

What Makes a Great People Manager?

Written by: Chad Prinkey, CEO, Well Built Construction Consulting

I've been confounded by the insufficiency of my own vocabulary, and perhaps the English language, to articulate different types of "management."

Managing a project requires strong planning, organizing, communication, and problem-solving skills. You can entrust your projects to someone with these attributes if they also possess the necessary technical aptitude for the projects, as one cannot solve a problem that they do not know how to recognize nor have solutions prepared to resolve.

That's where experience and education come in. If we want strong people managing our projects – which for the sake of this article includes roles like project manager, superintendent and foreman – then planning, organizing, problem-solving, and communication are the attributes we must hire and train for to succeed.

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT DEFINED

On the other hand, people managers require a deeper, specialized set of communication attributes compared to their project manager counterparts.

Every strong manager must be capable of expressing ideas with clarity, listening for comprehension, and selecting the right mode of communication (phone vs. email, for instance) to match the situation. That's Communication 101, and without those abilities a project manager will be ineffective no matter their on-paper qualifications for the role.



Communication 401 is necessary for great people managers. This is rooted in emotional intelligence, which is essentially the ability to understand and effectively work with feelings. This begins with awareness of one's own feelings and ability to master those emotions, so they don't adversely impact results.

For example, a strong people manager will not allow their own bad day to cause them to treat their team poorly. They understand the mission and can control their emotions.

Once a people manager becomes the master of their own emotions, they must learn to recognize the emotional state of others and be strategic about intentionally eliciting the ideal emotions in others.

For example, we all want our people to be happy and

motivated, right? A great people manager knows how to create an emotional environment for their team that is most likely to bring those feelings out.

They'll adjust their body language and tone while choosing their words and actions wisely. They understand that, while they cannot control how other people feel, they can create conditions that make those feelings probable.


BORN OR MADE?

Great people managers are somewhat rare. I've had many discussions with people smarter than me about whether these folks are born or made. This is an important thing to consider, because if they're born, we must only learn how to find them and keep them.

If great people managers can be shaped and developed, however, we can transform our project managers into people managers and unlock considerably faster growth.

Here's my take: People management attributes come more naturally for some than for others. Those for whom it comes easily were perhaps born (or raised) with heightened emotional intelligence, while the others were not.

With a deep desire to become a people manager, I've seen people who were not born with these gifts develop them at extremely high levels.

In short, people managers can be made, but they have to want it and be willing to change their habits, learn new skills, and embrace entirely new ways of thinking. It's not easy, but it is possible with focused effort. 



About the Author

Chad Prinkey is CEO of [Well Built Construction Consulting](#), a Baltimore-based firm that delivers strategic consulting, facilitation services, and peer roundtables for construction executives.

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