

Joel Garfinkle on Dealing with the Pressures of Management

By [Anita Bruzzese](#) | Posted on [April 26, 2012](#)



Joel Garfinkle is an executive coach and author of *Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level*. Recently, I asked him some questions about some common problems faced by managers, and how best to deal with them.

AB: Let's say I'm a manager and my staff just isn't meeting its goals. How do I determine if it's something I'm doing wrong or they're just a bunch of losers?

JG: As a manager, you need to take responsibility for the situation by conducting one-on-one meetings with each staff member. During each one-on-one, you should focus on these

important areas:

- Communicating clearly with defined goals and objectives for each staff member.
- Providing adequate support and resources for your staff to be successful.
- Clarifying expectations of what is required for each project or assignment.

After two to three months of meetings, some staff will make dramatic improvements toward meeting their goals. This process will also reveal the staff members who need to be phased out of the company due to poor performance. By communicating effectively, you'll learn to address any concerns before they become full-blown crises, and you'll realize that you aren't the problem.

AB: My staff says they're overworked, but I'm working 24/7. How am I supposed to deal with this added stress – don't they appreciate I'm working as hard as they are?

JG: It's certainly stressful to be in a situation where everyone feels overworked. That said, however, however overworked a manager may feel is a completely separate issue from whether his or her employees are also overworked. If you're in this position, you should take a step back and examine how much time your employees are actually spending on the job. If they are indeed spending more time than their employment contracts or job descriptions stipulate, then it's time to do one of two (or possibly both) things:

1. Figure out how best to collect information about what everyone's responsibilities are. (This could be a paper form, an online questionnaire, interviews with individual employees, and/or a team meeting.) Once you, or perhaps an administrative assistant, have collated all the information, share it with your team members. Invite them to consider and discuss ways in which they could reallocate responsibilities or otherwise optimize the team's workflow. It's ultimately the manager's responsibility to ensure that teams are working in as organized and efficient a manner possible.

2. Collect information about your team's job responsibilities and the amount of time it's taking them to complete their duties. Identify the additional positions that are needed to make your team work more efficiently. Create a proposal that details how adding those positions will increase your team's productivity and bring it to your superiors. Remember that effective managers advocate to those above them for the employees under them.

AB: My boss is pressuring me to be more innovative, but how can I do that when I'm swamped with all my other duties? I barely have time to eat lunch every day, so how am I supposed to be more creative when I'm so exhausted?

JG: There are really two ways to approach this problem. The first is as an individual. Psychologists have found that "psychological distance" can dramatically improve creativity and innovation. Examples of psychological distance include thinking about a problem while in a very different place from its normal context (for example, while eating

lunch in an outdoor park), talking to people who have many dissimilarities from your own position or perspective, considering the problem within the context of the distant future, or brainstorming solutions from the perspective of someone in a fundamentally different position (for example, a product engineer at one of your company's vendors).

The second approach is team-based. Most managers have a team of talented people working with them. Don't be afraid to lean on your employees and encourage innovative thinking. Hold regular discussions with employees and keep the lines of communication open. Also encourage employees to spend informal time discussing new ideas and solutions with one another. You can even consider incentivizing innovative ideas. Invite team members to submit emails or develop proposals of their own and find ways to reward their effort. Even if they don't create any practical proposals, what they do share may spark an idea of your own.

AB: My budget is something that is set by the higher-ups. I'm worried that my best talent is going to walk out the door because I can't compete with salaries some others are offering. Is there any way I can keep these people or is it a lost cause?

In the long term, one of the most critical things you can do for your employees is promoting their accomplishments and reputation to your superiors. Doing just that will go a long way toward earning the trust and appreciation of your employees. Most superiors will pay attention, which may by itself lead to raises for your team members.

In the short term, you can communicate your appreciation of valued employees and try to find creative ways to reward their effort. Possible non-monetary compensation could include greater schedule flexibility (including telecommuting), longer lunch breaks, invitations to networking and professional development events, and the opportunity to engage directly with senior management.



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