

# Successful Software Management: 17 Lessons Learned

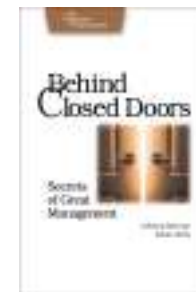
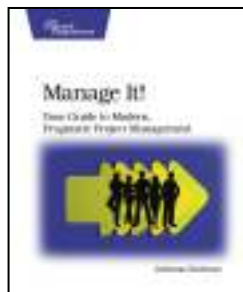
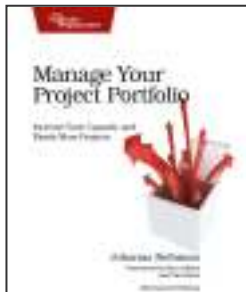
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Johanna Rothman

*New: Manage Your Project Portfolio: Increase Your Capacity and Finish More Projects*

[www.jrothman.com](http://www.jrothman.com)

+1-781-641-4046



# Some Startling Statistics

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- Want to improve your processes?
  - Reuse gives a 350% improvement
  - Capable managers gives 65% improvement
  - Project staff with capability and domain expertise gives 55% improvement
  - Effective methods/processes gives 35% improvement

Source: Capers Jones, *Software Assessments, Benchmarks, and Best Practices*. Addison-Wesley, Upper Saddle River, NJ. 2000. (page 133).

# *Why Have Managers, Anyway?*

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- Managers exist to organize purposefully (paraphrase of Drucker)
- Obtain business results by
  - Get the best work out of your people
  - Create an environment that enables people to work
  - Increase your team's capacity
- Create value for the customers by working effectively, balancing the needs of the business, the people, and the environment you create

# *Effective Management*

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- Surprisingly difficult to do
  - Started as an individual contributor
  - No training
  - “The people stuff is hard to do”
- As we proceed, think about your capabilities and knowledge
  - What is new for you, what do you already practice, what are you ready to take to the next step?

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# 1. *Know What They Pay You to Do*

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- What's your mission—the reason they hired you? Some possibilities are:
  - Keep clients happy
  - Release on time
  - Keep the CEO from random calls
  - See to the care and feeding of the developers/testers/writers/whomever
  - Understand the state of the product at any time and report on it
  - Find the Big Bad Bugs before the customers do
- What's your mission?

## 2. *Plan the Work: Portfolio Management*

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- Identify and manage your project portfolio
  - Collect all the work: know what all the work is
  - Rank it
  - Decide what you can staff and what will be unstaffed
- Develop strategies for each product
  - How little can you do?
- Know what done means for each project
- Avoid multi-tasking and its context-switching

## 3. *Accept Only One #1 Priority at a Time*

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- How many of you are context switching between several #1 priorities?
- Do you confuse urgent and important?
- You can only do one (important) thing at a time
- Choose what it is

# 4. Commit to Projects After Asking Your Staff

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- “Can we have this next month (or week or day)?”
- Even if you’ve already considered the request, the answer is “No”
  - In the moment, you might confuse this request with another request
  - There may be other implications you haven’t considered, since it’s no longer the same time you first considered this request.
- Don’t train your management to ask you for an answer
  - Your staff will know that you think:
    - ♦ I want to know what it will really take you to do this work
    - ♦ I’m not afraid to tell my management what it will take



## *5. Hire the Best People for the Job*

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- A manager's greatest point of leverage is in hiring appropriate staff
- “Best” is not necessarily synonymous with “Similar”
- Develop a hiring strategy
- Learn to interview successfully, so you can hire people who can do the job well (stars)

## 6. *Preserve Good Teams*

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- How do you create teams now?
  - Do you keep teams together who work well together?
  - Do you keep pairs together who work well together?
- Recognize when you have a team un-jeller
  - Find another place for that person (not necessarily in your company)
- Do you have people who like to work together and are successful working together? Do you keep them together?
- Don't disrupt teams just because you think it's time to break up a team
  - Every time you re-create a team, there's a team startup cost

## 7. Avoid Micromanaging or Inflicting Help

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- Assume each person knows how to perform his or her job
- Assume you no longer know how to perform the job
- You hired the people because you thought they could do the work.  
Let them...
  - Give them assignments
  - Ask if they need help
  - Jointly decide when to check in
  - Don't interfere
    - ♦ Sneak up behind them and ask “How's it going?”
    - ♦ Micromanagement
    - ♦ Inflicting advice
- Choose a time to know when they or you are stuck

# 8. *Treat People Individually and With Respect*

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- Adapt your management style to each person
- Everyone likes different projects
  - Specific tasks vs. general information
  - New complex problems vs. immediate success
- Your staff's relationship with you is more significant than rewards
  - Ask your staff what they want from work
  - Provide opportunities to do new or different work
  - Treat people with respect
  - Clarify each person's contribution to the organization (in a one-on-one)
  - Hire candidates they respect
  - Treat people as individuals

