

The Questions Real Managers asked....

..and the answers they found.



by Elizabeth Best

The New Managers Club

TFB Associates LLC

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About Elizabeth Best:

Elizabeth works internationally. She is a management consultant and trainer with a Master of Science degree in Management and she has over twenty years practical experience in managing in a variety of business settings.

In Elizabeth's early career, she personally experienced the challenges faced by today's new managers and more importantly, she developed the strategies to meet the challenges.

Her CEO said "You can do this job, you're qualified; if you think you need a course, you can go on one when we're less busy".

Elizabeth has held senior management positions in business development, training, insurance, retail, health, leisure and education.

She has acted as a mentor and coach to many new managers of all ages.

Her consultancy work has included assignments in the US, UK, Western Europe, Canada and Australia.

Elizabeth is the author of "**Great Start! – a Guide for New Managers**"

In 2007, Elizabeth and her business partner Jack Francis formed The New Managers Club – "the premier resource for managers.

More details of what **The New Managers Club** offers can be found at the end of this report.

One recurring need...

Hello,

In all our work with managers, we've come across one recurring need - one requirement that nearly every manager we work with tells us they want.

That need is for instantly usable, practical advice - the "how-to" of real life problems and situations in which managers find themselves right now.

Most managers find that management books contain only the theory of management and they have to work out for themselves how to translate that theory into practice. Few books are written in a simple, easily understood style, most are academic in style. Few, if any, give practical advice and solutions for a busy manager.

Many managers find reading the questions which other managers ask very helpful.

They can identify with the questions and the problems. Thinking about the challenges other people face, helps them to prepare for similar situations in which they may find themselves. They give a "heads-up" and a warning of the pitfalls to avoid.

In this report we've included a number of questions our managers have asked and some of our ideas on how their problems can be solved.

These are **real life situations** which we've encountered through our coaching service for managers and through our "Ask an Expert" section at ***The New Managers Club***.

We value and protect the confidentiality and privacy of our members. More than the managers' names have been changed throughout this report. We've also changed the business or industry in which the questioners work.

So, let's look at some real questions asked by real managers...

"Big is always best" – when it's a mistake to apply that criterion.

Question:

My boss doesn't show appreciation for the work I do. He frequently asks me to prepare a presentation for the next day and I often have to stay up half the night getting it done.

Jonah lived in a neighboring town to Jack and I. We met him for coffee one evening and he described to us the sorts of people for whom he gave presentations and he showed us a couple of examples of the work he did.

Jonah and his boss worked for HT Company which provides event management solutions. HT has a range of clients who hold regular events - from large corporations to small enterprises.

Jonah said that when his boss got a lead on a potential client, Jonah prepared a presentation and then often, both Jonah and his boss, would go to the client to give the presentation. Jonah's boss was an older guy, almost computer illiterate and he was very impressed with what Jonah produced. Jonah had only worked for the company for 3 months. He had been eager to impress and was still eager to impress.

As he talked about the clients for whom he'd prepared presentations, it became clear that some clients were "big" in terms of the frequent business they brought to HT and others were "small" in that they only held one event per year.

Jonah's work was impressive, he was obviously a perfectionist.

We quickly saw that whether the client was big or small, Jonah provided the same style of full presentation. Very often, Jonah worked at home, long into the night, on the presentation.

The questions Real Managers ask..

His boss was always impressed next morning with what they had to show to the client but he had no understanding of how long it had taken to create a presentation of such high quality.

The boss was completely ignorant of the work involved in producing these high quality, hour-long, near perfect presentations and as Jonah turned up each morning with the great product, the boss assumed, without ever asking, that it took Jonah only a short time to get each presentation done.

How had this situation arisen?

Jonah hadn't differentiated between a big and small client and he hadn't asked his boss how much each client was worth to the company.

Jonah had done a thorough and perfect job - every time. He'd always done the very best he could do - every time.

What he hadn't done was prioritize the time he had available and allocated his time according to the likely revenue to HT.

He'd decided "BIG and perfect is always best" and that isn't true - "appropriate is always best".

AND

Jonah had never described to his boss what was involved in creating a presentation.

We were able to provide Jonah with what he needed, which was:

- The points for a meeting with his boss
- A checklist of questions to ask his boss in the future when his boss was briefing him on the requirements for a presentation
- A check list of what Jonah needed to do to prioritize his work

Starting a new job

Starting a new management job is something we cover comprehensively in our "**Great Start - A Guide for New Managers**" but following this question, we give a few ideas to help you begin.

