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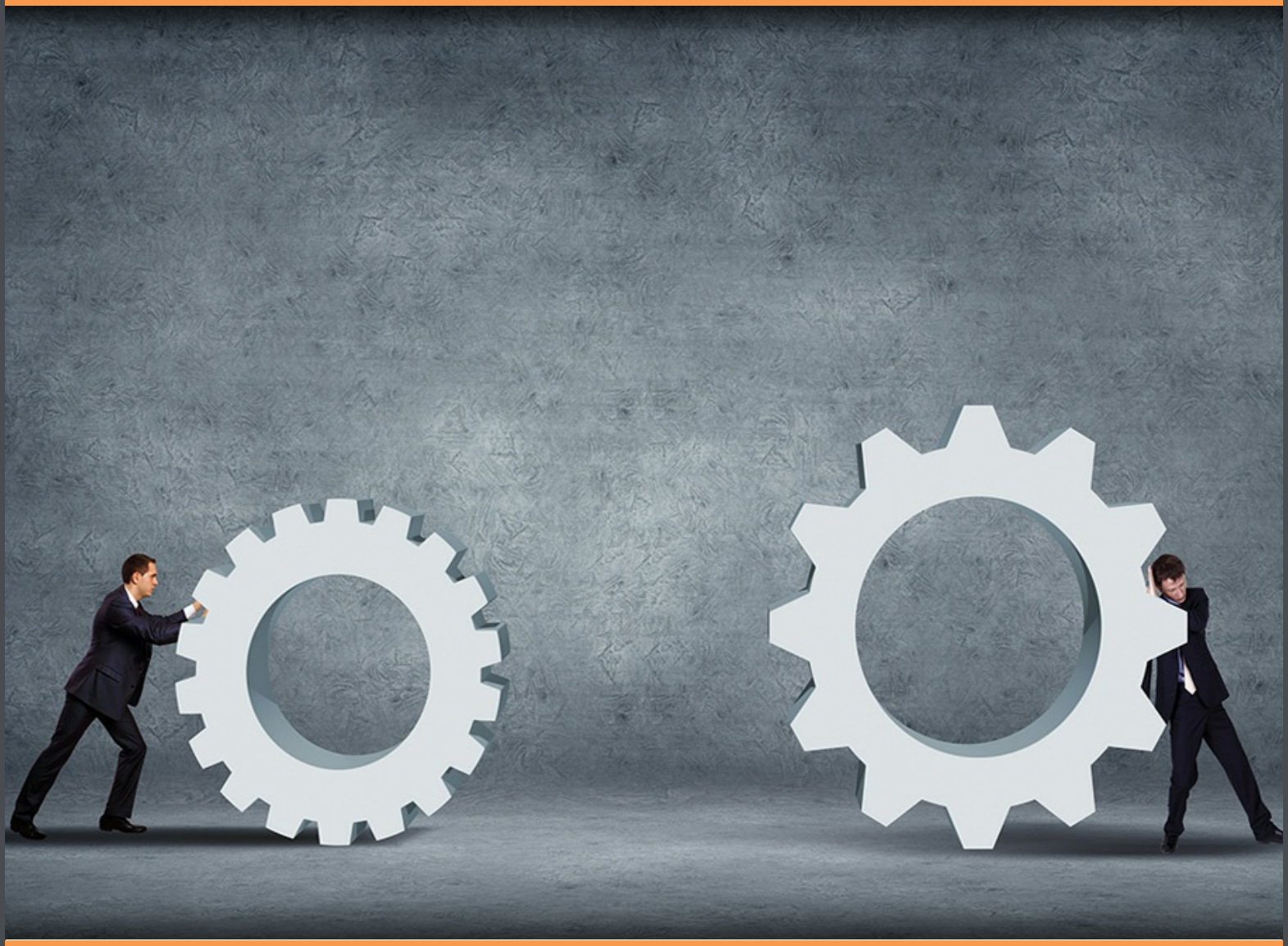
How to deal with your manager

Manmohan Joshi



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1 Human Hypothesis of Management

The success of any organization depends directly on effectively making use of human resources. The real test of our abilities as leaders, managers and team members of an organization is how effectively we can establish and maintain human organizations for the purpose of achieving results. What is it that makes some succeed and others fail? It is a way of looking at where they want to go and how they are going to get there. It means having an idea, a mental plan, a vision, and the skills to execute their ideas.

