GOOD MANAGER, BAD MANAGER

New Research on the Modern Management Deficit and How To Train Your Way Out Of It
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Introduction

The Modern Management Deficit

The facts are in, and they tell a troubling story: today’s workforce is in desperate need of better managers. Half of employees who quit their jobs leave because of a bad boss.¹ Nearly 90% of companies say finding and developing strong leaders is an urgent challenge, with more than a quarter confessing to weak leadership pipelines.²

At Grovo, we believe that smart training programs can solve even the toughest business challenges. So these numbers left us asking a few questions:

- How do most organizations currently train managers?
- What’s working and not working about those methods?
- If there were a better way to train managers today, what would it look like?

To answer these questions, we partnered with Wakefield Research and surveyed 500 managers across an array of industries.

We also conducted further research around what it is great managers do that makes them great, and used our findings to craft a new management training approach that promotes those behaviors.

PART 1: WHY GOOD PEOPLE BECOME BAD MANAGERS

How bad is it? In this section, our study reveals why many management training programs fail to produce good managers, and often end up producing bad ones.

Beware the bad manager: Like the great white shark, bad managers spell imminent danger for business, leading to sunk costs and talent casualties.

PART 2: HOW GOOD PEOPLE BECOME GREAT MANAGERS

How good could it be? In this section, we show you a simple, powerful framework for developing good managers who only get better with time (and practice!).

Behold the good manager: In some cultures, the zebra symbolizes balance, agility, clarity, and sureness of path—everything a good manager should be.
Part I. Why Good People Become Bad Managers

Why Good People Become Bad Managers

“Most students of management agree that the transition from employee to manager is one of the most challenging in business.” — Victor Lipman, Harvard Business Review

It starts innocently enough. A top performer gets promoted to manager as a reward for being a valuable individual contributor. Suddenly everything changes. No longer solely responsible for their own work, they're now responsible for a group of human beings with different strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and personalities. It can be rude awakening for many new managers and without the right support can quickly become a waking nightmare.

Obviously there’s a learning curve—middle managers believe more than 2 out of 5 of their company’s managers were unprepared for management when they assumed their role. But companies don’t always support that development process adequately. Many companies lavish learning on senior leaders and skimp on new manager training, leaving first-time leaders to fend for themselves—unarmed and in charge. This is where the problem of bad management begins. But hardly where it ends.

WHEN MANAGEMENT GOES FROM BAD TO WORSE
Bad management often goes uncorrected because it goes undetected. How can you tell if a manager is a poor listener, lacks empathy, or plays favorites? It's not easy. Eighty-four percent of the managers we surveyed said their company needs a better way to evaluate manager ability.

Furthermore, bad management spreads. Of the managers we surveyed, 76% said ineffective managers at their company are frequently rewarded or promoted. This is why it’s so important to nip bad management in the bud.

To do that, let’s dig a little deeper into how today’s companies think about management training—and why they might want to rethink things.
Part I. Why Good People Become Bad Managers

Manager Development: Why It Doesn’t Add Up

The good news is **99% of companies do offer some sort of management training and 93% of middle managers frequently attend it.** The bad news is that the way companies approach management training falls short in three key areas.

**98% NOT COMPREHENSIVE**
A good manager is more like a team leader, coach, trainer, and psychiatrist all wrapped up into one. However, most management training simply doesn’t dig deep enough into the myriad skills and behaviors required to do the job well. **98% of middle managers feel managers at their company need more training in areas like professional development, conflict resolution, employee turnover, time management, and project management.**

**87% NOT TIMELY**
When someone is first promoted to manager, their motivation to learn is at its peak. They’re excited, curious, and probably nervous. During this highly charged moment of need, they’re far more likely to engage with training, remember what they’ve learned, and apply it on the job. However, too many companies allow this window to close before taking action. Some companies wait months before delivering any kind of formal training and **87% of managers agree they wish they had received more training when they first took on the role.**

**72% NOT HABITUAL**
Management isn’t like riding a bike, where you learn it once and you’re set for life. It’s more of an art, requiring constant learning and practice to master. Even the most experienced manager can benefit from regular training that reinforces the fundamentals, course corrects bad habits, and delivers fresh ideas about the craft. **But 61% of managers say their company provides training only a few times a year, with 11% saying only once a year.** This isn’t frequent enough for an organization to build a consistent habit of learning among its leaders.

