



## I need to manage a worker

### A good manager...

**"... is releasing but supportive."**

**"... understands my gifts."**

**"... listens to me, knows me well enough to be aware of how I'm feeling."**

**"... supports me and does the things they say."**

**"... leads but doesn't control."**

*Various schools workers, 2008*

### ▶ Starting points

You've been a schools worker for a while now, you've developed your strategy, you're working with a great group of young people and schools see a real value in your role. Your team has begun to grow and suddenly you wake up one morning, no longer just a schools worker, but a manager. How did that happen?

In every walk of life, as soon as you become good at something it seems it's time to move on. Of course there are some great reasons for this but it can happen without you even noticing it. Being a great schools worker doesn't necessarily mean you can manage others to do the same, but it does mean you have a lot of experience to pass on. If you find yourself managing other schools workers and interns, it's important to think through how to do it.

It's now irrelevant how you got here, the question is, what do you do now?

### ▶ Why should I manage?

Everyone needs to be managed. Whether you're a self starter, an extrovert or a detailed person, everyone needs direction and oversight. It's a manager's responsibility to create an environment to enable people to thrive and achieve.

If you value your work then it's worth investing time in learning how to manage people well. Like many things, management is best learnt from experience, but to think through what you are doing, how you are

doing it and to constantly reassess is vital to the health of staff, volunteers, young people and the work. Without effective management, often the quality and quantity of someone's work suffers, or worse still they experience burn out.

Workers need managers who can

- push them to get on with a task
- give them direction
- talk through issues and problems with them
- support them when they're finding something hard
- praise them when they've done something really well

This guide looks at the basics of managing a schools worker and details some top tips for management. The second looks in more depth at some of the issues around management and encourages the reader to think through their own and their organisational policies.

### ▶ **Who should manage?**

One of the problems in the Christian sector is that our managers are not always specialists in our field nor are they trained in management. Youth and schools workers are often managed by church leaders or a support group of volunteers, this is not an easy position to manage from.

The Youthwork Partnership and Amaze have launched a Youthworker Charter to help churches value their workers. It encourages leaders to be accountable in the way they manage their staff and adhere to some basic principles. This is a great way for non specialists to start to understand the issues and think about the needs of their worker.

If you are a non specialist manager of a schools worker, consider signing up to the Charter, alongside which, this guide should give you some starters on general management skills. For more guidance on schools work, you could spend time with another schools worker to get a gauge on some of the major issues or read up some of the articles or other posts on the [schoolswork.co.uk](http://schoolswork.co.uk) website. Of course, the best thing you can do as a manager is to listen, challenge and support your worker and learn about schools work in that way.

Many schools workers do not make the best managers and it may be a play off between specific knowledge and management skills. Only you can decide who the appropriate person is to manage a worker. For most there won't be a choice, but if there is, think it through.

However don't be put off managing someone just because you don't have the skills at the moment. Many of these can be learnt and tend to be learnt by practice.

### ▶ **How should I manage?**

Schools workers, youth workers and volunteers are notoriously difficult to pin down. Try asking some youth workers what they've got on for the coming week and you are likely to get an ambiguous general response: "I've got a busy week next week, I'm all over the place." How do you even begin to manage that response?

Managing someone is not about doing everything for them, it's about enabling them to do the work themselves. Here's where it gets tricky, we all work differently, so effective management is about helping someone to work in a way that suits them. Some people need to be supported in the detail, some need to be given a task and the flexibility to just get on with it.

Some common pitfalls when managing a worker include

- agreeing with everything your worker says or suggests
- disagreeing with everything your worker says or suggests
- needing to approve every little task your worker completes
- trusting them to do everything without any accountability
- doing the work for your worker

It may seem that you can't do anything right and often the manager gets a fair amount of grief from those they supervise. In reality, it's about balancing extremes, like giving too much input and giving too little. It's important to keep learning from your mistakes and keep being flexible to change the way you deal with situations.

There are some key starting points in ways to manage people. Here are a some basic guidelines.

### ➤ **Make your expectations clear**

People need to know exactly what is expected of them. If you want to see continuous improvement, initiative, and problem solving, let them know. Express clear expectations and guidance, the chances are a task will then be done in a way you're happy with.

### ➤ **Encourage good performance**

Knowing that we have done a good job is vital to our happiness at work. Encouraging and pointing out what someone has done well not only increases productivity, it raises an individual's self esteem, a crucial outcome of work. When someone has used their initiative, offer support, encouragement and make sure the initiative is recognized and rewarded in an appropriate way.

### ➤ **Treat staff with respect and don't patronize**

How would you like your manager to talk to you? Staff are adults and want to be treated as such. Take suggestions seriously and include them in decisions that affect them if you can. Try and limit the rules you set down, although clear policies are important to ensure a fair, consistent working environment. Work contributes to the worker's self esteem; most people want to feel as if they are contributing to something greater than themselves.

