior. But if it needs to be done, I try to do it in a respectful manner. Unless it involves something that needs to be addressed immediately, I do it in private. And I try to let the employee know that I’m addressing their behavior and not who they are as a person.”

Andrew inquired, “So how will I know when to confront unproductive behavior?”

“That’s a difficult question to answer,” Leon responded. “You definitely have to choose your battles. If I confronted every single minor issue I ever had with each employee, nobody would ever work for me. Some things you just have to let go. I’m not trying to be funny or patronizing, but if you ever get married, you will know exactly what I’m talking about.

“However, if I have a constant nagging feeling in my gut about an issue with an employee, then I know that it probably needs to be confronted.”

Andrew asked, “Can you give me an example of unproductive behavior from an employee that you wouldn’t confront?”

Leon replied, “Sure, here is a good example. One of my employees, Mike, doesn’t have his own car right now, so he takes the bus to work every day. He normally works from 2 p.m. to 10 p.m. Well, he almost always takes the 1:15 p.m. bus that picks him up near where he lives and gets here about 15 minutes early at around 1:45 p.m. However, usually about once per

month, something will go wrong and Mike will be 15 minutes late. There could be a variety of reasons for this. Maybe he showed up to the bus stop a couple of minutes late or the bus arrived at his stop early and left before 1:15 p.m.”

He continued, “Mike will always apologize to me over and over again when he is late. But when this happens, I always tell him it’s totally fine and these things are going to happen. Mike is a really good worker, so there is no way I’m going to confront him about being late once per month. Now, on the other hand, if he were late three or four days in a row, I would definitely address the issue in a tactful manner. Do you see the difference?”

Andrew said, “Yes, I see what you’re saying.”

Leon started folding up the map and said, “I think we’ve covered that issue, so we’re all done for the day. Remember, I won’t be here tomorrow through Monday. Therefore, the next time we will meet is next Tuesday.”

“That’s right,” Andrew replied. “I had forgotten that you won’t be here for a few days. Are you going on a short vacation or something?”

“Actually, yes,” Leon said. “My wife and I are going to take a trip to the Biltmore Estate in Asheville, North Carolina. We’re leaving tomorrow morning and will be coming back on Monday afternoon. My wife’s parents are going to take care of our twin girls while we are gone. Neither of us have ever been to Biltmore, but several of our friends have suggested that we go there. It should be a lot of fun. I work pretty hard around here, so I need a break from time to time.”

“I hope you both have a wonderful time,” Andrew responded. “And I look forward to talking again on Tuesday.”

“Me, too,” Leon said. “Have a good weekend.”

Leon got up from his chair and went back to work. And then Andrew spent the next couple of minutes writing down the following notes in his notebook:

*Communicate the end result you want,
then empower employees to achieve it*

- *The role of a manager is to get things done through other people*
- *Employees must be trained before they can be empowered*
- *Hold employees accountable by confronting unproductive behavior*

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

No psychological weapon is more potent than example. An executive who seeks to achieve results through the people who work under his direction must himself demonstrate at least as high a standard of performance as he hopes to get from his subordinates...When an executive's bad example or his double standards become known, morale and output plummet in his department.⁴

J. Paul Getty
Founder
Getty Oil

Andrew arrived at Big Todd's on Tuesday at the normal meeting time. After he sat down at a table in the dining room, a cashier walked over to him.

He said, "Are you Andrew?"

"Yes, I am," Andrew replied.

The cashier continued, "Leon is actually cleaning the men's restroom. He asked me to let you know that he is in there."

With a slightly puzzled look on his face, Andrew said, "OK, thanks." And then he proceeded to go see Leon in the men's restroom.

When Andrew entered the restroom, he noticed that Leon was cleaning one of the toilets.

Andrew inquired, "What in the world are you doing, Leon?"

Leon looked up and responded, "Oh, hi Andrew. Just give me a minute. I'm almost done in here."

Andrew said, "My goodness, you just got back from your vacation and now you're cleaning toilets. You're the manager, why don't you just get somebody else to do this?"

The wise teacher just looked at the student and smiled.

Andrew started to figure out what was going on and asked, "Does this have something to do with what you're going to teach me today?"

“You bet,” replied Leon. “Just give me a minute to finish up in here and wash my hands. I’ll meet you in the dining room.”