1.1 Vision

All organizations – in sports, business or government – are started by someone with an idea. Many people get ideas to start something, but only some of these ideas are turned into successful events. The idea often begins with a vague desire to do something that is challenging. To become a success, this idea has to grow into something that we really want to do. Once we have a sense of what we want the organization to look like, feel like, and be like, we have a clear idea. The idea then becomes an image of the future, usually referred to as a ***vision***.

1.1.1 How to turn vision into results

It is highly improbable that a single individual can turn his/her vision into results. For this, they need help and support from the others who are normally members of their team. This can happen in the following manner:

- All members of the team have to see in it possibility of realizing their own hopes and dreams.
- Images must be created in the followers' minds that are similar to the images in the leader's mind.
- Personal visions of individual team members lead to the shared visions of other members. They are then likely to put their energy to work to achieve their desired future results.

1.2 Purpose of management

The main purpose of management is to create value as seen by the subordinates. To be successful, managers must achieve the results valued by the people who are concerned with the organization's success. Managers must meet the needs and aspirations of subordinates.

1.2.1 What is management?

Management is the process of working with and through individuals, groups, and other resources (equipment, capital, technology).

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To be successful, organizations require their management personnel to have interpersonal skills. The achievement of organizational objectives through leadership is management. Thus, everyone is a manager in at least certain activities.

Managing, leading or influencing requires three general skills:

- **Diagnosing:** understanding the situation you are trying to influence;
- **Adapting:** changing your behaviour according to the situation;
- **Communicating:** interacting with others in a way that people can easily understand and accept.

1.3 Human skill

Human skill is the ability to:

- Work with individuals and groups;
- Understand them;
- Motivate them;
- Discipline them;
- Solve their conflicts.

People working together have constant interaction with each other. For this purpose human skills are essential.

1.4 Understanding behavior

Managers need to understand why people behave as they do. To get things done through other people, you have to know why they behave in a certain manner.

Understanding past behaviour is also important in itself for developing human skills. Understanding why people did what they did yesterday enables a manager/supervisor to predict how they are likely to behave tomorrow, next week, and next month under similar as well as changing conditions.

People have many needs. No one person has exactly the same needs as another. We must know what our employees really want from their jobs. Managers have to know their people to understand what motivates them.

Managers should remember that no one (including themselves!) learns how to do anything all at once. We learn a little bit at a time. As a result, if a manager wants someone to do something completely new, he/she should reward the smallest progress the person makes in the desired direction.

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The result of any situation is dependent on the way you choose to behave. You will have three options to choose from:

- **Passive behaviour:** You are passive when you:
  - ✓ Want to maintain the things as they are;
  - ✓ Allow others to make decisions for you;
  - ✓ Verbally agree with others even if you have other feelings;
  - ✓ Delay action to avoid problem solving.
- **Aggressive behaviour:** You are aggressive when you try to:
  - ✓ Impose your position on others;
  - ✓ Find fault with others;
  - ✓ Act in a way which is insulting to others;
  - ✓ Behave in an unpredictable and angry manner.
- **Assertive behaviour:** You are assertive when you:
  - ✓ Are honest with yourself and others;
  - ✓ Protect your rights;
  - ✓ Respect the rights of others;
  - ✓ Are able to express yourself clearly in front of others;
  - ✓ Have confidence in yourself;
  - ✓ Are able to behave in a responsible way.

1.5 Steps to assertiveness

- Listen to the other person; show you understand.
- Say what you think or what you feel.
- Say what you want to happen.

Getting to WIN/WIN:

You must ensure that both parties come away from the situation in a positive position – look for a Win/Win solution.

