

YOU & YOUR JOB

PART 2

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Effectively managing engineers can be a difficult task. Technical employees, who often require meaningful, challenging work, sometimes resist mandated organizational goals. They demand a high level of autonomy in their jobs.

So how do you best supervise engineers, while strengthening teamwork and commitment among them? The following five people-handling skills, revealed by a three-year study conducted by our company, can help you increase your managerial performance level. We observed and interviewed over 300 managers of engineers and other technical employees at 19 technology-oriented companies.

Coach, don't command

The most effective technical leaders are coaches. Instead of ordering employees, they listen, ask questions, facilitate cooperation, and provide administrative support.

Not always the source of "right" answers, the coach serves more as a sounding board, a source of facts and ideas from a broader experience base, a supportive critic and sometimes a devil's advocate to test the engineer's conclusions. Analyzing, addressing and correcting performance problems is part of the coaching function.

Try to find ways to blend the technical professional's goals with those of the company. Engineers will be more supportive of organizational mandates that line up with their own interests.

Similarly, employees will be more accepting of change if they are informed and consulted about it. Make certain they thoroughly understand the reasons for the change and are heavily involved in its implementation.

Champion employees

Successful leaders capitalize on organizational opportunities for engineers and are quick to remove organizational barriers from the path of innovation. For instance, an effective manager cuts through the red tape that usually entangles employees.

Streamline the engineer's work by knowing whom to consult or inform, how to time a request, and how to build a network of reciprocal assistance. Working as the engineer's liaison with other parts of the company, you should know how to get management support for an employee's idea or proposal. Provide feedback by broadcasting good news and explaining shortfalls to engineers.

In addition, nurture employees' innovative thinking. As manager, you can provide them with resources to foster their creativity. Allow — and encourage — engineers to explore possibilities outside their usual job duties. For ex-

ample, you could plan a certain amount of lab or computer time into their work schedule.

Foster career development

Successful technical leaders understand engineers' need for demanding work. They make certain that employees' work offers enrichment — variety rather than a microdivision of labor, challenge rather than a continuum of routine, and an emphasis on performance rather than on process.

Help broaden the employee's business perspective. By providing information about where the organization is and where it is heading, you involve the engineer more in the company's business operations.

To foster innovation, champion fragile ideas and encourage intelligent failure. Worthwhile efforts, even if they do not solve the problem at hand, inform and educate engineers in current and later endeavors. If the results of intelligent mistakes are disseminated among employees, everyone is better informed about what others have already tried.

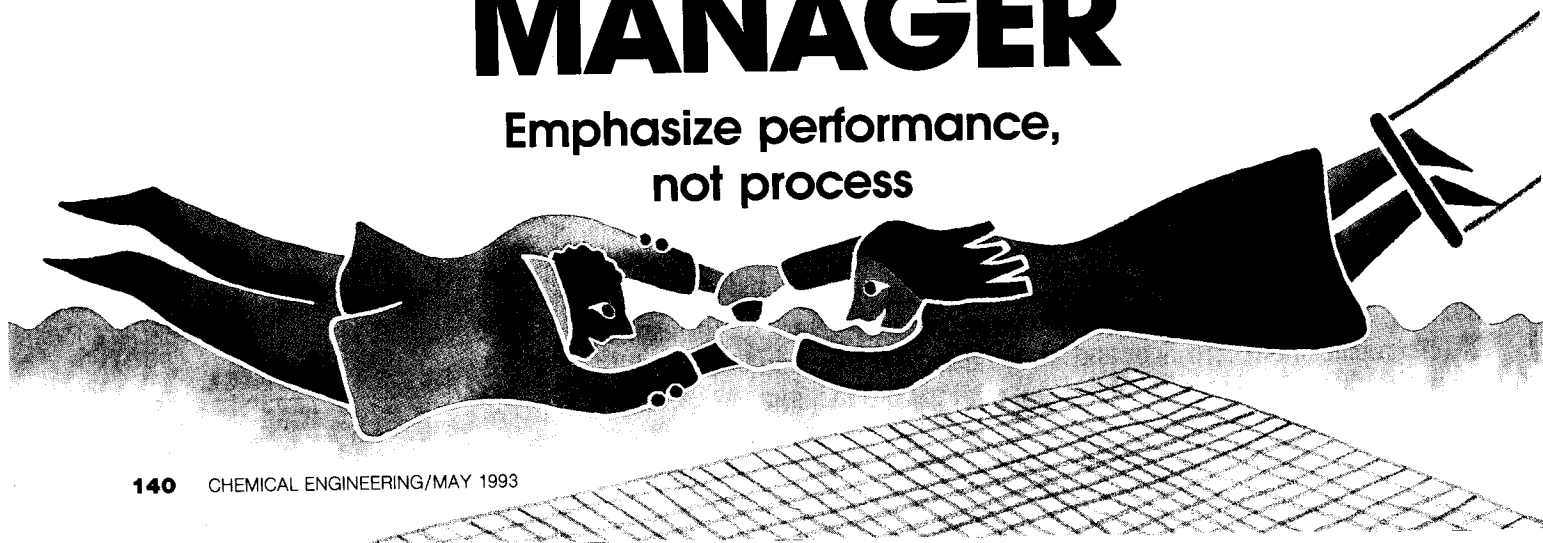
In addition, help the engineer realize career development. Career growth can be encouraged with stretch assignments — work slightly beyond what the employee feels ready for.