I've just got my first management job and next week I'm meeting with my new boss for a planning meeting. She's asked me to consider over the weekend what I plan to do and what I think I'll be able to achieve during my first few months in the job. Can you advise me please on what I should include and anything you think I should avoid?

First off Tom, we'd recommend you read again our "Great Start Guide".

You probably browsed it when you first joined **The New Managers Club** but now you're actually about to start work, you'll want to read it again. It will mean more to you now because you can picture yourself in the actual setting and situation and you'll be able to visualize the office and the building which are the context for your planning.

One point we'd emphasize from the very outset is "don't be tempted to make radical, sweeping changes right at the beginning".

In the past, bosses and CEOs thought it was good for new managers to be a "new broom" and to "sweep clean".

Many new managers changed everything they could, even if it didn't need changing - just to show that they were the boss and to demonstrate that they had the power.

That's old thinking and is out of fashion now, fortunately.

Making radical, sweeping changes without consideration of the situation and people involved is arrogant and risks you taking a mighty fall if you've got it wrong.

The questions Real Managers ask..

A much better plan is to:

- Observe
- Ask questions
- Listen
- Don't give your comments or opinion until you're sure you have reliable facts
- Don't rely on other people's opinions or hearsay
- Verify everything
- Consider carefully
- Assess the situation

Do this for a few weeks. Talk to everyone with whom you will be working, talk to your co-managers and talk to managers from other departments

Take time to put your thoughts in order before you write a report or give your boss your conclusions and recommendations.

From team worker to team manager

Handling the transition from key worker to boss needs taking care.

Question:

Can you help me please with ideas to improve my leadership and management skills?

I've just been promoted to manager – just 3 days ago in fact and I started the job today. My first day hasn't gone well and my co-workers who I've known for years are coming to me with trivial problems - and everyone looks so sulky – the atmosphere has really changed since last week.

We asked Paula for more information and particularly the background to her situation.

This is the story as it emerged:

For five years Paula had been part of the team – one of the workers.

The company was owned and started by 2 brothers - Jeff and Walt. In the beginning, the two brothers did all the work themselves.

Gradually, over 5 years, as business grew, they'd taken on additional staff.

Now the company comprised Jeff and Walt plus 9 staff.

Jeff was out most of the time with prospective customers and Walt was in the factory supervising day-to-day operations.

Paula was the second person to be employed. She knew the business and the work thoroughly because she'd been involved in all sides of the business – buying some raw materials, setting up customer accounts and helping to interview new staff.

The questions Real Managers ask..

She'd automatically taken on the induction and training of new staff but hadn't been acknowledged as the trainer or paid extra for that responsibility – she'd just done it.

The company was a bit like a family, everyone did extra when needed but, if Paula was honest with herself, she was a bit like the eldest sister, she did the most because she knew the most and the other workers looked to her to take the lead.

The bosses saw a major opportunity in the market and responded to it. The business started to expand. Jeff became swamped by potential work which meant Walt also had to help him and be away from the factory for part of every day.

The bosses thought of a solution. Paula, who was their best worker - in terms of general knowledge of the business, customers and suppliers, should take on a manager's role and Walt would be at the factory at the beginning and end of each day.

For the rest of the day, Paula would be in charge and deal with day-to-day operations. She'd done that on numerous occasions over the years – it was an informal arrangement but it had worked well.

On Friday, Jeff and Walt asked to see Paula as soon as the day was rolling smoothly.

They met with Paula and asked her if she'd be prepared to formally take on the manager role. They re-assured her that she could do the job – it was after all just what she'd always done – simply a formalization of an existing situation.

They were relaxed and relieved when, after she got over the surprise, she agreed.

She was given a salary rise and the title "Operations Manager". The bosses called an early coffee break and gave the good news to the workers.

Jeff and Walt were a little surprised when the 8 workers were quieter than they'd expected them to be. Jeff and Walt assumed everyone would be as relieved and pleased as they were that the manager problem had been so easily and happily resolved in a way which amounted to "business as usual".

Jeff and Walt said they would be meeting with Paula for the rest of the day and then the new system would be in place straight after the weekend. The staff was told the factory would close at lunchtime and everyone could have a half day holiday.

Again, Jeff and Walt were surprised the staff weren't more pleased with an unexpected afternoon holiday at the end of a busy week.

Paula spent her weekend making plans.

