



They're here in unprecedented numbers, and they're talented.

# Developing the New

## In This Article: Generational Training

- The U.S. Department of Labor shows a continuing escalation of employees age 20 to 34 in management jobs.
- NYMs typically face a complex assimilation process and share certain baseline learning needs that smart organizations should address.
- Used to functioning as individual contributors, NYMs' transition to management requires a new mindset and new skills.



Earning a place in the managerial ranks used to be fairly straightforward: People were hired into entry-level positions and expected to put in their time, do a decent job, and eventually garner a promotion to management. There were dues to pay and a corporate ladder to climb.

These days, different rules apply. Enter the NYMs—new young managers—whose rise to a position of authority is occurring fast and in large numbers. The U.S. Department of Labor shows a continuing escalation of employees age 20 to 34 in management jobs. Dun & Bradstreet reports that roughly 15 percent of managers in their 20s and 30s anchor such top spots as CEO, president, and business owner.

A tight U.S. labor market and dramatic shifts in the business environment and corporate staffing patterns have much to do with why the face of management is getting younger. The overused term *Gen Xer* refers to an age group characterized by ambition, impatience, flexibility, independence, creativity, and techno-literacy—having grown up in the technological revolution. Such traits are simpatico with the current fast-moving, fast-changing, Web-wired marketplace and are highly desirable to businesses across industry sectors.

The growing preponderance of NYMs in the workplace, however, says nothing about their readiness to don the managerial mantle. Many are thrust into the role equipped with little more than a half-day management workshop. That's akin to a flight attendant being promoted to pilot after a morning's worth of flying lessons.

# Young Managers

By Lynda C. McDermott

hang out with his or her co-workers after office hours is suddenly deciding their assignments and deadlines, evaluating their performance, and perhaps determining the size of their paychecks. An NYM can't play favorites or let anyone slack off or take advantage. Many NYMs are startled when they realize they're now the boss who's griped about. An NYM who fails to acknowledge the power shift and puts too much emphasis on being liked and accepted is likely headed for a fall.

Regarding managing upwards, NYMs regularly become preoccupied with trying to gain credibility and be taken seriously by senior managers. NYMs may work doubly hard to prove their ability to handle the job despite their age and can be reluctant to ask for guidance for fear they'll be perceived as unskilled, unknowledgeable, or unable to deal with their new responsibilities. Their quest to earn upper management's respect and trust may lead them to take no action at all just to avoid doing the wrong thing.

NYMs are entering management nearly straight from school or after just a few years of work, so their backgrounds most likely involved friends, family, and others who shared similar values. Consequently, many NYMs have little or no experience dealing with people who have widely disparate values and are motivated by vastly different management styles and incentives. NYMs need to acquire critical skills for managing across generation gaps and value gaps.

#### A lot of learning

The time to start developing NYMs is at the start. Errors in judgment are bound to happen, but it can be tough to overcome early management blunders. Coaching and training can help prevent big mistakes and minimize those that occur. A lot of learning will take place in the course of NYMs doing their jobs, but some training early on gives them critical tools and enables

## How to Train Them

In training NYMs, **DO**

- avoid too much theory, too little application
- give how-tos for dealing with specific situations
- train up front and continue to follow up
- structure a development track that's ongoing and strategically targeted
- establish a system for regular feedback
- secure the involvement of upper management, not just HR or the training department
- ensure that training is relevant to the NYM's particular learning needs and actual responsibilities
- train managers of NYMs in coaching skills.

them to approach their experiential learning with greater awareness.

Development should stem from two primary sources. One, the organization can enlist the internal training department, corporate universities, or external consultants and learning institutions—or a combination. Two, it's important that executive managers, especially the NYM's boss, play a key role through regular coaching, mentoring, and performance feedback. An active commitment by upper management models expected behaviors and facilitates down-the-line transfer of skills and knowledge to NYMs and their staffs. Management's support also enables a proactive diagnosis and response to specific training gaps or performance problems that may surface.

Development of NYMs must be

viewed as a process. Natural-born managers are rare. They become effective best through ongoing, strategically directed learning. As much as possible, development should target individual learning needs and provide practical guidance for an NYM's day-to-day duties and responsibilities. In addition, opportunities for NYMs to interact with other NYMs are of enormous benefit in identifying issues, solving problems, and exchanging information.

