



# Leading from the Middle

## BEST PRACTICES FOR BEING A GREAT MIDDLE MANAGER

Healthcare organization's middle managers are asked to navigate the disruptive healthcare environment, achieve goals set forth by more senior leaders and ensure their staff are equipped with the tools and skills to succeed. This presents challenges as well as an opportunity to grow professionally while helping your organization succeed. Strong middle managers are critical enablers for healthcare organizations that are seeking to fulfill their strategic initiatives today and develop skilled senior leaders for the future. Successful middle managers are those who build relationships with their leaders, gain employee buy in and successfully navigate obstacles.

### Connect With Your Leadership

Relationships with senior leaders are foundational for the success of middle managers. Not only will these relationships give you the chance to learn from those with more experience, but you can also better understand what matters most to them. This can help you understand how to make sure that you can

allocate your time and effort in a way that aligns to these goals. Working with senior leaders can also help you put your innovative ideas into action.

To build a relationship with your leaders you should:

- **Understand your leaders.** Learn how they want to receive information from you, what their day is like and what is expected of them.
- **Know their expectations.** Ask them to define success for you and what their expectations of your work are.
- **Offer a solution, not just a problem.** If you are seeking help in navigating a difficult situation, come to them with a potential solution rather than just stating the problem. This will create a dialogue that can lead to a solution.
- **Earn their trust.** Help your leaders see the value you offer to their organization by delivering on the goals they've set forth.

### Gain Buy In

As a middle manager, it's important to have employees that are advocates for your ideas and supportive of the changes that they'll need to be a part of in order to realize your goals and objectives. A core group of individuals can serve as champions for your new ideas and initiatives and rally others around your vision of success. To identify individuals, find people who are:

- Trusted amongst their peers
- Willing to take initiative in creating change
- Motivated to succeed

While supporting your employees, it's also important to ensure that your goals are being realized and this often requires change to occur. This means you may need to ask them to do things differently or reassess why things that "have always been done that way" may not need to continue in that fashion. It also may mean that you need to ask your own leaders to empower you to bring about change. To do so, start out by understanding the needs of the individuals the change will impact and their perspective on the challenge at hand. Listen to them and understand their ideas. Then as you create a solution to the problem, leverage their expertise throughout the process. You can also address their concerns and explain why the solution isn't exactly how they may have thought it should be.

## Overcome Common Challenges For Middle Managers

As a middle manager you must be prepared to deal with challenges that you may not have experienced in other roles. A few challenges include:

- **Supervising former colleagues.** This can be difficult to navigate at times as your relationship may need to evolve. Those you once worked side-by-side with suddenly must follow your directions and you must do more than be their peer. To gain their support for you as a leader, provide them with the support and guidance they need to be successful.
- **Managing a diverse population.** As employee populations become increasingly diverse with multiple generations in the workforce and a wide range of cultural differences, managers should find ways to connect with individuals on a more personal level and look beyond their demographics. Diversity also requires more personalized management styles and a one-size-fits all approach to managing each employee will not drive results.

- **Finding a support system.** There are many other middle managers who are going through similar experiences that you are experiencing. Connect with these individuals to leverage their expertise on overcoming challenges and share your own successes so that you can become a better leader. Those that you choose to connect with don't need to have your exact role or level of experience, or even be a part of your organization.

## Have Your Leadership Set You Up for Success

As a middle manager, you should receive support from more senior leaders. Some best practices for senior leaders who want to help their middle managers succeed today and become their organization's leaders of the future include:

- **Providing clarity on the mission.** Leaders should clearly communicate the vision and priorities to their middle managers who in turn can then serve as advocates of this vision.
- **Showing middle managers that they are valued.** Leaders should articulate why they found their time as a middle manager valuable for their career development and help them see how they are impacting the organization.
- **Giving them permission to say no.** Leaders should support middle managers in learning to navigate the complexities of the organization and provide them with a clear scope of what's of value for the organization so they can prioritize their time appropriately.
- **Set realistic, clear, mutually agreeable benchmarks.** Leaders should develop goals and objectives for middle managers that align to the goals set forth by the board or shareholders. This will mean that the success of a middle manager drives success of the organization.

Middle management is a chance to make an impact on your organization and a critical element of career development. As a middle manager you have the chance to make an impact at your organization as you gain buy in from key stakeholders into initiatives and changes that will enable your healthcare organization to achieve its strategic priorities.

### Key Takeaways

To be a successful middle manager in your healthcare organization, you should:

#### Think differently.

Look at your role as a middle manager as a way to create success across the organization and be an enabler of growth.

#### Plan differently.

Identify key goals and objectives that align to your organization's broader goals and objectives.

#### Act differently.

Develop leadership skills that enable you to support those you lead in achieving the goals you've set forth.



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