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Solid skills guide for new managers

Book Review: Newbies—and veterans—should attend this "boot camp"

May 13, 2013 | By [Debra Lins](#) | Comments: [0 Comments](#)



AMA Business Boot Camp assists those new to management and leadership through exposure to both basic and advanced fundamentals--while also helping those wanting to refresh their skills. It's not meant as a straight-through read, consumed once and put away, but as a book that readers will refer to as they meet challenges in the course of learning on the job. I found the book full of useful information, including several management tools that I've not seen before.

Entering the boot camp

Boot Camp consists of two sections, with each part concluding with Action Items for the manager to reflect on in their new or existing management role in their company. Editor Edward Reilly, president and CEO of the American Management Association, International, worked with his team to combine

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Reilly states at the outset that:

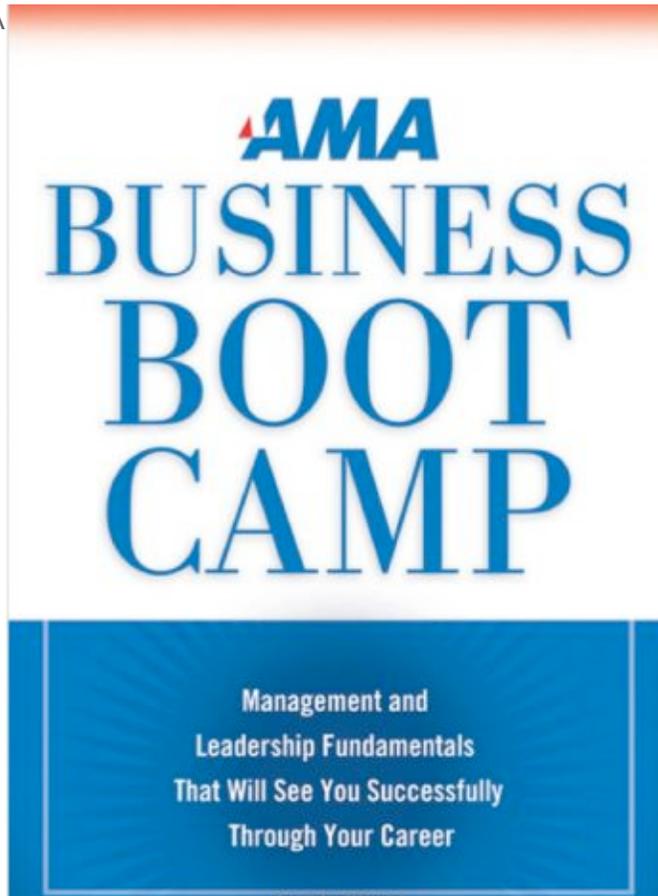
"It is my hope that this book will be an introduction to the principles of effective, efficient management and leadership for some of the people we don't yet touch and that the collective skills they begin to develop through the exposure to these ideas will help them and their organizations."

In my own community banking career, I learned that managing is not a science, but an art, and that no two managers will

handle a situation the same. I see the tools provided in this book as a beacon. I believe that an owner of the book will go back to it many times.

The book consists of three main elements:

- Section I, "Essential Management Skills," includes detailed chapters on basic management, performance management, managing staff changes, and managing projects.
- Section II, you could think of as graduate level work. Titled "Senior Management Skills," it includes a chapter each on strategic thinking and leadership.
- There are three appendices, a glossary, and an index to aid the user as they are being challenged and want to reference specific areas again.



AMA Business Boot Camp: Management and Leadership Fundamentals That Will See You Successfully Through Your Career. AMACOM Books. Edited by Edward T. Reilly, 236 pp.



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Now let's get into specifics covered.

Getting started in management

In the introductory chapter, Basic Management, the *Boot Camp* reader learns about the role of a manager.

This begins with a basic duty: To ensure that the right environment is created for the manager's team. The reader is taken through decision making, characteristics of a healthy work environment, and why communication is so important.

Regarding communication, a bit of time is spent on the fundamental problem with one-way communication channels, such as emails and texts.

I found this area of guidance of personal interest. I'm sure you can relate to the experience of sending an email or text that was misinterpreted, or one that could have been worded more clearly, or the case where with a bit of patience the email would have been unnecessary. The critical point made is that these types of channels prevent both the speaker and listener from easily identifying when confusion arises.

The lesson: *When utilizing such channels, be as concise and clear as possible.*

For myself, I have always preferred face-to-face communications with an employee, when it is an area that really needs input or clarification. So I enjoyed examining the pages devoted to running an effective meeting, as it included good points for both rookies and veterans alike.

The Essential Management Skills section's focus on performance management will be very helpful to new managers. It reviews the process of managing, and using SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time based/trackable) goals as part of the management process, with examples provided.

This chapter also takes the new manager through the fundamentals of motivation, and provides a sample Motivational Checklist, with companion actions, to aid the manager in the review of what motivates direct reports.

This tool was new to me, and it's something I would refer to again. There is also a portion of the chapter devoted to proper delegation for both growth and development, and coaching to boost performance--helpful to all managers.

How managers handle change

Some of the earlier material comes together in "Managing Staffing Changes," another part of the "essentials" section. If there is one thing in life we are certain of, it is change. This chapter covers dealing with change, and how important communications is when going through changes in your organization, such as

hiring, firing, and outsourcing, as well as changes due to the economy or a cultural shift in your company.

