

CHAPTER

1

THE JOB OF A MANAGER

We bet you had trouble finding the time to read this book. If so, it's probably because you're feeling serious stress, like many of the nonprofit leaders with whom we work. You're under pressure from funders, your staff, constituents, perhaps your boss, and ultimately yourself, to be getting more done. Too much of the burden of making things happen is falling on you.

Effective management—how you get things done through other people—could help you accomplish more with less stress, but you may not know where to start. And if that's the case, you're not alone. Nonprofit leaders often end up in their roles not because they're great managers, but because they are experts on a particular issue or excel at a specific function like communications or program design. If you're one of these talented, committed people, you may have been highly effective at getting results on your own, but you may now have hit the point in your career where your impact will be more a function of what you get done through others than what you do directly yourself.

Fortunately, good management is pretty straightforward. Our goal in writing this book was to create an easy-to-use manual with hands-on, practical advice and tools that will help nonprofit managers get better results in their work. We'll cover a range of skills, representing what we think are the most important areas for managers to master—from delegating tasks, to setting and holding people accountable to clear goals, to hiring and firing, to staying organized and using your own time effectively. Exercised properly, these practices will make your life much easier.

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Most important, though, not only does good management make your life easier, but it also makes it easier for you to get great results.

Although this probably sounds obvious, as managers ourselves we didn't automatically grasp it from the start. Jerry's first real management experience came at Teach For America, a large, national nonprofit where, as the second in command, he was responsible for managing the day-to-day work of the organization. A former teacher, he had been drawn to management partly because he liked seeing people learn and develop to their full potential. He wanted staff members to be happy and fulfilled in their work, and he viewed it as his job to mentor them so that they grew and developed.

That was fine as far as it went, but Teach For America had ambitious aspirations: it was trying to triple in size, raise the quality of its teachers, strengthen its alumni network, raise more money, and build a stronger organization to make it all happen. Early in Jerry's tenure, when he was more focused on mentoring and viewing his staff members' satisfaction as an end goal, he wasn't always producing the kind of progress that was needed. Most of his staff members worked extremely hard, but not everyone did. And many excelled at their jobs, but in several critical cases, the organization's needs had outgrown his staff members' skills.

And that brings us to the fundamental premise of this book: your job as a manager is to get results.

One day Jerry was complaining to a friend about how much pressure he was under and how difficult it was to get things done without making people hate him. She looked at him and said, "Well, if you're doing your job, you might just be the least popular person there." With those not-so-reassuring words, Jerry's friend helped him realize that he was thinking about his job in the wrong way. The organization was never going to achieve its aims if he didn't make some people unhappy. He needed to hold people to more ambitious goals, be clearer with people when they weren't meeting expectations, and, ultimately, tell some of his staff members that they weren't the right people for the job.

Through this stage in his work, Jerry came to appreciate more fully what his true job was as a manager. Yes, it was good to develop people, empower them, help them be fulfilled at work, and mentor them. Those things helped make his job enjoyable, and in some cases they helped make his people better at what they did, but ultimately, they were means to an end. Fundamentally his job was to make sure the organization got the results it aspired to. That's why it existed as an organization, and that's what Jerry was getting paid to do. Teach For America's donors funded it to help expand opportunities for students in low-income communities, the students whom Teach For America served needed it to deliver, and that's what his job was about, not to make the staff happy. If Jerry wasn't doing what it took to make Teach For America as effective as possible in pursuing its mission, then he wasn't doing his job.

As it happens, we believe you can get things done *and* be well liked, at least most of the time. In fact, by being clear about what you expect, helping people meet your expectations, ensuring people are in roles in which they excel, and getting everyone aligned around a common purpose, you'll build your staff's morale in the long run. Treating people well also happens to be the best way to sustain your results over the

long haul, because you'll never get good people to work for you otherwise. Time and time again, though, we've found that managers confuse being "supportive" bosses who "empower" their people with being effective managers who actually get things done. And in the short term, getting things done sometimes requires you to make others unhappy with you.