Prior to the actual training, it's important to take the following actions:

#### **Clarify expectations and goals.**

Define and communicate explicitly the NYM's role expectations and boundaries of responsibility and authority. Set goals and objectives that are of the SMART model: specific, measurable, action-oriented, realistic, time-bound. Clarify expected business results and measures of success. Those actions should be done by the NYM with his or her manager face-to-face, not by the manager issuing a memo or handing out a job description.

#### **Describe the big-picture strategy and vision.**

Explain to the NYM the direction that the organization as a whole is heading, as well as short- and long-term plans for achieving its vision. Describe how the NYM's department or business fits into the big picture. Define exactly how the NYM can have impact and make a meaningful contribution.

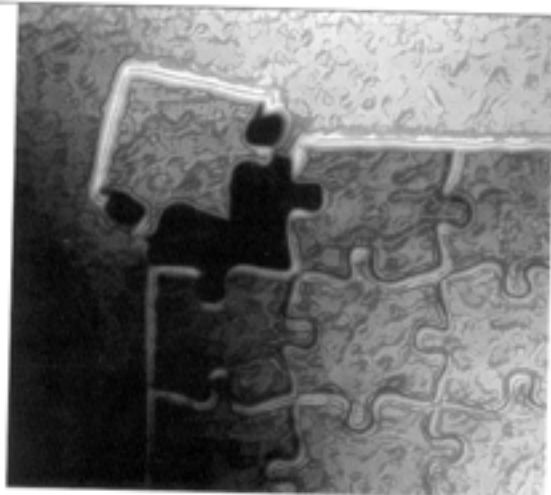
**Identify skill gaps.** After clarifying the NYM's expectations and goals, determine the skills and knowledge he or she will need to attain them. Then conduct an assessment of the NYM's knowledge and skills—technical, functional, and leadership—to identify gaps. Use a formal assessment tool (such as the Leadership Effectiveness Analysis instrument created by the Management Research Group) to get a reliable profile based on the required competencies and behaviors.

Initially, a joint assessment of the NYM and his or her manager is benefi-

cial; follow up with a 360 feedback process nine to 12 months later.

Any development should be structured around individual learning needs, though the form and content of such efforts can vary according to such factors as company

policies on training, funding for training, and resources for delivery. Ideally, development includes group programs and individualized coaching and training. If provided early, those elements give NYMs a period of trial-and-error before they take full charge.



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The development process should follow these guidelines:

**Focus on the fundamentals.** You can tell NYMs they need to get results through others, but that doesn't mean they will know how to go about it. They need basic management skills, including how to delegate and how to manage time, workflow, and projects.

**Cultivate people management skill.** NYMs would probably find becoming a manager a breeze if they didn't have to worry about managing and strengthening staff performance, not to mention coping with their staffs' various concerns, demands, and personalities. NYMs need basics in situational leadership, coaching, managing diversity, meeting facilitation, conflict resolution, performance feedback, decision making, and motivation.

**Teach team play.** NYMs accustomed to functioning as isolated producers may feel trepidation about interacting with management and other departments or business units and might even resist. They may be caught up in trying to manage their staffs, resulting in tunnel vision with regard to their role with peers. They need skills in collaboration, influence management, interpersonal dynamics, communication, and presentation. Down the road, conduct teambuilding sessions to fine-tune their teamwork skills and motivate high-performance teamwork.

**Develop team leadership.** NYMs need assistance to reach beyond their supervisory, administrative aspects of their jobs and learn how to lead their teams. The role of team leader can be intimidating, and NYMs can be uncomfortable dealing with people one-on-one. Facilitation from an internal or external HR or organizational effectiveness consultant can help NYMs develop competencies in managing team performance and process, building a team, group, developing team members individually, and managing team boundaries with regard to key stakeholders.

**Elicit strategic leadership.** Another dimension of leadership that NYMs must step into is exhibiting leadership in the organization to act as a strategic business partner. That relies on having a broad organizational perspective, developing innovative solutions, and prioritizing and responding to demands for achieving business results. It can be hard for NYMs to think "blue sky" when they're constantly being pulled down to earth by the day-to-day concerns.

Invite them to participate in meetings that address big-picture, long-term business issues. Expose them to upper-management discussions. Ask them to write white papers on strategic business issues (such as how to grow the business, cut costs, produce new products, or offer new services), and identify ways their departments can contribute to organizational success.