### ➤ **Provide good quality training**

Continuous professional development is crucial for all schools workers. It's important to keep up to speed with everything from new thinking in education and theology, to conflict management and counseling skills. However we can't learn it all at once. Help your worker prioritise their training needs. You may know these better than them.

Think about the needs of the individual and how they need to grow in their role. Try to be creative about training.

Think about questions like

- are there excellent secular training opportunities?
- can you offer training exchanges to other organisations? (exchanging training in expertise, rather than paying for it)
- could you club together with other youth workers to buy in some training?
- could you invest in one excellent training session rather than several mediocre ones.

### ➤ **Meet staff regularly**

Nothing demonstrates more effectively to a person that they are valued than time spent with them. Regular management meetings enable you to maintain oversight of what an employee is doing, give an opportunity to praise the good and steer in the right direction.

## ➤ **Be available**

When a manager is 'present' in a work space, the dynamic changes. Often productivity and focus will increase. Being around and available is an important part of boosting morale in a team.

Being a presence amongst your team is a good way of infusing a natural sense of your expectations. It's a way of modeling what you expect from staff on every issue from time keeping and dress code to maintaining an appropriate working environment.

It's also a good idea to be approachable and available for team members to talk to between formal meetings. It may be best to structure this to avoid continuous interruptions (eg you may chose to be available for drop ins between 9 and 10am daily or to be available on email) Find what works best for you and your team to avoid unnecessary interruptions.

## ➤ **Observe and critique**

It's all very well hearing a staff member's opinion of what and how they are doing, but it's key to watch them working and be able to critique. Spend some time each term observing their practice. Over the year, you could watch different styles of work (lesson, detached, youth club...) and give constructive feedback on how they did. Before giving your opinion on the work, it can be good to ask how the worker felt that it went. This will give an indication of how they rate themselves for when they report back in the future. When you feedback, give plenty of encouragement about the things they did well, as well as a few pointers of things they could try differently.

Having external people come in to observe can also be an excellent way of getting a view of how well you work. Perhaps ask a friendly teacher, youth worker or Ofsted inspector to spend a day with your team, observing different members. An external perspective may be needed to shock you out of a comfort zone, or to encourage you as to how well you really are doing.

## ▶ **Managing: the next stage**

So, now you've mastered the basics, what about when things get a bit tough? How do you get the best out of your team, encourage them to grow and develop personally and professionally? What about when your worker doesn't do what you tell them to do, or when they do something inappropriate? How do you manage someone when things are not simple? How do you coax the best out of a schools worker without feeling like you're on their back? Part II begins to look at some of these questions.

## ▶ **Building a team**

Once there is more than one worker in a project, you can start building a sense of team spirit. This will not only make your work more enjoyable, but will help you learn more about each other to get the best out of everyone. The better you know someone, the better you can work with them.

People's perceptions are really important. It's key for staff to feel that their managers are working alongside them and working to the same rules, policies and procedures. If managers start to cut corners or apply different rules to themselves, it can become divisive. Of course if there are genuine reasons as to why a manager needs to have different rules, explaining these clearly should avoid any misinterpretation.

It's also key that employees feel that they are being treated fairly and equally. A good sense of team is built when managers are clear with their staff and deal with any inconsistencies as they arise. Anything that is not dealt with can breed contempt amongst other staff members. This divisiveness is not healthy.

## ▶ Training

Another key role of a manager is to encourage workers to continuously develop. There may be training courses that would be appropriate, training days, online resources or DVDs that will help an employee develop and grow. Some training can be done in house using the expertise and skills of the team. Schools workers come from all walks of life and may have transferrable skills that can be used in in-house training.

Part of a schools workers training should be to talk through organisational policies and procedures regularly. Sometimes it's just a case of reminding yourselves of the way you work, sometimes it will be to report changes or pass on new information.

## ▶ Management vs. mentoring

One of the traps that Christian organisations fall into is when we focus too much on the pastoral needs of our staff. Of course it's vital that we care for our workers and take an interest in them personally, but that must never be intrusive or take the place of the management relationship. It may sound harsh, but as an employer your primary role should be to get the best out of an employee, this will have some cross over with their mental health, but don't make the mistake of becoming their counselor or mentor.

However, it does seem sensible to encourage staff to engage with a mentor of some description. Part of the role of a manager is to identify needs of the individual and to begin to address them. Often this will mean making suggestions for external help. They may need a professional mentor who can help guide them through the maze of the working world. It may be that they need a spiritual mentor, who can pray with them and challenge them about their faith. There are loads of people around in local churches who have amazing skills in these areas and are delighted to help.

## ▶ Networking

Even if your organisation is growing, the chances are it will still be quite small, this is where networking can play a crucial role in a worker's well being. Nothing can replace having peers to talk through issues and strains with. Join up with youth workers in the local area to meet and pray regularly, maybe you could meet up with some from the [schoolswork.co.uk](http://schoolswork.co.uk) site, or use the blog to discuss and link up with other schools workers.