While fixing any one of these issues would be a step in the right direction, it turns out the problem goes deeper than topics, timing, and frequency. We need to get further upstream from the problem—and fix the training content itself.
Part I. Why Good People Become Bad Managers

Management Training Content: Why It Won’t Stick

Eighty percent of managers who change their behavior after management training go back to their old ways in just 6 months or less. Why? Our study uncovered three chief reasons:

01 TOO LONG 74% of management training attendees agree that large volumes of info given in most management trainings makes it hard to remember and apply.

02 NOT ENGAGING 92% of managers agree that they’d be more likely to use managerial skills if management training were presented in a more interesting way.

03 NO FOLLOW UP 1 in 3 respondents say they hardly ever receive follow up sessions to reinforce their management training.

Given everything we know about how people learn best, it’s not hard to see why training with these characteristics goes in one ear and out the other:

YOU CAN’T LEARN EVERYTHING AT ONCE. Our working memory can only hold about 4 or 5 pieces of information at any given time. The best learning experiences reduce our cognitive load to a manageable size so we can process the information being taught and then retrieve it later.

IF THEY’RE NOT FEELING IT, IT’S NOT WORKING. For learning to be effective, it must be emotionally affective. That’s why your favorite teachers in school were probably the ones who taught by telling stories, making you laugh, sparking your curiosity, or inspiring you with their own passion for the subject.

REINFORCEMENT IS A REQUIREMENT. Our brains learn best when learning is spaced out over time and interleaved with lots of real-world practice and reinforcement. It’s called the spacing effect, or distributed learning; and it can double the amount we learn in the long run.

Now we know what’s not working about management training from a learning standpoint. But what do companies stand to gain from improving management training from a business standpoint?
Better Management Training: Why It’s Good Business

U.S. companies spend around $15 billion in leadership development every year. As we’ve seen, they’re hardly getting their money’s worth. How would supporting new managers with better training, faster, result in a more profitable return on that investment?

Consider this: 98% of middle managers believe key aspects of their company would improve if managers were trained to be effective more quickly.

The items in this chart echo some of the most pressing challenges faced by enterprises today. Four out of five business leaders rank employee retention as an urgent concern. Organizations with happy employees outperform their competition by 20%. And company revenue… well, that speaks for itself.

More broadly, getting smarter about manager development just makes sense. Managers are the executional arm of a successful company. They organize teams, set goals, delegate work, and account for progress. They’re also the best conduit and facilitator of culture and engagement within the company. Managers make sure things get done—and good managers make sure they get done well.

In today’s talent-centric economy, the importance of good managers only escalates. Under strong, capable managers every ounce of talent in your organization is recognized, mobilized, maximized, and ultimately monetized. To put a dollar figure on it, it’s estimated that better managers can save businesses $360 billion annually in productivity.

The data confirms what is really just good business sense. Companies have a mandate to prepare their middle managers with training that’s designed smarter and delivered sooner—or risk their bottom line.

“Vision without execution is hallucination.” — Thomas Edison
Part II. How Good People Become Great Managers

How Good People Become Great Managers

Simply put, **good people become great managers the same way anybody becomes great at anything**—through continual learning and practice.

However, as our study revealed, the techniques many companies use to facilitate this process are insufficient at best, counterproductive at worst. Is there a better way to train the future leaders of your company? We believe so.

Using the data we uncovered, along with additional research, we’ve crafted a new management training framework that any company can use to reliably produce good managers. The framework involves three key steps:

01 **RETHINK**
Your organization’s philosophy on manager development.

