

# be a **BETTER** manager

Use these tips to get the right people in the right places to help the garden center run smoothly.

By David Fellman

**M**y basic premise for today is that most managers don't manage very well — because they manage from the top, rather than the front and the beginning. I think this stems from a commonly accepted definition of management, which most managers seem to think is about being in charge.

Personally, I think management is more about being an enabler than being a boss. It starts with a clear understanding of goals and objectives. And it works best when managers don't manage people, but instead create teams.

### Management by Objective

I read once that management is the process of setting and achieving organizational objectives. Peter Drucker introduced the concept of "management by objective (MBO)" in the 1950s.

In essence, MBO is about participative goal setting. In the "big company" model, the top manager has a vision. He or she consults with the senior management team to refine that vision, and to formalize the objective.

Each senior manager then repeats the process with his or her direct reports, and the process continues from level to subordinate level, until, ideally, every employee knows his or her role and has measurable standards to meet.

In the "small company" model, the whole process is compressed, with far fewer levels, but it's basically the same process.

- Step 1 is the vision: Where do we want to go?
- Step 2 is the plan: How do we get there from here?
- Step 3 is the measurement: Are we following the roadmap? Are we making good time?
- Step 4 may be some adjustment: Should we modify the plan and/or the timeline? Do we need to slow down? Speed up? Add resources?

Two things are important here. The first is that this all starts at the beginning, with the vision, then

the objective, then the plan. The second is that it's all about we. You probably know the expression "there's no I in team." It's been my experience that the best managers tend to be "we" people rather than "I" people.

Back to MBO, it's a strategy that makes lots of sense, right? But MBO also has limitations.

The most important limitation relates directly to the execution of the plan, and that takes us to a more fundamental definition of management: Management is making sure that everything from the big things to the little things gets done and done right.

Think about it. If that kind of management doesn't happen, the plan may fail. That's why great managers are micromanagers.

### Micromanagement

Somewhere along the line, micromanagement became a bad word in business. I'm not sure there's a better word, though, for managing the little things. So with that in mind, I want to attempt a change in attitude via a change in language.

Micromanagement is a good thing. Overmanagement is a bad thing. And time management fits into this discussion too because some of the little things are too little to justify the time of a "big" manager.

Delegating is the obvious solution to that problem, but once we start talking about delegating, we have to consider words like authority, responsibility, accountability and capability.

Let me put all four of those words into a series of sentences.

You build a management team by giving people authority. By accepting that authority, they take on responsibility for certain elements of management. Responsibility is something someone feels; accountability is the enforcement of that feeling. And none of this is worth anything if the person with authority lacks the capability to do the job.

### Management Team

When you delegate, you add to your management team.

I mentioned Peter Drucker earlier, and here's something he wrote in a 1992 article in the Wall Street Journal: "'Team building' has become a buzzword in American business. The results are not overly impressive."

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He went on to explain his perception of the problem, "The all-but-universal belief among executives is that there is just one kind of team. There actually are three — each different in its structure, in the behavior it demands from its members, in its strengths, its vulnerabilities, its limitations, its requirements, but above all, in what it can do and should be used for."

The first kind of team, according to Drucker, is the baseball team, which he also compared to an assembly line team. The players play on the team; they do not play as a team. They have fixed positions they never leave.

The second kind of team is the football team, which he compared to a symphony orchestra. The players still have fixed positions, but they support each other and interact with each other to a far greater degree.

The receiver runs a pass pattern, the left tackle protects the quarterback's blind side, the

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quarterback makes the throw, and the result is (hopefully) a completed pass. The horn section plays a sequence of notes, the string section plays another sequence of notes, the conductor manages the timing, and the result is (hopefully) music to our ears.

The third kind of team is the tennis doubles team, which Drucker compared to a jazz combo. Here, the players have a primary position rather than a fixed position.

In doubles tennis, when one player serves, the other takes a position to cover a part of the court when the serve is returned, but once the play starts, both players must be able to react to the changing demands of the game. In jazz, the players are encouraged to take turns in a musical game of follow the leader — to keep up when it's their turn to follow, and to take the music to another level when it's their turn to lead.

### Lessons To Learn

What can we take from all of this? One key lesson, I think, is that your "baseball players" must have the skills and knowledge to play their positions effectively. If not, they need training.

A second lesson is that your "football" players need something beyond raw skills and knowledge. They have to know the plays, and understand and fulfill their responsibilities to each play.

Finally, a few "doubles partners" in your garden center can make your life much, much

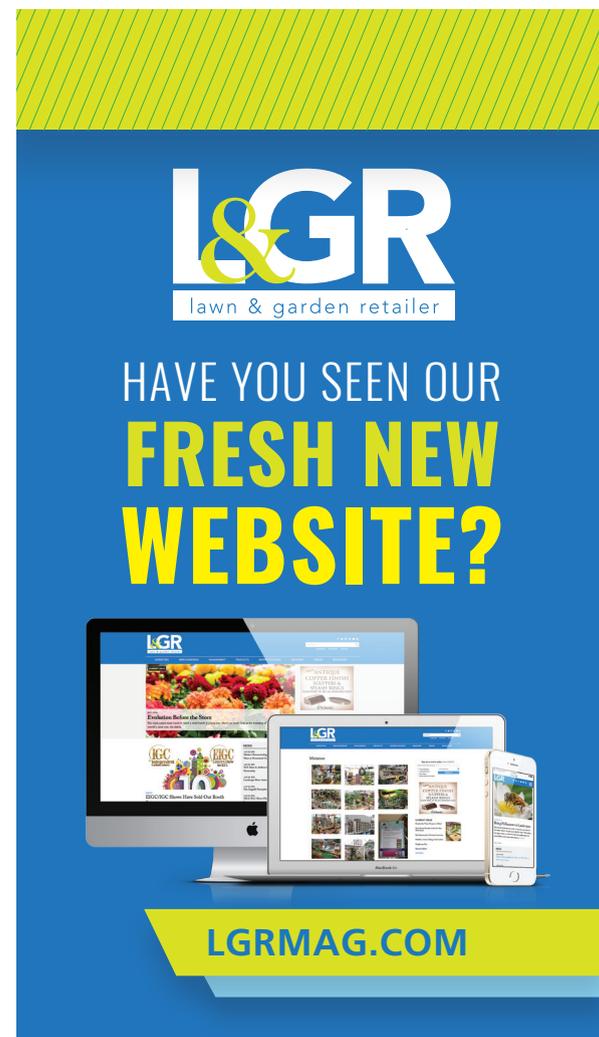
easier. Give some thought to teaching and coaching your people, not just how to play their positions, but how to anticipate and react to out-of-the-ordinary situations.

That's how you end up with a well-running garden center, and that's how I define true success as a manager. **LGR**

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