Of interest to many managers in this chapter is the detailed "Personnel Expectations" lists based on generational preferences. All organizations have a multigenerational workforce to manage and motivate today and understanding what works for different age groups makes a difference.

The balance of this chapter is devoted to the hiring process, from the recruitment, to having a properly documented job description, to the interviewing format and questioning techniques, to testing competency areas. It concludes with selection guidelines. All good basic information for someone new to managing; yet much of the support needed during the hiring process will most likely come from your bank's human resources department.

Understanding project management

Any banker involved in meeting a bank challenge--strategic, operational, regulatory, or developmental--knows how a bank's success hinges on getting projects done effectively and on time. The last chapter under the Essential Management Skills section is titled "Managing Projects," and perhaps not surprisingly this is the lengthiest chapter of the book.

At first I was not sure if the material would be relevant enough to our industry; yet the more I probed, the more I realized how much the principles could be applied to bank projects. Whether you have a team of two working on a loan clean-up project, or a team of 20 working on a systemwide computer conversion, the steps and tools provided for project work are solid and could make the difference of success or major frustration.

The editor surmises that although the types of processes may vary by name from industry to industry, the basic phases of a project are the same: initiating; planning; executing; monitoring and controlling; and closing. Each of the phases is delved into in greater detail, with several valuable templates provided to assist the project leader, and team to stay on task.

A key takeaway: Throughout this chapter, the success of a project is tied to how the different stakeholders hope to achieve to assure a project's success. When you have your project charter-and-scope statement in hand, and a clear understanding of the project necessities, the team then moves on to a WBS (work breakdown structure).

This formal term was new to me, and this segment of the chapter is truly important to the planning phase of a project. A Gantt Chart was used to assist with a team's visual reference for what is needed when, for a project. Any banker who has been involved in a building project is familiar with a Gantt Chart.

As we all know, communications is very important, and even more critical when

working on a project with people who may be in different areas of the bank, or who are not familiar with your work style. The book provides three quick questions to ask a project team at status meetings to provide a mechanism of project control. These three questions may be something you may want to ask yourself at the beginning of each day, as part of managing your own day. I plan to!

The questions can be found on page 127. They are:

1. What did I accomplish yesterday?
2. What will I accomplish today?
3. Is there anything that will prevent me from accomplishing what I plan to do today?

Boot Camp's "graduate course"

Section II of the book, referenced as Senior Management Skills, contains two chapters, each dealing with an important senior-level task.

The first concerned strategic thinking. "The ability to think concurrently along dual tracks" was noted as a key characteristic of a strategic thinker.

Initially, the chapter discusses mindset and why it is so important as a manager to be able to think strategically. Constant change in every organization underlies the need for this.

Eight elements of the "strategic frame of Reference" are identified, and an important point made. The eight elements are: Vision, Mission, Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Tactics, Roles, and Relationships. *Boot Camp* points out that Mission and Vision are oftentimes confused, and that to drive change your bank needs *both*. The book covers a planning basic--SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats).

The balance of the chapter was focused on the anatomy of a strategic vision, and making the vision a reality, which I found clarifying, and of value.

Leadership, where management comes together

The last chapter of the book, also part of Senior Management Skills, discusses leadership. This was my favorite chapter, as I found it very enlightening.

Editor Reilly wants the reader to keep in mind that every leadership situation has three elements: a goal, the leader, and the followers.

The behavior of leadership is summed up with an acronym SPARK, which stands for:

- **S**hare information.
- **P**lay to strengths.
- **A**sk for input and appreciate different ideas.
- **R**ecognize and respond to individual needs.
- **K**eeP your commitments.

Each of the SPARK dimensions is summarized, with wonderful tips to drive the importance of each point. Reference was made again to the four generations currently in the workforce and how the "R" (recognizing and responding) will be different for each group. Ten critical indicators of success were recorded.

Boot Camp dedicates 20% of this chapter to the areas of leveraging your leadership style, and to leadership image, which I believe all managers new and experience will find of interest. Under the heading of building power and influence are three self-assessments for a manager to take, and tallying the results will provide one with material for reflection on areas to further develop.

The pages assigned to office politics and motivating difficult people held my interest, and both will be referred to again.

Under the subject of politics, 40 rules were shared from the AMA book *Enlightened Office Politics*, by Michael and Deborah Dobson. The rules listed are intended to help managers focus their thinking, and provides a model for analyzing a situation, while providing some options.

Several examples of difficult-type personalities (people) were summarized, which is interesting: The Staller; The Emotional Hothead; The Complainer; The Backstabber; and Ms. or Mr. Perfect.

Dealing with such types gives managers their ulcers, and the book provides a seven-step process to deal with both the difficult person's emotions and with the manager's own.

One closing word. *Boot Camp* resembles and reads somewhat like a textbook. But don't be put off by that. The information is quite current, and will continue to have value to both new and seasoned managers.

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Debra Lins

Debra Lins, a frequent book reviewer for ababj.com, is CEO and president, Lins Business Consulting. Lins is a veteran community banker and a former member of the ABA's Community Bankers Council. She has also written for ABABJ.com's Boardroom and UNconventional Wisdom guest blogs. Lins is a Governor's appointee to the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions Banking Review Board.

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