A few minutes later, Leon walked over to the table where Andrew was sitting. As Leon sat down, Andrew said, “Let me guess. The fourth principle is to lead by example.”

Leon responded, “That’s exactly right. You’re a quick study.”

He continued, “And why would I want to do that? Why do I clean the men’s restroom two or three times every single week I’m here?”

Andrew pondered this for a few moments and then said, “Well, my guess is that having clean restrooms here is very important to you. But it’s probably something that you have a hard time getting employees to do. After all, who wants to clean restrooms?”

“However, if the manager cleans the restrooms, then it’s going to be extremely difficult for an employee to complain about having to do it. Through your actions, you are basically setting the standard for your employees to follow.”

Leon replied, “Once again, very well done. You’ve pretty much covered it.”

He continued, “The most effective way to teach employees how to act is through your own example.

“For example, as a manager, think about all of the characteristics your ideal employee might have. Now, apply that standard to yourself and think about how well you live up to it.

“For example, do you work hard? Do you work smart?

Do you treat customers well? Do you show up on time every day? Do you work well with others? Do you pay attention to details? Do you dress appropriately? Do you do things right the first time? Do you hold yourself accountable for your mistakes? Are you enjoyable to work with? Do you have a standard of excellence? Do you have a pleasant demeanor? Are you thrifty with the company's money? Do you adhere to company policy? Do you practice the company's values?

"You should not ask your employees to do anything that you are not willing to do yourself. If you do, then you are facing an uphill battle. The line 'Do as I say, not as I do' should not be used by managers. You not only have to talk the talk, but you have to walk the walk. However, if you set a good example, then you will raise the bar for your employees. The message that is communicated without saying a word is, 'I do it, so you should be able to do it, too.'"

Andrew said, "I can see that leading by example is not easy. But it's obviously an extremely powerful management technique."

"Indeed it is," responded Leon. "This is very straightforward, so I think we're done for the day unless you have any questions."

"I think I've got it," Andrew replied.

"By the way," Leon said, "we're now more than halfway through the seven lessons!"

Andrew exclaimed, "That's right! I've learned so much already. And I'm looking forward to what we'll cover over the rest of the week. I'll see you here tomorrow."

Leon replied, “See you then.”

Before heading back to the office, Andrew wrote down the following notes in his notebook:

Lead by example

- *The most effective way to teach employees how to act is through your own example*
- *When you want employees to act a certain way, apply that standard to yourself and think about how well you live up to it*

LISTEN TO EMPLOYEES

*The open door policy is very important at HP because it characterizes the management style to which we are dedicated. It means managers are available, open, and receptive...It is a procedure that encourages and, in fact, ensures that the communication flow be upward as well as downward.*⁵

David Packard
Co-founder & former CEO
Hewlett-Packard

When Andrew arrived at Big Todd's that sunny Wednesday, Leon was sitting outside at a table waiting for him.

"Hi Andrew," said Leon. "It's a really nice day, so I thought I'd wait for you out here."

"Hi Leon," replied Andrew. "It certainly is a beautiful day."

Leon said, "We're going to take our first field trip today. I need to get the oil changed in my car. The place I go to is only a couple of blocks away. I just called over there and they said they aren't busy right now. So are you up for a little field trip?"

"Absolutely," replied Andrew.

Leon and Andrew got in Leon's car and arrived at Bill's Fast Oil a few minutes later. One customer was getting their oil changed in the first bay and the other two were available. Leon pulled into the third bay on the right-hand side of the facility. He asked for a full service oil change and then started the lesson after he and Andrew sat down in the waiting room.

"Andrew, let me tell you a story," Leon said. "My sister is a vice president in charge of marketing for a medical devices company down in Orlando, Florida. She was recently in town for a conference and spent the weekend afterward with me and my family before going back to Orlando. While she was here, she told me

about a very interesting situation in her company.

“One of her best friends at the company is the director of business development. They usually go to lunch about once a month and often discuss how things are going in their departments. Around a year ago, he started having some problems with one of his employees who used to be one of his best. The problems started around the time he chose a person outside of the company for the assistant director of business development position which he thought she wanted.

“After this happened, the employee often took extra time at lunch. But she always left right on time. And while she was usually cheerful before, she became less friendly and a bit short-tempered at work. She would even stay on personal calls when they needed to be taking care of important business.”

