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## Reimagining the Manager Role

**New research finds only a third of surveyed workers expressing interest in managerial roles within their organization. Experts say HR needs to better understand the preferences and driving forces of different generations in their workforce in order to make the role a more appealing one.**

By Carol Patton  
Tuesday, December 22, 2015



Nearly every day, employees compete for leadership or management jobs at their workplace. But results from a new survey reveal a change in direction: A growing number of employees are now turned off by managerial roles.

According to the Addison Group's second-annual generational workplace survey that attracted nearly 1,500 responses from U.S. employees, only 33 percent of workers believe that being a manager has the potential to advance their career. Only one quarter (25 percent) say that learning how to be a better manager is a priority; and 17 percent say they do not enjoy managing others.

Addison Group attributes these changes to a rising trend in which workers are discovering opportunities to advance their career and make more money without assuming the added responsibilities typically associated with management jobs.

Still, the perception that management roles are not considered essential to progressing an individual's career is surprising, says Ed Kavanagh, president of the HR and administrative staffing division at Addison Group, a professional staffing and search services firm in Chicago.



"It's a constantly evolving situation, especially with millennials," he says. "The ground keeps shifting and keeps the staffing industry on our toes -- and all HR professionals as well."

The survey results also revealed significant differences between age groups. For example, 17 percent of baby boomers (ages of 51 to 69) acknowledged that they'd like to become a better manager, compared to 29 percent of millennials (ages 18 to 33) and 26 percent of Generation X (ages 34 to 54).

The survey's overall message, says Kavanagh, is that HR professionals need to better understand the preferences and driving forces of different generations in their workforce.

"Continually communicate with employees, especially millennials," he says. "HR needs to spend the time . . . to understand what's important to its employee base and communicate what [an employee's career] path can be in the future."

Part of that process includes changing the value proposition of management positions or selling them as part of an employee's career journey, adds Ilene Siscovick, partner and leader in global careers at Mercer, a New York-based global HR consulting firm.

She says employees at some point often face a fork in the road, choosing between staff or management. But many are not prepared for a management role, or they have unrealistic expectations. HR, she says, needs to reframe what a successful manager looks like and identify the capabilities of the job.

"[T]hink about it as a success profile," Siscovick says. "Here's what it takes to be a successful manager. It takes being able to deal with complexity, ambiguity, people management and building your team, gaining insights into teaching acumen and learning how to make decisions and negotiate. You have to reposition it in terms of what are the experiences [and capabilities] of the job."

Besides being transparent about necessary job skills for managerial roles, HR must also address other employee concerns: Prerequisites for moving into a management role, such as developing specific skills, and velocity, or how fast they can transition to management. Since many employees want to control their career mobility and the timing of promotions, she says it's important to lay a realistic foundation to avoid disappointment and worse, failure.

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Another way is for HR to restructure job roles that periodically present employees with a realistic job preview, says Lorraine Stomski, global practice leader for leadership and assessment at Aon Hewitt, a global HR and management consulting firm in New York.

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She says individual workers can sample management responsibilities by handling specific management tasks, such as leading a team to develop cost-cutting strategies.

"You could give this [responsibility] to one of your direct reports who has an interest in this or being a manager," Stomski says. "It's an important project. It's not a risky one . . . the manager can coach, oversee and mentor. You're giving employees an opportunity to try something out that a manager would otherwise be doing."

However, she says, some managers micromanage their workers, or avoid piling such opportunities on to their already overloaded plates. Others just don't know how to do this and, instead of offering employees a management experience, send them to management-training classes.

Stomski says some companies have trained their focus on preparing managers to converse with employees about their career interests, plans and ambitions and stepping stone opportunities.

Meanwhile, Stomski isn't really surprised by the survey results.

"We've got a systemic issue about the role of manager and, really even more importantly, not just preparing people to be a manager or really setting those expectations about what management is about," Stomski says. "We expect them to embrace the role and be good at it when we missed the boat in the first place by ensuring that the person has the desire to be a manager and understand what it's about."

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