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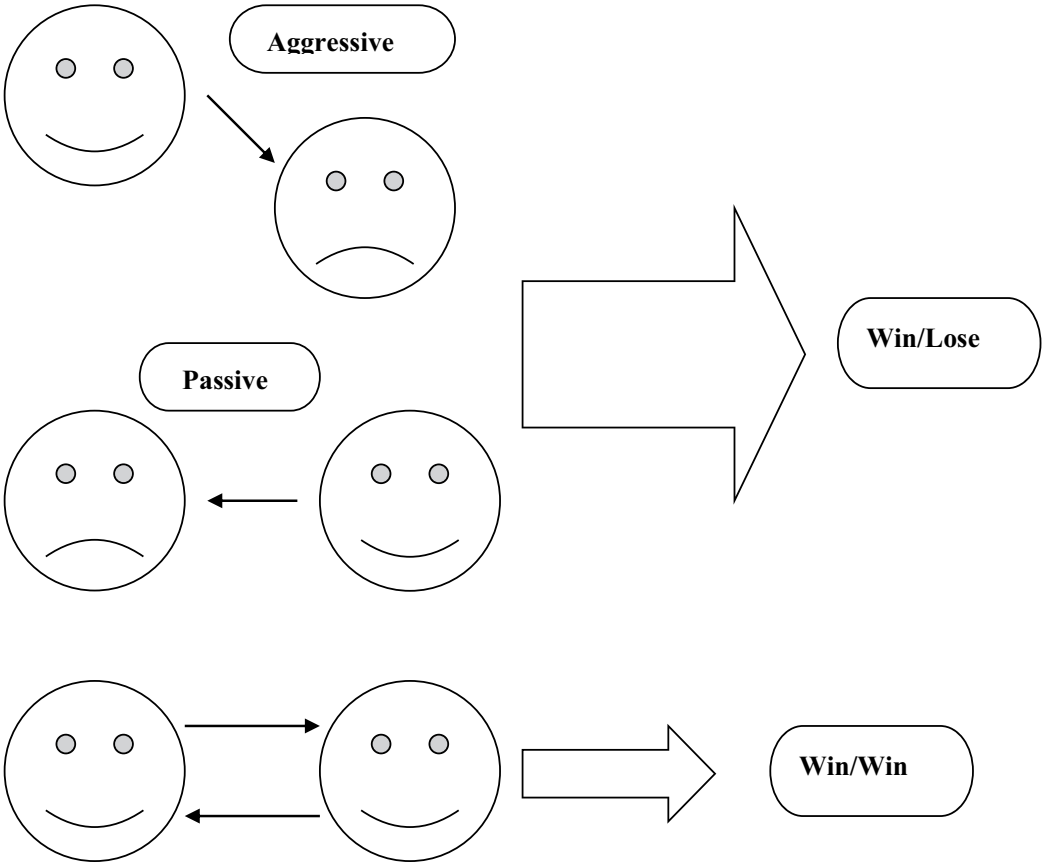

- ❖ Try for a joint solution that will work.
- ❖ Your Solution + My Solution = OUR SOLUTION

10 Steps to assertiveness:

- Build your self-esteem
- Learn how to listen
- Practice taking risks
- Understand behaviour
- Know what you want
- Make choices in the way you behave
- Stop – Look – Listen
- Develop assertive skills
- Practice all the techniques
- Make assertiveness a way of life

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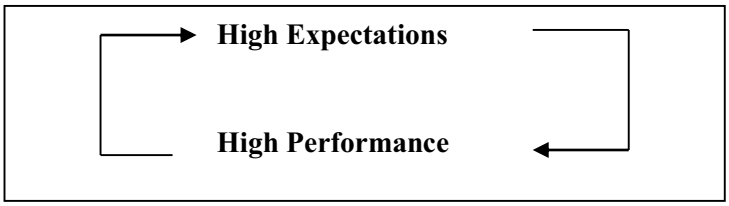
1.6 Hypothesis

Human beings are basically motivated by social needs. They seek meaning in the social relationships on the job. If they are happy with these relationships, they work more effectively. Hence managers should not limit their attention to the task to be performed but should give more attention to the needs of the people. Managers should be concerned with the feelings of their people and, in doing so, must often act as the communication link between the employees and higher management.

With this type of relationship people respond to high expectations of their managers with high performance. This is called the **effective cycle**.



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2 Scientific Guidelines to deal with managers

2.1 Managerial responsibilities

Much of a manager's job involves the carrying out of responsibilities to employees. Proper discharge of these responsibilities is the primary way in which managers meet the demands placed on them by the higher management. Employees place leadership expectations on managers. They expect him/her to provide them with direction and support. They expect him/her to look after their needs – social needs and personal needs – and the manager must deal with these expectations.

Managers have many different expectations from their subordinates and many different responsibilities towards them. Differences in subordinates, jobs, work organizations and cultures are among the many different factors that influence which responsibilities managers have towards their subordinates.