02 **REDEFINE**
The behaviors that constitute good management at your organization.

03 **REDESIGN**
The management training experience for your people.

"**Leadership is doing the right things. Management is doing things right.**" — Peter Drucker

**A FEW THINGS TO NOTE:**
We’ve started using this framework to train managers at Grovo with promising results. However, it’s still a work in progress. In the interest of fostering discussion in the L&D community, we’re sharing our thinking thus far. Any and all feedback is welcome, and if you use any of the following ideas at your own organization please let us know at learning@grovo.com. We’d love to hear from you.

Without further ado, let’s dive in.
Part II. How Good People Become Great Managers

A New Philosophy: Rethinking Manager Development

Forget the vague theories, fluffy mantras, and abstract concepts that have characterized so much management training in the past. Our study showed they’re not sticking. Let’s focus on behaviors instead—what you want people to actually do—and get managers to adopt and habitualize those behaviors through online training. Here are three key themes to keep in mind about this new approach.

**NOT A SKILL, BUT A SYSTEM.**
Many people think management is an elusive skill unto itself. But in truth, it’s more like a set of known behaviors that’s proven to work—a system that can be repeated. More than possessing some mysterious talent, the best managers simply follow that system.

**NOT EXCELLENCE, BUT COMPETENCE.**
Initially, management training isn’t about making rock stars better rock stars. It’s about getting all of your managers practicing the fundamentals. Not necessarily doing them well—just doing them, period. Greatness comes later, with time and repetition.

**NOT A PIT STOP, BUT A JOURNEY.**
Becoming a great manager is a journey. More than one-off events or seminars, managers need practice spaced over time as well as real-time support for the right behaviors to become second nature.

In other words, we need to stop thinking about management training as a way to increase what managers know, and instead transform what they do. We’re not alone in championing a more behavior-based approach to management training. Google and Facebook have made a similar shift in their Project Oxygen and Bootcamp work respectively and reported improvements in effectiveness and performance as a result.

But in order to get managers putting the right behaviors into practice, first you’ll need to identify what those behaviors are.

Initially, management training isn’t about making rock stars better rock stars.
What does it mean to be a good manager? Let’s get specific. Identifying what behaviors constitute good management for your organization is a crucial step in the training process.

At Grovo, we’ve consulted everything from Frederick Herzberg’s classic theories of employee motivation, to contemporary workplace thought leaders such as Marcus Buckingham, Liz Wiseman, and Carol Dweck to identify exactly what it is we want our managers to do.

You can find a small sampling of those behaviors outlined to the right. These are the minimum expectations we have for all managers. Like coding standards, these management standards establish a mandatory baseline, clarifying expectations for both managers and their direct reports.

By establishing clear, concrete behaviors like the ones to the right, you’re no longer evaluating the success of management training on “lessons complete” or some other proxy metric. You now have a black-and-white, yes-or-no indicator of whether or not the learning actually worked.
Part II. How Good People Become Great Managers

Lasting Transformation: Redesigning the Training Experience

With your behaviors identified, the next step is designing a management training experience that motivates people and gets them to actually apply what they learn on the job. Here are 10 key items you can evaluate your program against to make sure you’re set up for success.

1. TREAT YOUR PROGRAM LIKE A CAMPAIGN, NOT A COURSE.
Think about how people campaign to raise money or run for office. There's a specific goal, an emotional urgency, and a time limit to achieve success. This is how management training should feel. It’s more than education; it’s an opportunity for someone to transform for the better.

2. LAUNCH WITH A BANG.
Don’t let your new management training arrive quietly. Make it a big deal so everybody knows it’s happening. Not only does this create buzz and social pressure to participate, but it’s often a self-fulfilling prophesy, too. People expect things to get better, so they do.