**Enhance their EI.** Developing NYMs to become high achievers and leaders requires attention to their level of emotional intelligence, a term coined by Peter Salovey and John Mayer, and popularized by Daniel Goleman. EI relates to abilities that can be slotted into these categories: being self-aware and self-motivated, managing emotions, having empathy, and handling relationships. NYMs need to recognize that derailment on the management track can often be due more to low EI than to lack of intelligence, functional ability, or technical expertise. Leadership models and development should encompass a range of EI competencies, including flexibility, stress tolerance, cooperation, and interpersonal expertise.

**Improving the ROI on NYMs**

The need for upper management's involvement and support in developing NYMs can't be overemphasized. The manager to whom an NYM reports should hold a quarterly, one-on-one meeting with the NYM during the first year to 18 months to ensure regular performance feedback. The manager should also fulfill

the role of coach, a crucial but often sorely neglected aspect of good leadership.

In a recent NYM program my company conducted, we asked people in the group to describe the differences between the good coaches and bad coaches they'd

had. One participant asked, "What if you've had no coaches?" Inexperienced managers who receive no conscious or systematic coaching tend to feel isolated and left to fend for themselves. The message they receive is, "Sink or swim."

Russ Vieselmeyer piles out of his warm truck on a cold, windy day in Seattle as rain falls outside. He and his roofing crew from Tile Tech prepare to climb 20 feet to finish a roof that will keep the family below warm and dry for decades. It would be easy for Russ to curse the weather—and his job. He looks to the cloudy sky and begins to laugh.

"Is that all you got?" he shouts, "Bring it on!"

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**TELLING STORIES THAT CHANGE THE WORLD**

Along with ongoing development and coaching, management should convey its support and encourage receptivity from the NYM's group when he or she first takes charge. For example, the management team or CEO could issue a written

announcement describing the NYM's qualifications, reasons for selection, and other information to introduce and promote the appointment. The NYM's manager could bring the NYM and his or her staff together for a transition meeting,

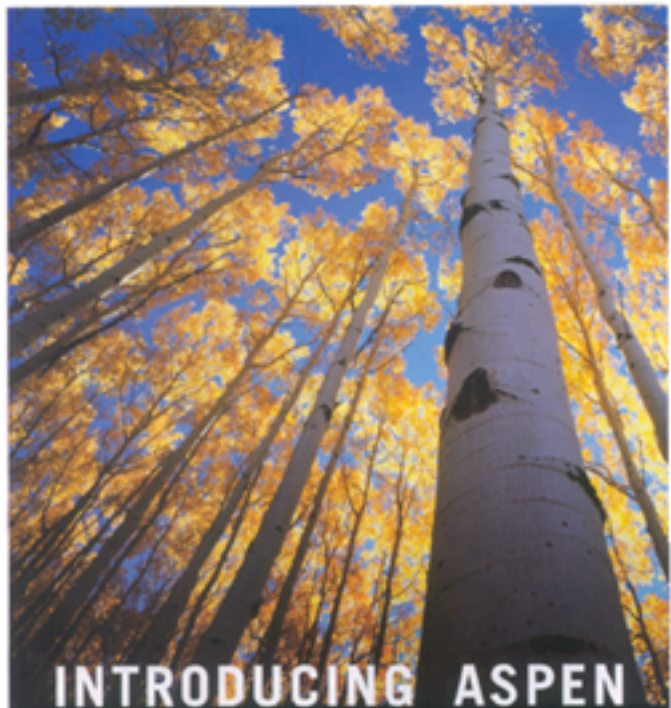
with the manager conducting the first part and then turning the meeting over to the NYM. In addition, managers can set up meetings between the NYM and his or her staff members and other key people the NYM will be working with, inside and outside of the company, including customers and suppliers.

Smart companies take the responsibility of developing NYMs seriously, viewing and treating it as an investment in a valuable asset and devoting the time and resources needed to protect and grow that investment. Ineffective performance costs an organization, as do turnover and replacement. Letting NYMs muddle their way through their first management assignment will no doubt result in poor performance for the NYM, his or her staff, and the organization. Investing in their development not only boosts performance, but also fosters their motivation and loyalty. Young workers are known for putting a premium on training and development. If they aren't learning new skills and advancing in a marketable direction, they're unlikely to stick around.

Developing new young managers is a bottom-line issue and sound business practice. Using a variety of learning and personal-growth strategies—including formal training, on-the-job development assignments, and individual coaching—can mean the difference between mediocre performers and superstars who are able to deliver measurable business results through their efforts and those of the people they lead.

**Lynda McDermott** is president of Equipoint International, a New York-based organizational consulting firm specializing in leadership and team development. She's also a frequent speaker and co-author of *World-Class Teams* and author of *Caught in the Middle*.

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