

They Trained Me to be a Scientist Not a Manager

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In graduate school, I was trained to be a scientist and not a manager. So if I had to do it again, I would have taken a general management class. So I could begin to learn effective ways of leading and delegating. I think I would have also taken a general human resources class. And the reason for this is because you have to help all employees with all types of requests and challenges. That can be it there can be myriad ways in which you have to interact with your employees. And this might include managing an employee who is underperforming, or maybe an employee's computer crashed that day, and you need to approve the purchase of a new one. Or perhaps an employee might have personal requests, such as family medical leave, and you have to help that employee navigate your organization's policies and processes to make what needs to happen actually happen. So there are many hats that you have to wear when you are a manager. And it's important to understand how your organization works, so that you can help and serve your employees. You have to be a leader, a coach of manager, and sometimes just a good listener to make your employees feel heard and understood. And sometimes you might have to be a cheerleader or counselor for someone who's having problems that might not even involve the workplace. And of course, at times, you have to be the expert, and maybe some cases, even the student where you can learn from your employees.

On the research career development side, I very early on established some ties with a senior professor in my department. He was and is like a sage uncle who provides great advice. I would regularly check in with him once a year and tell him what was going on in my research and ask him for advice. While we did not call this mentoring at the time, I know this to be mentoring today. And we continue to interact. So similarly, in areas of management, staffing and leadership, it is good to seek out your own support network, including trusted mentors so that you can be the best manager that you can be.

I also serve on deal MPs appointments and promotions committee. And we have recently established a mentoring program for junior faculty, including assistant and associate professors. At this point in my career, I truly see the value of reaching out regularly to those who have more experience. Early in my career, I was impatient, and naively thought I could do everything on my own. I have since come to learn that it is important to not work in a vacuum. The key point is that there is likely someone who has had similar management issue or experience. So why not ask them for advice?