3. BUILD IN BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES.
How can you tell if someone is modeling abstract management behaviors such as “getting to know your people” effectively? Your guess is as good as ours. Break your campaign into concrete behavioral objectives, such as “have weekly one-on-ones,” that are easier to evaluate.

4. PROVIDE HOLISTIC SUPPORT.
Make sure all your bases are covered. This means surrounding the behavioral objective with learning resources that address the knowledge, environment, skills, habits, and attitude required for a learner to actually adopt the behavior.

5. MAKE IT DIGESTIBLE WITH MICROLEARNING.
There’s only so much someone can learn in a day. Give people a few minutes of daily microlearning and put the emphasis on making progress, not learning everything at once. Bookend with a review of what was learned the day before, and a preview of what’s coming up next.

6. START EACH LESSON WITH INSPIRATION.
At the beginning of every bite-sized lesson, strive to deliver an “aha” moment—a sudden realization that makes your learner feel smarter, or that surprises them with an interesting story or perspective. This gets them motivated and increases retention.

It’s more than education; it’s an opportunity for someone to transform for the better.
Part II. How Good People Become Great Managers

7. SUPPORT HABIT FORMATION. Adopting new behaviors is difficult. Repeatedly cue your managers to take small actions—“Take two minutes to praise a direct report for something they did last week”—that are not only easy to do, but feel good, so the behavior becomes something they start doing instinctively.

8. GUIDE PRACTICE OVER TIME. Start by giving learners real-world challenges with maximum support. “This is how it’s done. Try it with me.” Then gradually remove the training wheels. “Now, you try it on your own.” Slowly descaffold your support until they reach a point of automaticity.

9. MAKE IT LOOK GOOD. Beautiful, well-designed content isn’t a nice-to-have, it’s a need-to-have. Especially when YouTube and Snapchat threaten to snatch your learners attention at any moment. Keep your materials up to snuff with the standards of the digital media revolution.

10. DELIVER A SEAMLESS EXPERIENCE. The kind of daily, habitual learning that leads to behavior change can be enabled only by technology that puts learning right at the point of need, quickly and easily. In our case, we use our own Grovo platform to create, deliver, and track the training.

Beautiful, well-designed content isn’t a nice-to-have, it’s a need-to-have.
Conclusion

Let’s make better managers together.

The need for better managers is clear. It’s a top concern of today’s executives, and the data from our study confirms its urgency. But thankfully, we’re no longer fighting a hidden enemy. We now have a clear picture of precisely where most management training is going wrong, making it easier to see how it can be better.

We plan to continue testing, refining, and expanding on our own management training approach and sharing what we learn with the workplace learning community.

For more management training resources, visit www.goodmanagerbadmanager.com
The Research

All facts and figures are from Management Matters: Grovo’s 2016 Research Study on the State of Management Development unless otherwise noted.

The Grovo Survey was conducted by Wakefield Research (www.wakefieldresearch.com) among 500 U.S. middle managers at companies with 500 plus employees between June 3 and 13, 2016, using an email invitation and an online survey.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the interviews conducted in this study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 4.4 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

References


About Grovo

Grovo is reimagining learning for today’s teams. The workplace learning company combines beautiful technology, engaging content, and hands-on advisory support to deliver a better way to learn at work. The heart of Grovo’s approach is microlearning—bite-sized video lessons, exercises and real-world practice delivered in the right way, at the right time. From digital skills to leadership training, Grovo teaches employees the behaviors to be extraordinary at what they do, on a platform that learners and trainers love.

Founded in 2010, Grovo has delivered more than 9 million learning moments at organizations in over 190 countries. Its own culture of learning has earned the company recognition as a “Best Place to Work” by Entrepreneur Magazine, Crain’s, and Internet Week. Headquartered in NYC, Grovo has raised venture financing from some of the world’s best investors, including Accel Partners, Greg Waldorf, Costanoa Venture Capital, SoftTech VC, and Vayner Capital.

Learn more at [www.grovo.com](http://www.grovo.com)

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