Two examples from clients of ours might help illustrate what happens when managers do, or don't, fully feel the weight of responsibility for getting results in their realms. In the first case, the manager oversaw the field operations for her organization. When the organization realized that it needed to shift resources from one part of the field program to another in order to improve its results, this manager made only incremental changes in staffing levels to meet that need—changes that would certainly not suffice to generate the results needed. At a meeting with the head of the organization, the field manager explained her plan, saying, "Imagine the uproar if I had proposed really shifting people around." Her explanation made it clear that she was weighing the potential staff reaction to changes (or, perhaps more accurately, her own discomfort with that reaction) more heavily than the important results that the organization needed her to generate. Fortunately, the field director's own manager caught the issue before it was too late and insisted on more dramatic changes.

In contrast with this approach, our client in the second case did what it took to get results. This client is the executive director of an organization whose work gets carried out through multiple state offices, with those offices overseen directly by a regional director. The executive director and the regional director had agreed on ambitious, critically important goals for what each state office would produce over the coming four months, before the organization's next fundraising cycle began. But after only a couple of weeks, it was painfully clear that the regional director was proceeding under business as usual and that the state offices were nowhere near on track to producing the results they needed.

In this kind of situation, many managers would continue to work through the regional director, checking in periodically, hoping the regional director would deliver in the end, and perhaps blaming him if he didn't come through. In this case, though, the executive director understood that if the hoped-for results did not materialize, he himself was ultimately responsible. He was not simply a passive overseer of the results the team generated, but was ultimately responsible for those results himself. He also understood that in this case, the results had to happen: the organization would not fulfill its mission without them, and it would not be able to raise funds to keep supporting itself. Given that, the executive director took a much more hands-on approach, one that many management books might suggest was micromanaging. Among other things, he insisted that he and the regional director conduct daily calls with each of the state offices to discuss what steps the states were taking to produce the results. After just a few days, the energy at the state level changed, and within a couple of weeks, dramatically different results began to appear. The regional director, who was initially not thrilled with what he viewed as the executive director's heavy-handed approach, learned a valuable lesson about how to generate results. And once the new plans were on track,

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the executive director was able to step back and take a more normal approach to managing by working through his regional director.

When we highlight examples like these and stress the importance of being results oriented, people sometimes ask us whether that means we think nonprofits should be run like hard-nosed businesses. Our answer is that because the work nonprofits do is so important, we need to be *more* hard-nosed about management than for-profit enterprises are. Given what nonprofits do, we have a moral imperative to commit to strong, effective management practices because what's at stake is much more important than a business's bottom line.

And that's the main reason we wrote this book. We want to see more strong, effective nonprofits that are changing the world.

This book contains the tools you need to make it easier for you to get results. We intend for this book to be helpful to new managers as well as to those who have experience and need a refresher, and to managers of individual teams or departments as well as to executive directors of entire organizations. You won't find information on fundraising or working with the media or other topics on specific functions already covered by myriad other books. Instead, you'll find step-by-step guidance on how to manage any single area or an organization as a whole.

As we noted earlier, management is how you get things done through other people. (When you're doing it yourself, it's called "work"!) There are three components to that definition of management: getting things done, the other people, and you. We've divided the book along the lines of those three pieces, covering in each part the practices in which the best managers we've seen excel:

- *Managing the work.* We begin with the things you're getting done because this is what most people think of when they think of management, and it's the most immediate challenge that most new managers face. We'll start with the most specific level of things you might want to get done, which is looking at how you delegate a discrete task or project. We'll then look at how you can assign bigger pieces of work and broader responsibilities by using meaningful roles and clear goals with concrete measures of success. Then knowing that beyond the things you discuss explicitly with your staff, there are thousands of tiny actions that people take every day within your organization, we'll examine how you can use culture to guide your staff members on those items. Finally, we'll bring it all together by looking at a couple of easy-to-implement management systems that help you stay on top of it all.
- *Managing the people.* Using practices to make sure you have the right "other people" to get things done for you may be the single most important lever you have, and yet it's the area most neglected by managers. We'll discuss how to build a staff of superstars: hiring them, developing them, and making sure you hold on to the best and let go those who fall short.

- *Managing yourself.* The final part of this book explains how to apply to yourself the same rigor that you apply to your management of others, including using your time effectively, staying organized, working with your boss, and exercising authority. As a manager, what you do in this area sets the limits on or, we hope, removes the limits from, the results you can get.

We believe that the practices in this book will help you build and lead a high-performing organization that achieves outstanding results over the long haul. And for nonprofits working to change the world, and the people who run them, that's what it should be all about.