Andrew inquired, “So what ended up happening?”

Leon responded, “Well, the director of business development kept mentioning this situation to my sister when they would meet for lunch. So my sister suggested that he talk to the employee about what was happening. She thought if he just listened to the employee and heard her side of the story that the situation might get resolved.”

Andrew asked, “Did he end up taking your sister’s advice?”

“He sure did,” replied Leon. “They had a long conversation about what was happening. And here is what he found out.”

He continued, “The employee had recently gotten a divorce from her high school sweetheart after they

were separated for a while and unable to reconcile their problems. The employee loved her job and actually wasn't even interested in the assistant director of business development position. The timing was purely a coincidence.

"Her separation and divorce had really taken a toll on her. For example, when she and her husband were together, he would drop their daughter off at day care every morning and pick her up after work. However, after the separation, she had to take over this responsibility. This was especially difficult after work, because the day care center closed at 6:30 p.m. and charged a late fee of \$1 per minute. Since she worked until 6 p.m. and the facility was nearly 30 minutes away, she would always have to leave work right on time and was constantly worried about being late.

"In addition, around this time, her mother had started having health problems that the doctors had trouble diagnosing. She had to speak many times with several different doctors to try to figure out what was happening with her mother. She even started doing many of her chores during lunch, because that was one of the few times during the day that she had free.

"She told the director of business development that she knew the problems in her personal life were negatively affecting her work life and desperately wanted to talk to her manager about it. But she thought that it was best to not bring personal issues into the office."

Andrew replied, "Wow, that's a great example of how there are two sides to every story. How did the situation get resolved?"

Leon replied, “That’s very true. The situation was actually resolved with a very simple solution. The director of business development ended up allowing her to have 30 more minutes for lunch, so she would have enough time to eat, do chores, and handle her mother’s situation. And she was also allowed to leave 30 minutes earlier, so she would not have to constantly worry about making it to the day care center by 6:30 p.m. Then, in order to make up for the time she missed during the day, she would do computer work at home every night for an hour after her daughter went to sleep.”

He continued, “This story shows the importance of the fifth principle.”

Andrew inquired, “And that is...?”

“The fifth principle is to listen to employees,” said Leon. “As this example shows, one of the benefits of listening to employees is that you uncover problems. Listening to employees to uncover problems is a lot like periodically changing the oil in your car. If you don’t change the oil, problems will begin to build up until that dreaded day comes when you are stuck on the side of the road after your car has broken down and you have to call a tow truck. Just as getting your oil changed regularly will help ensure that your car is in top working condition, listening to employees to uncover problems will help ensure that your employees are in top working condition.”

Andrew nodded his head and was in deep thought as he processed what he was told.

And then an employee from Bill’s Fast Oil walked up to Leon and said, “Mr. Cook, your car is all ready to go.”

Leon replied, "Great, that was quick. I really appreciate it."

Leon paid for the oil change and then he and Andrew headed back to Big Todd's. The lesson continued at the table outside where Leon had been sitting earlier.

Leon said, "Being a good listener is one of the key abilities of an effective manager. Last week, we talked about the importance of sharing information with employees. When you listen to employees, your purpose is to get employees to share information with you."

He continued, "In addition to uncovering problems, another reason I listen to employees is to get suggestions. Employees know more about their jobs than anybody else. And besides being experts at their jobs, employees can bring a fresh perspective to analyzing the organization's problems, because they have a different set of life experiences. Therefore, I have developed the habit of asking employees 'What do you think?'"

Andrew asked, "I'm sure you must get a lot of good ideas from employees. But what do you do when your employees give you ideas that you don't think are very good?"

Leon replied, "I let them know upfront that we may have to agree to disagree about some of their ideas. Another possibility is that I might end up implementing a part of the suggestion or modifying it a little. I've found that most employees are totally fine with this. My experience has been that they usually feel good about being heard even if you don't completely agree with every idea they have.

“In addition, there may come a time when you can’t do anything about an employee suggestion even though you agree it’s a good idea.”

Andrew responded, “Can you give me an example of this?”

Leon said, “Yes, this can happen when you don’t have the authority to implement the idea. For example, I used to be the manager of a pizza restaurant. And we had numerous complaints about the quality of the sauce that we were using. One of my employees suggested that we should try out some new pizza sauce vendors and then choose the best one to replace the sauce we had been using. I thought it was a really good idea.