Some of the managerial responsibilities towards subordinates are as follows:

- Establish a warm and trusting work climate within the department. Be considerate and open with employees.
- When employee problems occur, handle them promptly. An employee might need a personal day off in order to attend a friend's wedding. The manager should take care of the problem because it may cause the employee to feel dissatisfied.
- Be fair in relationship with employees. Although one employee in the department may be more likeable than some others, it is important to make work assignments strictly on the basis of job competence or other organizational requirements.
- Provide all employees with a clear explanation of all matters connected with their jobs – sometimes employees need an explanation for even small things. One receptionist went to the cafeteria while she held a customer's telephone call on 'hold'. When asked by the manager she said that she thought a person had the freedom to go to the cafeteria!
- Train employees in job-related skills. Most employees still need on-the-job training.
- Discuss planned changes before they take place. When this happens¸ employee often welcomes changes and not opposes them.
- Develop a satisfactory level of positive attitude in the employees about a number of things such as quality of supervision and attitudes towards colleagues and managers.
- Encourage team work.

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2.2 Role of communication

Effective communication is very important in establishing a good working relationship between managers and other employees. If the communication between both the parties is clear it becomes easy to deal with managers.

2.2.1 What is meant by communication?

Communication is the process by which we give, receive or exchange information with others. It can involve speaking, listening or writing. This information does not necessarily need to be hard facts. Sometimes just a shrug of the shoulder can act as our means of communication.

2.2.2 Why do we need to communicate?

You might think we could all live quite happily without communicating at all. But no – we all need to communicate throughout our life. Communication is a fundamental part of human life. Unfortunately, quite often people fail to communicate in a way that you could understand.

Nowhere is effective communication more important than at work. Important information needs to be given, received, exchanged and understood hundreds of times every working day. Many business dealings go wrong simply because of poor communication between the people concerned.

2.2.3 Effective communication skills

Communication means interacting with others. We do this through:

- Face-to-face communication
- Listening
- Questioning
- The telephone
- Letter writing
- Report writing

2.2.4 Face-to-face communication

It is the easiest. You can explain what you mean.

- **If the person does not understand, ask yourself:**
  - Are you using the language they understand – not difficult but simple words?
  - Are your ideas going over their heads?

- **Areas that matter in communication:**
  - Words: what we say
  - Tone: how we say it
  - Body language: how we look when we are saying it

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- **Advantages of face-to-face communication:**
  - People can see what you mean.
  - Eye contact helps you establish if the other person is listening and understanding.
  - Your body language can help them believe what you are saying.

- **Disadvantages of face-to-face communication:**
  - You can give away your true feelings.
  - The other person may not understand the words that you say.
  - They may not like the way you are saying the words.

2.2.5 Listening skills

The art of effective listening is essential to clear communication, and clear communication is necessary to management success. Hearing is not the same as listening. We hear all sorts of noises during every waking moment but we do not listen to them. Listening is more important than just 'hearing.'

- You often 'hear' what you want to hear.
- Listening is the other half of communication.

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➢ **When listening:**

- Give your full attention.
- Do not assume what the other person is going to say.
- Do not waste listening time thinking what your reply will be.
- Show by eye contact and an interested expression that you are paying attention.

➢ **Questioning techniques:**

To clarify a point questions are needed.

There are categories of questions, which can be used depending upon the type of information that you want in return.

➢ **Categories of questions:**

- **Elaboration questions:** They are asked for information of a general nature, for example:
  'Tell me about…'
  'Is there anything more?'
  'Would you elaborate on that, please?'
- **Specification questions:** They are used for asking for more specific information, for example:
  'What exactly did she say?'
  'When was the last time this happened?'
- **Feelings questions:** They are asked when you want to know the emotional effect of something, for example:
  'What did you feel when it happened?'
  'How do you feel when people are aggressive towards you?'
- **Opinion questions:** Most people hold opinions about things and welcome the opportunity to express them, for example:
  'What do you like about your present job?'
  'What do you least like about your job?'
  'What would you like that you don't have?'
- **Behavioural questions:** Past behaviour is a good indicator of future behaviour, for example:
  'How would you usually deal with a situation like this?'
  'What did you do the last time this happened?'
  'How did you react when…?'

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➢ **Warnings about questions:**

Bear the following points in mind when asking questions of managers and other team members:

- Too many questions from you will appear to be an interrogation of the other person.
- When you ask a question, keep quiet and wait for the answer. Don't be tempted to re-phrase your question unless asked to.
- Ask one question at a time. If you ask multiple questions you will only get one or two answers.
- If you don't get a full answer to a question, ask it again.
- Listen carefully to the answers.