# 9. Meet Weekly with Each Person

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- Why do people work? Stay at the same job? “The people”
- One-on-ones help you
  - Build trusting relationships
  - Know what’s really going on
- One-on-ones are sacrosanct
  - With each person at a regular uninterrupted time
  - We talk about
    - ♦ Their accomplishments: Showing progress, not just talking about progress
    - ♦ Their issues
    - ♦ If they need my help
    - ♦ Career development
    - ♦ Anything else they want to discuss
  - After we’ve done this for a while, they can set the agenda

# *But...*

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- I don't have time...
  - You already are taking the time but not building the relationship
  - If you plan time, you can reduce the number of unplanned interruptions
  - How will you give timely feedback on performance?
- I'm using Agile
  - Wonderful! You don't have to discuss project progress
  - My experience on Agile teams is that people require more feedback, coaching, and mentoring especially for interpersonal skills

# 10. Plan Training Time in the Workweek

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- Technical work is constantly changing
- People generally like getting training
- Many inexpensive ways
  - Brown bag lunches
  - Periodic talks from other groups
  - Present projects across the company
  - In-house tool “user group” meeting
  - Outside experts
    - ♦ Professional consultants or speakers
    - ♦ Knowledgeable friend or colleague

# 10.1 Plan Training Time Each Week for Yourself

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- You need to continue your education on a regular basis too
- Possibilities:
  - Article/column review with your peers/group
  - Book reading (1 chapter per week and discuss) with peers/group
  - Conferences



# 11. Give Credit Freely

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- When people have done a good job, never take credit. Acknowledge the work publicly
  - “Howard’s work on the data for this report allowed me to finish it in time”
  - “Julia’s really considered the angles on this architecture”
  - “My staff, Tim, Tina, and Theo finished that feature for you”

# 12. Fire People Who Can't Do the Work

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- Keeping people around who can't perform is expensive in time, project budget and morale
- If you've tried to hire the appropriate people, and you've given them feedback, and they're not working out, fire them
  - Part of your job as a manager is to assess peoples' work, and give them feedback
  - If they can't work the way you need them to, your job is done
  - Work with your HR group to handle the situation with humanity and persistence. I follow this checklist:
    - ♦ Verbal feedback and coaching in our one-on-ones. How many times do I have to say the same thing?
    - ♦ Written feedback and more coaching. Start a 4-8 week get-well plan with defined outcomes
    - ♦ Continue weekly feedback until end of get-well plan.

# 13. *Emphasize Results, Not Time*

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- Hours working do not positively correlate with productivity
- Permit (Force?) people to only work 40 hours per week
  - When they work longer, they do non-work things
  - Productivity goes down
  - If you keep people working only 40 hours per week, they work on work things
- But I keep getting interrupted...
  - Log where the time goes
  - Look for meetings you can cancel
  - What obstacles do you need to remove?
- Reward results
- Plan for a 40-hour week, and reward the work completed in that time

# 14. *Admit Your Mistakes*

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- Mistakes are embarrassing
- If you admit mistakes, people respect you more
  - You save face by admitting you are human
- Don't deny or ignore mistakes

# 15. Recognize and Reward Good Work

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- Give positive feedback liberally
  - Privately as one-on-ones
  - Publicly in group meetings (if that fits for the person)
  - Publicly to the organization about the group's work or a project's work
- Rewards don't have to cost you money
  - Consider team-generated awards (divorced from money)
    - ♦ “Best recursion of the month”
    - ♦ “Best problem report of the month”
  - Time off
  - Group activity, but consider whether everyone really enjoys the activity
  - Appreciations
  - Team party
  - Movie tickets
  - Ask the group

# 16. *Take a Vacation*

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- You can't do your best job when you're burnt out
- Helps your team learn how to run things without you
  - You're not tied to just one job
  - Everyone has more opportunities

# 17. Manage Yourself

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- Before you can manage other people successfully, you need to know how to manage yourself
  - Organize your work
  - Recognize when you're accomplishing work and when you're stuck
  - Recognize when your reactions are not in synch with the situation
  - Learn from your decision-making, behaviors, and actions
  - Keep a journal so you can learn from your actions

# *Technical People Can Make Great Managers*

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- Manage your management career
- Know what you have to do, and develop a strategy to do the work
  - Identify how to manage your staff
  - Observe your own work
  - Make corrections and continue
- You don't have to be perfect
- Do enough right to help people do their best work in an environment they can work in
- Help your managers learn to be better managers—the productivity gains are enormous



# Resources

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- I have a number of articles on my web site, [www.jrothman.com](http://www.jrothman.com) and blog, and Pragmatic Manager email newsletter: [www.jrothman.com/pragmaticmanager/](http://www.jrothman.com/pragmaticmanager/)
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