“But I had to tell the employee that we couldn’t pursue it, because our restaurant was a franchisee and the franchise agreement stated that the franchisor had control over all of the ingredients that were in the pizza.”

Andrew replied, “I see. That makes sense.”

Leon looked at his watch and said, “I know you need to go back to your office pretty soon, so we’re almost done for the day. But one last point I wanted to make is that listening to employees’ ideas can also be a tremendous morale booster. Most workers would cherish the opportunity to give input on issues involving their work. And when you listen to the ideas that your employees have, the message being communicated to them is that you value what they have to say. This is one of the best compliments a manager can give an employee.

“Also, if you listen to employees and are open to their ideas, then employees will likely be more willing to fully embrace the things you ask them to do.”

Leon looked inside the dining room at a young man in his late teens who was working hard at cleaning the tables and straightening up the chairs.

He said, “Speaking of listening to employees, that’s Ricky Stewart. He’s an outstanding employee. And I really admire him as a person, because he’s had a pretty tough life. Around six months ago, something happened with Ricky that reminded me of the powerful impact that good management techniques can have on other people. In all my years of being a manager, I’ve had countless proud moments. But this meant the most to me even though it might not seem like a really big deal.”

Andrew inquired, “So what happened?”

Leon answered, “Ricky came up to me and said...”

Leon was interrupted by the sound of the diesel engines of two large buses pulling into the parking lot at Big Todd’s.

Leon exclaimed, “Oh goodness! It looks like there might be some hungry passengers on those buses.”

He got up quickly and said, “Andrew, I’ve got to get back to work. But I’ll see you here tomorrow.”

Though Andrew was disappointed he didn’t hear the end of the story, he responded, “OK, thanks. I’ll see you then.”

Leon rushed inside and Andrew wrote down the following notes in his notebook before going back to his office at Harbinger Electronics:

Listen to employees

- *Uncover problems*
- *Get employee suggestions*

PRAISE GOOD WORK

Nothing else can quite substitute for a few well-chosen, well-timed, sincere words of praise. They're absolutely free – and worth a fortune.⁶

Sam Walton
Founder and former CEO
Wal-Mart

Leon was watering plants in the dining room when Andrew showed up at Big Todd's on Thursday afternoon.

Andrew said, "How's it going today, Leon?"

Leon replied, "I'm doing really well. I just have a couple more plants to water and I'll be ready to meet with you."

Andrew responded, "No problem. Take your time."

Once Leon was finished watering the plants, he walked over to the table where Andrew was sitting and sat down across from him.

Leon got a serious look on his face and said, "Andrew, I just wanted to let you know that you've been doing a really good job so far. You've been here on time every day and continue to be very eager to learn. You listen really well and ask a lot of good questions."

Andrew replied, "Thanks so much, Leon. That means a lot to me. I'm definitely trying to do my best to absorb what you're teaching me. And I'm extremely grateful that you're taking the time to do this for me."

"You're very welcome," Leon responded. "I've enjoyed it a lot."

He continued, "OK, are you ready to start today's lesson?"

"I'm ready to go," Andrew confirmed.

Leon pointed to some of the plants in the dining

room and asked, “What do you think would happen to those plants if I never gave them water?”

Andrew quickly answered, “Well, the leaves would soon become brown and wilted. And it probably wouldn’t take very long for the plants to die.”

Leon countered, “And what would happen to those plants if I gave them the right amount of water?”

Andrew replied, “You would be giving the plants the best chance to be healthy and live as long as possible. The leaves would be green and vibrant like they are right now.”

“That’s exactly right,” Leon said. “And do you know what watering plants reminds me of?”

“I don’t know,” Andrew answered. “What is that?”

Leon responded, “It reminds me of praising employees.”

Leon let Andrew think about this for a few seconds. And then Andrew said, “OK, I get it. The plants are the morale and motivation of your employees and the water is praise.”

“That’s correct,” Leon confirmed.

He continued, “The sixth principle is to praise good work. When employees are complimented, they get a warm, fuzzy, magical feeling inside. In addition, positive reinforcement of actions usually gets those actions repeated. Employees will often begin to seek out more ways to earn praise by working harder and more productively. Therefore, I do my best to praise employees when they do a good job.”