2.2.6 The telephone:

- When listening on the telephone, do not allow disturbances in the room to interfere with your listening abilities.
- Use words or your tone of voice to communicate your understanding of what is being said. Let your caller know you are listening by making verbal indications such as 'Mmm,' 'Yes,' 'Ok.'

2.2.7 Letter writing

In order to communicate effectively you must produce quality letters for your reader.

➢ **Planning your letter: Objective:**

- To give information?
- To sell an idea?
- To promote an action?
- To clarify something?
- To rectify a situation?
- To promote yourself?

➢ **Structuring your letter:**

- Greeting
- Heading
- Introduction
- Information
- Action
- Conclusion

➢ **Writing your letter:**

- Accurate
- Brief
- Clear

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2.2.8 Report writing

Quite often you may be asked to prepare a report on the progress of your work, an ongoing project, or a planned activity. It is necessary to understand that your manager wants a report that is well thought of, well prepared, and is effective. The following steps will help you in this task:

- **The first thing you need to think of:**
  - Who is my reader?
  - What does he/she know of this subject?
  - What are the objectives of this report?

- **Planning the report:**
  - Consider how long it is until the report is required.
  - How long do you have to work on gathering information?
  - How long on preparing for and writing the report?
  - Perhaps even retyping the report?

- **Structure of the report (suggested):**
  - Title page
  - Contents
  - Summary

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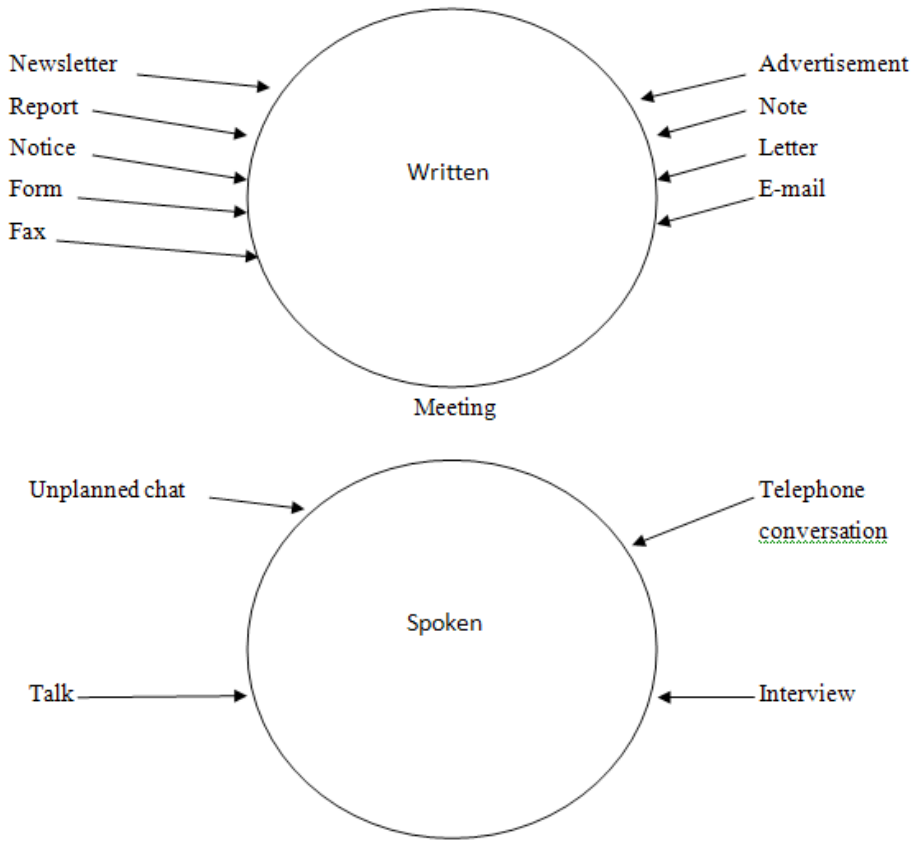
- Introduction
- Findings
- Conclusion
- Recommendations
- Appendices, acknowledgements, references etc.

➢ **Presentation/Typing:**

- Wide margins
- Double spacing
- Paragraphs and headings
- Headings in different type face
- Consistency in numbering system

2.3 Choosing paper on the spoken word

Should we communicate on paper or by the spoken word? Different occasions call for different action. If you need to contact your manager or someone else urgently and for a very brief communication, a telephone call would probably be your best choice. You could even go to him/her personally and clarify the matter. On the other hand, if you have a very detailed message to explain, then sending a letter/ note would be better. The receiver will have time to read the information properly in his/her own time.



