

CHRISTOPHER MILLER CONSULTING
Excellence in Management Accounting

GOOD MANAGERS

Neither race nor gender nor age determines good managers. Neither do physical attributes nor personality types nor manners. Even culture, life experiences and education are only indirect determinants.

Good managers are, of course, leaders and the core attribute of leadership is the drive to achieve an objective or, as it has been put, leaders start-out with the end in mind. They have a focus, a purpose. They are outer directed, interested in the broader environment in which they operate.

This enables them to see a pathway through what others see as impenetrable chaos. In sharp contrast to the great majority of people whose comfort zones limit them to their technical specialties, good managers prefer working with "the big picture". That means a preference for working at the analytical level, dealing in abstractions, as opposed to working at the transactional level, dealing in specifics.

The attributes that enable them to act this way, the key characteristics of good managers, fall under four headings in the order of significance indicated below.

ONE: NUMBERS

Good managers have an intuitive understanding that numbers are at the heart of good management. They understand that, "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it". In other words, they understand that good management and financial management are the same thing, that good management is done with numbers.

(Some people can sift out the words that matter from a sea of verbiage. Good managers can sift out the numbers that matter, a much rarer attribute. They understand the stepped progression from numerical data to financial information to management insight.)

TWO: PEOPLE

Good managers are “street smart” with people. They understand them, they are not easily taken in by them, they are not surprised or disappointed by them. They understand their value systems, they understand “where they are coming from”.

They have inter-personal skills that show in three areas:

- they have the political skills to deal effectively with their superiors in an organisational hierarchy,
- they can predict how their subordinates will act, enabling them to work through them to set and achieve group objectives,
- they are skilled at learning from other people (and they want to learn from them); in particular, they have the significant but surprisingly uncommon skill of being able to take advice from technical experts.

THREE: TACTICAL CORRECTIONS

Good managers are very *quick* to make tactical corrections. They are quick to recognise wrong assumptions and changed conditions, quick to recognise and face up to errors, quick to cut their losses. They understand that speed is more important than precision when making tactical corrections, so they act on preliminary insights without waiting for definitive information.

They understand that good managers actually make more mistakes than bad managers but the speed with which they make tactical corrections means they suffer much less from them.

(Most people are the opposite: far less likely to act quickly and decisively, much more likely to avoid confrontation or admit error, much more likely to put off decision making until all the data are in.)

FOUR: STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

Good managers are very *slow* to enter into strategic commitments. They do every evaluation and analysis possible and postpone strategic decision making as long as possible.

(In fact, and although they commonly don't acknowledge it, most people are surprisingly impulsive when entering into strategic commitments.)