Andrew inquired, “So do you praise employees through something like an ‘Employee of the Month’ program?”

Leon replied, “Actually, no. While some managers may disagree with me on this, I’m not a fan of ‘Employee of the Month’ programs. They just have never worked for me. And what I mean is that when I have used them in the past they haven’t accomplished my goal of improving the productivity of all employees.”

He continued, “Here is another way to look at it. We have around 10-15 plants in the dining room. Would it make sense for me to give water to just one plant and give none to the rest?”

Andrew asked, “But if you praise the mediocre employees, aren’t you just encouraging mediocre behavior to continue?”

Leon responded with intensity, “Let me be very clear. Mediocre employees don’t work at Big Todd’s. I won’t tolerate them. Do you remember what the first and most important principle is?”

Andrew replied, “Sure, it is to surround yourself with high-quality employees.”

Leon continued, “Therefore, since I usually hire the right employees in the first place, I usually have plenty of opportunities to praise good work. But I definitely believe that praise should only be given when employees genuinely do a good job. If you praise an employee when they don’t deserve it, then you are just encouraging mediocre behavior to continue.”

Andrew said, “Yes, I see. Also, this might be a stupid question, but...”

Leon interrupted, “Andrew, please remember there are no stupid questions!”

Andrew responded, “That’s right! OK, here is my

question. Is it possible to praise employees too much?"

Leon thought about it and said, "While I've never seen it or heard about that happening, it's certainly possible. If you think about the plants, it would definitely not be a good idea to water them 20 times per day. I suppose when it comes down to watering plants or praising employees, you just need to find the sweet spot in the middle between the two extremes of doing too much and not enough."

Leon continued, "I think we're almost done for the day, but there is one more issue that I want to cover. Although this is unrelated to work performance, another way I like to recognize employees is by celebrating their birthdays.

"This shows that you care about the employee as a person, because their birthday is probably the most important day of the year for them. I think it's pretty sad that you can spend just as much time with a group of people at work as you do with your own family and not celebrate each other's birthdays."

Andrew replied, "I remember hearing a bunch of employees singing happy birthday on my second day here a couple of weeks ago."

Leon smiled and said, "Yes, that was Earl's birthday."

Andrew continued, "I really like this idea. But aren't there a few people who won't want their birthdays to be celebrated? How do you handle this?"

"Good point," Leon answered. "While it doesn't happen very often, I have dealt with this situation a couple of times. The way I handle this is by asking each new employee when they are first hired if they are

comfortable having their birthday celebrated. If they aren't, then of course I honor their wishes."

He continued, "Well, that's it for today. We only have one more day to go."

Andrew replied, "I know. I can't believe it's almost over."

Leon inquired, "Speaking of our last day, do you play golf very much?"

"Not a lot," replied Andrew. "I usually play a couple of times per year. I'm not very good, but I enjoy going out and playing every once in a while."

"I'm not very good either," said Leon. "But I also have fun playing from time to time."

He continued, "On our last day, we're going to go on another field trip. Assuming it's OK with you, we'll be playing some golf."

"Sure, I would enjoy that," Andrew confirmed. "Where will we meet?"

Leon asked, "Do you know where Lakeview Point golf course is?"

Andrew responded, "Yes, it's only a few miles from here. It's pretty close to where I live."

"Let's meet there after you are done with work," said Leon. "I'm working until 5 p.m. tomorrow afternoon, so I can meet you there at 5:30 p.m. Will that work for you?"

"It does," Andrew answered. "I'll see you at Lakeview Point at 5:30 p.m."

Leon replied, "That sounds good. And don't worry about bringing any clubs. I have an old set that we can share. See you tomorrow."

Andrew went back to work after writing down the following notes in his notebook:

Praise good work

- *Positive reinforcement of actions usually gets those actions repeated*
- *Recognize the good work done by all employees*
- *Celebrate employee birthdays*

MANAGE EACH
EMPLOYEE DIFFERENTLY

We are all different. *A good manager will recognize those differences and treat each person as an individual.*⁷

Mary Kay Ash
Founder
Mary Kay Cosmetics

On Friday, Andrew arrived at Lakeview Point golf course a few minutes before 5:30 p.m. When he pulled into the parking lot, he noticed there were only a few cars there. As Andrew was walking to the clubhouse, Leon came outside and greeted him.