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2.4 Barriers to communication

There are many barriers to effective communication. In order to overcome these barriers and understand the true meaning of the message that comes through a particular communication, we need to filter the messages.

2.4.1 Identifying communication filters

When we filter coffee the grounds are left on the filter paper and only the liquid goes into the jug. A similar thing happens with communication. There are three types of filters that only allow a proportion of the message to get through. As a result, we only receive part of the message and, often, only the part that we want to hear.

- **Attention filters:** Physical distractions such as:
  - Noise – other people talking, telephone ringing, traffic, music.
  - Environmental – too hot, too cold, poor lighting.
  - Interruptions – people, telephones.
  - Timing – trying to talk to someone when they are about to go somewhere or are in the middle of a job.

- **Emotional filters:** These are inherent in the speaker and probably unknown to the other person.
  - Prejudice – dislike of the other person, the way they are dressed, the message itself.
  - Status – the other person is higher or lower in status in the company, which can affect the way in which you speak and listen to them.
  - Experience – If previous communication with a person has resulted in an unpleasant experience, you will be hesitant when approaching them the next time, not wishing to repeat the experience.
  - Assumptions – assuming what the message will be and thus not listening properly.
  - Values and beliefs – we all have our own codes regarding morals, religion, and politics and so on. If the message contradicts these codes, we are likely to switch off.

- **Word filters:** Certain words and phrases can cause us to stop listening to the person who speaks them.
  - Criticism – Few of us like to be criticized. 'That was the wrong way to deal with the problem.'
  - Moralizing – 'You shouldn't have done that!'
  - Ordering – 'I want the report on my desk by Thursday afternoon without fail.'
  - Threatening – 'If you don't do what I say, you will be in serious trouble.'
  - Advising – 'I suggest that you…' People will only accept the advice that agrees with their solution. They will respond to advice with the phrase 'Yes, but.'
  - Logical argument – It is too difficult to argue with logic.

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- Reassuring – 'Never mind, everything will turn out right in the end.'
- Diverting – 'Yes all right, but as I was saying…'
- Jargon – Unless the listener understands the jargon, they will wonder what it means and will not be listening to the rest of the message.

2.4.2 Reducing filters

It is not always possible or predictable to eliminate attention filters, but they ***can*** be reduced. If the proposed conversation will take more than a few minutes, find somewhere quiet to hold it and let it be known that you want no interruptions. It is simple enough to get your timing right. If someone approaches you at an inconvenient time, politely tell them so and arrange to meet later.

You can do little about other people's emotions, but try to put your own on hold when talking and listening to others. If you feel some barriers, keep your conversation brief and to the point.

Practice overcoming these barriers and learn good communication skills. If you are successful in doing so, you will be able to have an effective communication with everyone. You will be in a good position to deal with your manager in a proper and effective manner. This will lead to the success of your own self as well as your organization.

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3 Understanding the nature of manager's work

Every manager has responsibilities towards himself or herself, their team, the individuals within the team, the organization and the tasks in hand. Most managers find themselves under constant pressure to achieve targets as effectively as possible. In an effort to meet these demands, they too often forget the needs of the people for whom they are responsible. The results may not be welcome. In order to deal effectively with managers it is necessary for other team members to know what managers really want. An essential way of understanding the managerial role is to examine the functions or activities performed by managers. This is the traditional way of understanding managerial jobs.

3.1 Major functions of management

Management involves multiple functions but the most prominent ones are the following:

3.1.1 Planning

Planning is the establishment of goals or objectives and the courses of action for achieving them. To plan is to deal with the future. Planning involves work scheduling, budgeting, setting up procedures and preparing agenda for meetings. Decision-making is such an important part of planning that the planning function is often referred to as planning and decision-making. When a manager helps determine which work activities the department will undertake in the next week, he/she is planning.

3.1.2 Organizing

Organizing is dividing the work into manageable units and coordinating results to achieve the plan; organizing follows planning. It includes designing jobs, structuring the organization, and training employees to do the job.

3.1.3 Directing

Directing is influencing others to achieve organizational objectives. Directing is also referred to as leading. Managers are engaged in directing when they motivate, counsel or discipline subordinates. Leading can also be considered the person-to-person activities of the manager.