She arrived at work Monday morning happy and eager to begin. Jeff and Walt were both to be out all day. Paula was disturbed when just half an hour into the day, problems began - individuals constantly asking her questions, some of which were trivial and her co-workers seemed to find things to complain about. During the day, she frequently saw small groups of workers in discussion.

Towards the end of the day, Paula realized that since about 3pm nobody had asked her anything and the shop floor was very quiet.

As she sat in the office at the end of the day reviewing her first day as a manager, she felt a growing un-ease.

As we learned about the situation, it became apparent to us that Paula's problem wasn't about her management style and leadership abilities but about how her bosses had dealt with change management.

The questions Real Managers ask..

The issues were around dramatic change in a small “family” company where everything had been known and understood by all the workers – known and comfortable, known and predictable.

Changing a company structure has to be handled very carefully with consultation, careful communication and involvement of all the workers.

Consultation is the key element and consultation must be as thorough as time allows. The workers need to feel involved if the changes are to be as smooth as possible.

Jeff and Walt had been naïve.

We told Paula:

- This wasn't about her abilities as a manager and a leader
- The solution wasn't something she could deal with alone.
- She had to involve her bosses and involve them immediately.
- Urgent remedial action was needed to resolve her problems.
- Remedial action is always more difficult than dealing well with a situation in the beginning.

We gave Paula:

- A comprehensive checklist of the steps to take
- The agenda for a meeting with her bosses.

Subsequently we also:

- Had phone conversations with Jeff and Walt.
- We were able to describe to them the preferred stages in successful change management.
- We provide them with a step-by step guide to the remedial action needed to get their company working together again as a co-operative group.

Trying to find the time for Time Management!

Every manager wants more time but learning how to get it takes time too.

Question:

I've been a manager with my company now for 3 months. It was agreed that at the end of my first 3 months, I'd have a performance review with my boss. I've worked so hard these last months, putting in extra hours both at work and at home. To say I was disappointed at my boss' comments is an understatement. He said I wasn't getting enough done and when I told him the hours I was working, he said "in that case, it's clear to me you're being inefficient, you need a time management course".

I asked if he knew of one I could go on and he replied that perhaps I could find one which was held outside the work day or at weekends.

I was so angry I couldn't reply. Already, I'm working a 10 hour day at work and I'm exhausted when I get home. The thought of attending classes after work or on a weekend just about sends me over the edge.

What can I do?

What's wrong with conventional courses?

Nothing at all is wrong with the content. The content is great.

BUT

- The courses don't always run on the dates you need them or
- The time isn't convenient for you – maybe the first part is on a day you have to attend a crucial planning meeting.
- Maybe the subject for week 5 of the course is the topic you need covered next week - you can't wait till the end of next month for it.
- A few weeks after the course you have a question. Who do you ask?

The questions Real Managers ask..

Peter was a young manager we worked with a few years ago and his situation was what inspired us to develop our concept of "bite-size" training courses for ***The New Managers Club***.

Our "Bite-at-a-Time" Time Management Course is split into manageable sections so you can get started right away.

By dividing the course into bite size segments, you can take the part of the course you need – when you need it.

We include sections where we ask you to practice what we suggest for a few weeks before moving on to the next part and we also suggest time-scales for each section - but you can go at your own pace. It doesn't matter if you take longer than the minimum.

The important thing is that you practice and apply the training to your precise situation.

You can also ask us for specific help along the way to make sure you match the training to your specific needs.

Management Stress

We're alarmed at the growing pressures placed on today's managers. Good managers need to know how to correctly deal with stress.

Question:

I really need your help. You know I started this job 4 months ago. You know the background. The place was in chaos and they brought in a new team. The message from the bosses is that everything has to be done yesterday if the company is to survive. I've been getting to work at 7am to get in a couple of hours of my own work before I start getting people screaming for help with their problems and I've been taking work home to get some planning done in peace. This morning, in a meeting, I actually felt completely overwhelmed and had to silently give myself a pep talk and I was fine. Then, as I was driving home tonight, I felt awful and had to stop for a while till I felt ok to carry on. When I got home, I just crashed out and slept for an hour and then I was able to get the report written which I need for morning.

Can you give me a few tips to get more out of my day? Do you know of any high energy soft drinks that are not based on caffeine I could have at work which would help me?

Whooooaaa there Alison!

I can feel the stress oozing from your words, you're in over-drive and very soon you'll be no use to yourself or your beleaguered company. You don't need high energy drinks or a few extra hours in a day, you need to chill and get some rest.