Encourage team work

The creation of successful teams is an important means for encouraging new

HOW TO BE A BETTER MANAGER

**Emphasize performance,
not process**



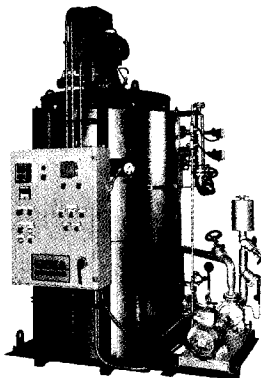
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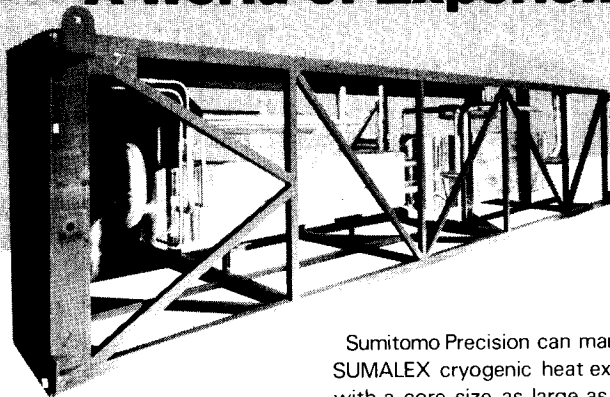


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technological developments. Establish goals that are clear, achievable, consensus based, realistically timed, and reasonably stable; and make sure that everyone understands them.

Identify and secure resources to facilitate the team's work. In addition, an information-exchange system should be put in place. Manager and engineers must formulate and agree on a structure for effective communication.

Build communication, trust

The engineer's success is determined by proper job structure and a relationship with the manager that promotes and supports self management. If engineers feel they are trusted and empowered to make intelligent decisions, they willingly take on more responsibility. This, in turn, makes your job easier.

An important part of managing is sharing information. When performing with minimal information, technical professionals tend to feel manipulated. When they can get as much information about a project as possible, they are considerably more motivated.

Delegating responsibility, another essential managerial task, is enriching and empowering. It often provides engineers with insights into the "bigger picture," decreases dependency, and satisfies achievement needs.

Encourage employee-management communication. Endorsing and reinforcing two-way communication facilitates self-management. Sharing information with engineers — particularly information that might seem peripheral to their duties — builds trust and an increased sense of ownership in projects and organizational objectives. Conversely, they will appreciate your trust in their intelligence and integrity. ■

Edited by Irene Kim

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