Everyone needs support, everyone needs rest, everyone needs to be fed. Effective management is about finding ways of encouraging all of these things in a balanced and fair way. If all else fails, the most important skill a manager can learn, is to listen.

## ▶ Stick or carrot?

Being managed is not all about negotiation, there has to be an element of simply doing what you're told. Knowing when you stop allowing your employee to have a say and when you simply expect a task to be done is crucial. It is important as a manager to remember that you are the boss. However much you want to nurture and encourage staff, you are also there to get a job done.

Healthy management is about balancing stick and carrot approaches. Human nature says that to get the best out of people, they need to be encouraged, coaxed and offered incentives; but there are times when they need to be told to do something they just don't want to do. As long as, as a manager, you have a just reason for doing that, then it is right to put your foot down and be authoritative. It's often in these situations, when a staff member is really stretched, that they achieve things they wouldn't have dreamed of. Sometimes it can be the making of an employee.

One aspect of management that is often lost sight of, especially in the Christian sector, is the responsibility to help people to grow. If employees are allowed to do whatever they like when they like, they are not being encouraged to grow good personal or professional discipline. One of the roles of a good employer is to encourage good self discipline. The letter to the Hebrews talks about how discipline is good for us. It refines our character, honing us to become more like Christ.

It's important to both challenge people to have a healthy work life balance and to motivate them to work if they are being lazy. This is where an employer's own approach and style of working becomes significant. It's a good idea for managers to assess their own practice and challenge themselves (or ask someone else to if that's too difficult) so that they can model great practice to those who work for them. No one is going to listen to someone who doesn't practice what they preach.

### ▶ **When things go wrong**

Of course one of the hardest aspects of management is dealing with problems with staff. Christians are not immune to making big mistakes and when this happens it needs to be dealt with in a clear and efficient manner. This is one of the reasons why it is so important to lay down expectations at the outset. If you have been clear, it is much easier to see where the mistakes or problem areas are and then deal with them appropriately.

### ⊗ **Know your policy**

The first thing you need to do is ensure that you have good disciplinary and grievance policies. They should clearly detail what constitutes misconduct and what steps are to be taken when acceptable standards have been breached. Also ensure that your policy complies with statutory requirements. You can commission a professional body to write all your documentation, or go to an employment law solicitor for advice.

Then it's important to follow your policy accurately and document this. If, sadly, you end up having to terminate an employee's contract, all documentation and the process adhered to must be clear. If, for whatever reason, the matter was taken further (eg. an employee claims unfair dismissal) any mistake you have made in procedure could make you personally or corporately liable.

### ⊗ **Dealing with conflict**

Of course the hope is that a situation wouldn't ever get as serious as dismissal. Most things can be de-escalated before they become more serious. A good manager will help and support their employees in order that termination will not be necessary.

As a manager, you can't be too scared to deal with conflict. Situations that aren't dealt with build up and ultimately cause more problems. For Christian schools workers, looking at God's perspective is key. The Bible talks at length about God's justice and how he doesn't avoid difficult situations. In the gospels, Jesus doesn't usually cause riots, but he does speak the truth and see that justice is done. So it seems that the Godly thing to do is to confront and work through issues before they escalate.

When a problem arises it must be dealt with as quickly as is practical. Annual reviews are not the place to raise problems you have been storing up all year. Each situation should be dealt with as it arises and employees should be given the opportunity and space to correct any mistakes. If a staff member is struggling with a task, their manager should come alongside them and facilitate them to complete it. Employees deserve to be given all the support and encouragement you can. It's not possible, or right, to do everything alongside them, but from time to time working on the detail with someone is appropriate and a great boost to confidence.

If the conflict is between two members of staff, you may want to mediate a meeting between them. If you speak to them individually, you run the risk of polarising the situation and making the problem worse.

It is good and right to expect your employees to carry out their role in a professional manner. You can't expect everyone to like each other, but it is important that any issues between members of staff do not detrimentally impact the way they work. It's important to address unacceptable behaviour immediately. Nothing lowers morale more than seeing other people's poor behaviour or working practices go unchallenged.

### ▶ **Conclusion**

There are no hard and fast rules in management. Each individual grows and changes as they learn 'on task'. There are basic keys to help and pitfalls to avoid, the beautiful thing about management is that the rest can be down to interpretation. There are as many different ways to manage as there are different people.

If there is one thing that all managers should do, it is to listen. Listening communicates importance and value. It gives a fresh perspective to a problem or situation. It encourages and builds good relationships.

To keep staff; value them, support them, listen to them.

### ▶ **Finding more help**

➤ You can download a great set of guides (for free) on strategy and monitoring and evaluation, from the For ideas on working policies see Volunteer England's "Good Practice Bank".

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/Resources/goodpracticebank/>

➤ For practical training on how to manage volunteers, see Volunteer England.

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/Resources/EVM/>

➤ For accountability see "We love our youthworker" National Charter for Youthworkers from Amaze and Youthwork the partnership.

➤ For reading: "The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership" by John Maxwell.

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