3.1.4 Controlling

Controlling is the function of ensuring that performance is achieved as planned. It involves measuring performance and taking corrective action when standards are not maintained. Controlling is conducted with people as well as with equipment and materials. Managers are engaged in controlling when they make spot checks of their operation.

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3.2 Ten key qualities of managers

In order to fully understand the nature of your manager's work it is essential for you to know what qualities a manager is expected to possess. Ideally, your manager must have the following qualities:

3.2.1 Providing clear directions by:

- Establishing clear goals and standards;
- Communicating group goals;
- Involving people in setting targets;
- Being clear and thorough when delegating tasks.

3.2.2 Encouraging open, two-way communication by:

- Being open when dealing with people;
- Being honest, direct and to the point;
- Establishing a climate of trust.

3.2.3 Willing to coach and support people by:

- Being supportive and helpful;
- Being constructive when correcting poor performance;
- Supporting the staff upwards.

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3.2.4 Providing objective recognition by:

- Recognizing good performance more often than criticizing;
- Relating rewards to the excellence of performance.

3.2.5 Establishing on-going controls to:

- Follow up on important issues and actions;
- Give staff feedback on their performance.

3.2.6 Selecting the right people to staff the organization

3.2.7 Understanding the financial implications of decisions

3.2.8 Encouraging new ideas

3.2.9 Giving out clear-cut decisions when necessary

3.2.10 Constantly demonstrating high levels of integrity

3.3 Managing resources

A manager has to manage various resources. He/she cannot accomplish this task unless he/she gets full cooperation of the team. The following resources are generally at the disposal of the manager:

- **People** – It is the most difficult resource to manage. People have different needs, attitudes, abilities and personalities. These are not constant and can change from day to day, hour to hour. A good manager will maximize the strengths and minimize the weaknesses.
- **Time** – This resource is equally available to everyone. Everyone has 60 seconds in a minute, 60 minutes in an hour etc. It is how this time is used that determines managerial effectiveness.
- **Space** – This is expensive and many work places suffer from lack of it. However, much can be made of the space available to improve the working environment and people's behaviour.
- **Finance** – All managers will be involved with budgets and expenditure to some degree.
- **Equipment** – It includes desks, telephones, photocopiers and personal computers. A manager must ensure that his/her team has sufficient equipment for their needs, while bearing in mind that idle equipment is a non-productive cost.
- **Information** – It is to be ensured that all information received is given the right priority and used as appropriate to help the team. Their utilization will help the team and the individuals within the team. Hence managing these resources effectively is very important.

3.4 Managerial effectiveness

It is helpful to understand why some managers are more effective and others are not, and how their sincerity in the welfare of the team members can affect the success of the organization.

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3.4.1 Level of effectiveness

- What managers expect of their subordinates and the ways they treat them largely determine the subordinates' performance and career progress.
- A unique characteristic of superior managers is their ability to create high performance expectations that subordinates fulfill.
- Less effective managers fail to develop similar expectations, and, as a result, the productivity of their subordinates suffers.
- Subordinates, more often than not, appear to do what they believe they are expected to do.

3.4.2 Developmental cycle:

- The role that managers play in developing the readiness of their people is very important. Too often, managers do not take responsibility for the performance of their people, especially if they are not doing well.
- When subordinates are at low level of readiness, the manager must take the responsibility for the "traditional" management functions.
- However, when managers develop their people and have subordinates at high levels of readiness, the subordinates can take over much of the responsibility for these day-to-day traditional management functions.
- In order to maximize the subordinates' performance, managers must change their style and take an active role in helping others grow.

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4 Skills of dealing with different types of managers

A good manager can inspire you to great achievement, while a bad one can be thoroughly de-motivating and make your life a living hell. The qualities most often associated with good managers include fairness, concern for others, supportiveness, consistency, and the ability to inspire workers to deliver their best.

4.1 Dealing with different managers in general

You must understand that managers are also under pressure to perform effectively. They look upon their team members to cooperate and help in achieving the targets. The success of your efforts depends greatly in the way you deal with your manager. The following suggestions will help you in this task:

4.1.1 Contributing to your manager's success and building the team

You can contribute to your manager's achieving success and building the team by doing the following:

- Defining your role and what is required of you to become a highly efficient team member;
- Thinking like your manager – easing their pressures and anticipating their needs;
- Keeping your manager well informed and organized.
- Building a successful working relationship with your manager;

4.1.2 Workload and time management

Workload is usually more than can be attended to during the time available. In order to do justice to your workload within the given time frame, you may follow the following guidelines:

- Managing your own and your manager's time – organization and planning techniques that get you in control;
- Establishing priorities when everything is urgent;
- Identifying and minimizing "time stealers" and correcting non-productive work habits;
- Meeting the needs and demands of more than one manager/person.