“Hi Andrew,” said Leon.

“Hey Leon,” replied Andrew. “It’s a nice day for a little golf.”

Leon responded, “It sure is. By the way, I already took care of our rounds with some free passes that I had. I got them the last time I tried to play a few months ago. It began raining soon after we started. And my clubs are in our golf cart. Let me go get it and we’ll be ready to start.”

Andrew said, “That sounds good. Thanks for taking care of my round.”

After Leon got the golf cart, he picked up Andrew and they proceeded to drive to the 1st hole.

“We will only have time to play nine holes before it gets dark,” said Leon. “But we shouldn’t have to wait for anybody since there are only a couple other people playing right now. The manager told me the last group started over an hour ago.”

As they arrived at the 1st hole, Andrew smiled and then asked with curiosity, “So when are you going to tell me the management lesson that I’m going to learn from playing golf?”

Leon laughed and responded, "I'll get to that after we play. But first I need to let you know that this round of golf will probably be different from any you've played before."

Andrew inquired, "What do you mean by that?"

"While I will be playing like normal, the difference is that you will only be able to use one club the entire round," Leon answered.

Andrew replied, "Are you serious?! Wow, I'm so used to playing with a full set of clubs. I'm not sure which one I'll choose."

"I know it's a difficult decision," replied Leon. "There are so many different types of shots during a round of golf that it's hard to choose only one club."

As they continued to sit in the golf cart, Andrew thought about it for a while and decided, "While a 5-iron is probably a safer choice, I'm going to be a little bold and choose a 5-wood. I should be able to drive pretty well and putt without too much difficulty. But chip and bunker shots are going to be an absolute disaster which should make things quite interesting."

"OK, a 5-wood it is," Leon said. "Let's begin."

There is only one thing that can be said about the next nine holes that Andrew played. While golf courses are usually kind enough to only humble most people who play on them, Andrew got to experience a unique form of humiliation that day.

After Andrew completed the 9th hole, he sat in the golf cart beside Leon and added up their scores.

Andrew exclaimed, "I think I just set a world record for the worst score ever on nine holes!"

Leon laughed and said, “Maybe, but you played with only a 5-wood and that’s extremely difficult. Let’s go inside and talk about this.”

Leon put his clubs in his car and then met Andrew in the clubhouse after returning the golf cart.

They sat down at a table and Andrew asked, “I’m really curious. What does this have to do with managing employees?”

Leon smiled and responded, “OK, I won’t make you wait any longer. The seventh principle is to manage each employee differently. Just like you shouldn’t play a round of golf with only one club, you shouldn’t try to manage each employee the same way. Although the principles that I have already discussed should still be followed, the best strategy is to take a customized approach with each employee in order to make them as productive as possible.”

Andrew said, “I think I understand what you’re saying. But can you give me some examples?”

Leon answered, “Absolutely. For example, some people want to grow and have their responsibilities increased so they constantly have a new challenge. Others are perfectly happy doing the same job year after year. Some employees get a boost from working on a team. Others just want to work alone. Some workers like to be creative in finding solutions to a problem. Others want you to give them more structure and feedback. Some people are too shy to give you their ideas in front of a group, preferring to tell you in private. Others have no problem voicing their opinion in front of everybody else. Some employees will be

more productive working on a team with Ray, Melissa, and Courtney. Others will be most effective when they work with Emily, Terrance, and Sarah.

“The main point is that employees have different abilities, needs, and preferences. And your job is to manage them in a way that maximizes their productivity.”

Andrew responded, “This makes a lot of sense. People are all very different, so I can see why it would be important to approach them differently as a manager.”

Leon paused for a moment and then said, “Well, I think we’re done, Andrew. You can write down your notes and we’ll go outside when you’re done.”

Andrew wrote the following notes in his notebook about the final lesson:

Manage each employee differently

- *Employees have different abilities, needs, and preferences*
- *Take a customized approach with each employee in order to make them as productive as possible*

After Andrew wrote down his notes, Leon walked outside with Andrew and then gave him some final words of wisdom.

“Andrew, the big secret to managing employees is that there is no big secret to managing employees. Most of what I have explained to you could be called common sense. But just because something is common sense doesn’t make it common practice.

