

PROVIDING THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE AN INFORMED CHOICE



Have you ever seen a truly gifted athlete who went on to become a mediocre coach? How about a record-breaking salesperson who was an absolute nightmare as a sales manager? A top-notch surgeon who wound up running a hospital into the ground? Of course, you have! It's a recurring irony. The talent you display in one role positions you for a promotion to another, then can wind up at the core of your struggles once you get there.

This dynamic was first addressed by Harvard professor Robert Katz in 1955. He described organizations as boxes divided into three layers.

- **Nonsupervisory:** They are the base, or the foundation, of the organization. The comparatively large number of nonsupervisory employees do the work the organization exists to do.
- **Management:** The people in the middle! This includes first levels of supervision and sometimes several tiers of "middle managers" responsible for planning, organizing and influencing targeted productivity.
- **Executives:** The comparatively few who occupy the top tier in the organization and are accountable for developing, orchestrating and implementing viable competitive strategy.

Katz then identified and defined the skills that were reliable predictors of success at each of the organizational levels: technical, human, and conceptual skills.

- **Technical Skills:** The ability to leverage knowledge, methods, techniques and equipment to perform at a sustained and acceptable level. If you want to

succeed in a nonsupervisory role, you need to excel at the technical aspect of your craft.

- **Human Skills:** Intuition and judgement in working with and through others to achieve performance objectives. Managers are distinguished based on their ability to consistently execute these skills.
- **Conceptual Skills:** The ability to accurately interpret complex organizational and market dynamics, then make decisions that secure desirable competitive standing. Executives are measured on their ability to "read these tea leaves" and respond accordingly.

CONSIDER THE ROLE THE TRAINING FUNCTION CAN PLAY AS EMPLOYEES MOVE ROLES.

Now, in the context of the theme for this issue, consider the role the training function can play as employees move from one role to another during their careers. For the sake of example, let's confine our focus to a jump most make early on in their careers as they transition from front-line employee to first-line supervisor.

First off, there is irrefutable research that suggests roughly 70 percent of the reason employees receive that first promotion rests with the comparative mastery of technical skill. This trend passes the common-sense test and is unlikely to change any time soon (i.e., what are

organizations supposed to do, promote people who have proven they don't know what they are doing?).

Conversely, 80 percent of the reason those employees struggle or fail when they become a manager can be tied to their limited grasp of, or experience with, human skills. This is the crux of the irony referred to above. Doing something yourself is one thing, but getting somebody else to do it is something altogether different.

This is where the training function can serve a critical role. Think about some of the common human skills challenges a new supervisor faces:

- Formally managing employees who a short time ago were peers;
- Introducing change that isn't welcomed or perceived as necessary; and
- Effectively integrating new hires to a tenured and intact team.

Many of these challenges can be simulated based on actual, company specific history, as a mechanism for preparing aspiring managers for their future roles. Beyond that, these kinds of immersive, assessment center experiences can provide qualified technical performers with a window into the expectations of a job primarily defined by human skills. If nothing else, it provides those individuals with the opportunity to make an informed choice. 🍷

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