4.1.3 Taking greater control and responsibility

In order to deal with your manager effectively, you may adopt the following practices:

- Solving problems effectively in your manager's absence;
- Increasing your influence and manager's confidence in you;
- Broadening the scope of your role and taking greater responsibility.

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4.2 Types of difficult managers

All managers do not behave in the same way. Different managers have different attitudes, beliefs, and styles of management. Broadly speaking, they can be categorized as follows:

- **The Know-it-all:** They are arrogant and usually have an opinion on any issue. When they are wrong, they don't accept their mistake.
- **The Passives:** They never offer ideas or let you know what they think and feel.
- **The Dictators:** They always intimidate. They are constantly demanding and always criticize others.
- **The Complainers:** Is anything ever right for them? They always find fault with others' work.
- **The No people:** They are quick to point out why something won't work. Worse, they will not listen and change their ideas.

4.3 Dealing with difficult managers

Part of being successful at work involves knowing when and how to stand up for your own self. Many people find this quite difficult, but it is a skill, which can be learned. You can learn techniques to help you become more confident in your dealings with the manager. If your manager has his/her difficult ways, it is best to come to terms with the situation and deal with it as best as you can. After all, your manager could have a lot on his/her mind and at times could be working under heavy pressure. Be prepared to make allowances for the times when you are shouted at, either because of a mistake you have made, or because you just happen to be around at the wrong time!

4.3.1 If you are picked on

No one is perfect, and your manager, like everyone else, will have his/her days off. However, if you ever find yourself in a position where you are being continually 'picked on', to the point where it is making you miserable, then action needs to be taken. First of all, of course, consider whether you could be in the wrong. Perhaps you are acting in a manner which displeases your manager? Or perhaps your work just isn't up to standard? In this case the solution rests with you. If, on the other hand, you are doing your job to the best of your ability and it is still not considered good enough, then the time has come for you to speak to your manager about the way you are being treated. Sometimes managers just do not realize the upset and bad feeling they are creating. Sometimes they need to be told in order to do something about it. But this discussion must take place in confidence and in a cordial manner. Only then some favourable change in the manager's behaviour is possible.

4.3.2 Analyzing yourself

You should develop the ability to analyze your strengths and weaknesses. Write down a list of those areas in which you are competent and a second list of those areas that need improvement. Be honest. Discuss your plan of action with your manager. He just might take an interest and help you deal with the situation.

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4.3.3 Managing pressure

Never allow yourself to be put under unreasonable pressure. Too often your manager will pass more and more work down to you. Be careful about such pressures and learn to say 'no' politely. If still the manager insists, ask him/her to prioritize your revised workload.

4.3.4 Managing your emotions

It is very important to control your emotions at work. Learn not to show any negative emotions resulting from events at work. You may not agree with certain actions or decisions taken by your manager. If that is the case, discuss it rationally with him/her.

4.3.5 Match your manager's style

To work well with your manager is to learn how he/she works. Determine what your manager expects so you can fulfill his/her expectations and even anticipate what he/she will ask for next.

If he/she is a talkative type, he/she probably prefers verbal communication. On the other hand, if he/she continually sends you memos and written reports, that's a signal that he/she would appreciate the same from you.

4.3.6 Special points to remember

"Managing up" means you take responsibility for developing your relationship with your manager, howsoever difficult he/she may be. Here is how to do it:

- Understand the difficult managers. Learn how they think, what they fear, why they do what they do. Understanding difficult people makes it easier to deal with them.
- Know specifically what to do and say.
- Look at the difficult managers. Chances are, at least one person manages to get along with them. Learn how he/she does it. You can too!
- Bring out the best in difficult managers. Nobody is difficult all the time – and everybody is difficult some of the time. Reinforce the most positive behaviour in everyone.
- Does your manager get to work at 8.00 and leave at 6.00? Think about adjusting your work hours accordingly.
- How does he/she dress? While you don't want to copy his/her style, you also don't want to dress too casually when he/she prefers co-workers to wear formal dress. Though it may seem childish to concentrate on things like clothing and work hours, why not use every available tool to your advantage?

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