Stress management tools and strategies are as much a necessary part of a manager's skills as the other skills on your CV. Being the best HR crisis manager the company has will count for nothing if you fall over.

The questions Real Managers ask..

It's time to stop. Here's a quick fix to get you ready for tomorrow but you must take proper and regular steps to get yourself properly de-stressed.

Right now, you might try some of the following tips but first let me tell you what you mustn't do. **Don't** reach for the bottle of wine to relax you. That's a dangerous path and it won't even help. You'll just feel worse tomorrow and you'll be inefficient. **Don't** drink sodas or sweetened drinks. **Don't** take additional caffeine drinks.

Do these things tonight:

On the way home:

- Rent a movie – one you've seen before or your favorite movie – something undemanding and peaceful with a calm message.
- Buy 3 aromatherapy oils – lavender, chamomile and Clary sage.
- Buy some milk
- Buy a good quality microwave dinner – not junk and not something heavy. Get something like salmon or chicken with vegetables

Then...

The questions Real Managers ask..

When you get home:

- Take a shower or a bath
- Change into night wear or comfortable clothes.
- Have your dinner. Sit comfortably to have it – not bent over, sit straight and drink a couple of glasses of water with it.
- Don't watch TV while you eat, play some music – preferably soothing music
- Get the movie set up and ready to go.
- Warm some milk to sip while you're watching the movie. Don't drink sodas.
- Put a couple of drops of each of the aromatherapy oils on your pillow and lie down with your pillow to watch the movie.
- Check out each part of your body to be sure it's relaxed and not tense.
- Watch the movie.

If you feel like you're going to drift off to sleep, don't go to sleep in the sitting room, get up and go to bed and sleep.

Tomorrow you'll feel better and able to work.

At ***The New Managers Club*** there are articles on Stress Management and other stress-reducers to help you take steps you need to take to chill out.

The New Managers Club

- where you'll get REAL, PRACTICAL help and advice.

Not all managers receive the training they need to be managers. Many managers are promoted because they are good at the essential job for which they are qualified.

The management job you're doing includes managing people, not just managing computers or investments or loaves of bread. Some bosses think it's an easy transition to be a manager of other people doing similar work.

At ***The New Managers Club*** you will find:

- The immediate help you need – now
- People with years of management experience, who have been in your shoes and want to help
- A supportive culture where you can grow in confidence, knowledge and experience
- A place where there will be nobody looking at you speculatively or judgmentally but looking at you and seeing your potential

Our aims are to help you to become the best manager you can be and to be your first port of call whenever you need management knowledge, help or advice or to ask a question.

Here's how to start at "GO" and BECOME A GREAT MANAGER.

Join *The New Managers Club* where you'll find the following features available to our Club members:

Need it Now guides - concise, information-packed, practical, focused solutions for New Managers who haven't got the time for management training courses or books - real, practical help - not theory (but based on sound, tried and tested theory).

Essential Skills 101 - a series of articles on basic management skills.

Ask an Expert - your question will be anonymous and in total confidence.

There are occasions when it's not appropriate to ask someone at work about an issue. Your boss may think you're not up to the job if you mention it.

The obvious person to ask at work may be too close to the problem to give you a balanced view.

You may feel you need independent advice on the range of options you think you have and you want to get another view.

Friends and family may not be familiar with your management situation. In some cases, the topic may require friends and family to be unbiased and not favor you in their response.

Articles & Reports - additional background information on the tasks and challenges of your new management job.

Case Studies - examples from real life. How managers deal with their challenges and solve management problems.

Training Courses - hone your management skills using these courses. You can take them when you need them and when you have the time.

Resources - Books, software, DVD's and other resources you'll find useful

What's New - keep up to date with Club events and discover the latest information available. We are continually adding new guides, reports and courses.

The questions Real Managers ask..

Make a Suggestion - if you have an idea for features, topics and courses which would benefit our New Manager members, then let us know.

“Great Start – A New Managers Guide” - Whether this is your first management job or your next promotion this is a comprehensive source of sound, practical “how to” advice on making the best start in your new management position.

Good managers analyze, plan and then **ACT**. No real problems get solved without taking action.

So act now and join us **TODAY** at ***The New Managers Club***.

We look forward to helping you to be the best manager you can be.

Wishing you luck in your management career.

Best wishes,

Elizabeth and Jack

www.TheNewManagersClub.com

“Even a correct decision is wrong when it is taken too late.”

Lee Iacocca, Father of the Ford Mustang and CEO of Chrysler