“The cold truth is that there are no shortcuts to being

a successful manager. You have to commit to being good and make a daily habit of putting these principles into practice. Managing employees is like anything in life. You get out of it what you put into it.

“Also, since you have a manager now and might have one for most or all of your career, I need to mention that there will be times when you won’t have the power to do exactly what you want. For example, you may not be able to hire who you want if the prospective employee demands a salary that your manager believes is too high. Even though you may be right to want to spend a little more for your top candidate, you might have to choose the next best person. However, when you can’t do exactly what you want, just do the best you can with the resources and authority you’ve been given. That’s all you can ever ask of yourself.”

Leon smiled and then said, “Andrew, I think we’re done.”

Andrew looked Leon in the eyes and said, “Thank you so much for teaching me all of this. I’m so very grateful. I know it’s going to help me so much.”

Leon responded, “You’re very welcome.”

Leon and Andrew then shook hands, got in their cars, and went their separate ways.

* * * * *

At home on Saturday morning, Andrew went through his notes and typed up the entire list of the seven principles that Leon had given him. And he added a title that he thought was appropriate and printed out

the information. He would look at the piece of paper with the following information countless times over the next 12 years:

How to be a Supermanager

#1 Surround yourself with high-quality employees

#2 Train employees well

*#3 Communicate the end result you want, then
empower employees to achieve it*

#4 Lead by example

#5 Listen to employees

#6 Praise good work

#7 Manage each employee differently

12 YEARS LATER IN
NASHVILLE AT LEON'S
FUNERAL AND AFTERWARD

Andrew's flight from Nashville left in the middle of the morning on Wednesday. He thought the funeral had gone really well. Hundreds of people were there. And Andrew was very pleased that the funeral was much more of a celebration of Leon's life than a mourning of his death. Many people stood up and shared funny, touching, and inspirational stories about Leon.

One of the last stories was from a man who looked familiar to Andrew when he walked up to the podium. He said, "Hi, my name is Ricky Stewart. I worked for Leon for two years beginning about 12 years ago. I was around 18 or 19 years old at the time."

Ricky continued, "Without going into a lot of detail, my teenage years weren't a lot of fun. I know pretty much everybody has their issues during this time of their lives. However, it was especially difficult for me for a variety of reasons.

"I know most people complain about having to work in a fast food restaurant. But working for Leon got me through a lot of tough times. He just treated me with so much respect and I tried to work really hard for him in return.

"I remember telling him, 'Leon, I really enjoy working here.' And when he asked me why, I said, 'Because you are the only person in my life who listens to my ideas.'

“While Leon probably didn’t know how much this meant to me, I hope he did.”

“Oh, he did,” Andrew whispered to himself. “He sure did.”

* * * * *

On the flight back to his new home in Los Angeles, Andrew became very sad about Leon being gone. The magnitude of the situation had finally hit him.

But just before the plane landed in Los Angeles, Andrew reminded himself that Leon’s legacy would live on through him by continuing to put the ideas into practice and making the world a better place as a result.

THE END

NOTES

1. Morita, Akio, *Made in Japan: Akio Morita and Sony* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1986), p. 131.
2. Schultz, Howard and Yang, Dori Jones, *Pour Your Heart Into It: How Starbucks Built a Company One Cup at a Time* (New York: Hyperion, 1997), p. 250.
3. Mackay, Harvey, *Swim with the Sharks Without Being Eaten Alive: Outsell, Outmanage, Outmotivate, and Outnegotiate Your Competition* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), p. 131.
4. Getty, J. Paul, *How to be Rich: His Formulas* (New York: Jove Books, 1965), p. 80.
5. Packard, David, *The HP Way: How Bill Hewlett and I Built Our Company* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995), p. 158.
6. Walton, Sam, *Sam Walton, Made in America: My Story* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), pp. 315-316.
7. Ash, Mary Kay, *Mary Kay on People Management* (New York: Warner Books, 1984), p. 133.

The *Fast Company* magazine article about Nucor that was mentioned by Andrew in the discussion of the first principle can be found at the following website address:

<http://www.fastcompany.com/online/04/hiring.html>

VISION

To uplift the world by making managers more effective, employees happier and more productive, and businesses and organizations more successful through the implementation of the seven principles in the book