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## Becoming Someone's Boss: Career Guide for Business Management

Travis Farrington

*College of DuPage*, [essai\\_farrington@cod.edu](mailto:essai_farrington@cod.edu)

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Becoming Someone's Boss: Career Guide for Business Management

by Travis Farrington

(English 1102)

If you are living in the Chicago area, it's unlikely that you haven't heard the name Sam Zell lately. Most of us know him as the man who is selling the Chicago Cubs, but he is also chairman, or CEO, of Equity International and a few other companies, and is listed by *Forbes* as one of the richest Americans (*Forbes* 1). And who wouldn't mind being a CEO like Sam and making millions, or even billions of dollars a year? But like most people, Zell didn't start at the top; he had to work his way up. Most top executives work their way up from lower to middle management, which will be the focus of my career research: middle management in business administration. A management position is an excellent way to exercise leadership, creative freedom, and along with that, excellent pay and plenty of opportunity for advancement. Landing a good job in business management requires certain skills, and a high level of education and work experience. Management is also one of the busiest jobs in the market, with a vast array of tasks that need to be performed that usually require long hours and lots of hard work, but in the end, it all pays off.

Management consists of several different fields, as well as different levels. Management is usually divided into three main levels: lower, middle, and upper. Lower level, or first-line, managers coordinate and manage employees on the business floor, whether it's in retail, or in a factory (Pride 204). First-line managers are mainly the people who were once operating employees within the business; their tasks often involve delegating the employees as well as working alongside them. The next level is middle management. Middle managers take orders from the top management, and translate them to first-line managers to carry out. Their tasks include developing strategies, tactical plans, and operational plans. Middle managers usually include department and division managers who mediate between the lower and upper managers. This area requires a lot of communication skills in order to translate the goals for the company from top to bottom. Lastly, at the top of the company are the upper level executives, including CEO's and COO's, the president, and the vice president. This is a small group of people who develop the company's mission.

There are many different fields of management, and, depending on the size of the firm or company, many different tasks may be broken down into several management positions, or there may be one person in charge of all aspects. One specific type of manager, and one which I am most interested in, is a human resource manager. Human resource, or HR, managers are usually middle management; they are the connection between the upper level and first-managers (U.S. Department of Labor, "Human Resources" 1). The 820,000 human resource managers reported in 2004 can be broken down into several subgroups (4). These include: 216,000 training and development specialists; 182,000 employment recruitment and placement specialists; 166,000 training and labor relations specialists; 157,000 general human resource managers; and 99,000 compensation analysis specialists (4). Although it may vary slightly depending on which specialty, the main duties of human resource managers include hiring, recruiting, interviewing, training, and handling benefits of the employees. An HR manager spends most of their time dealing with the employees. Their job is to "enhance [employee] morale and productivity... increase performance... provide training and development opportunities to improve [employee] skills, and increase employee's satisfaction with their jobs and working conditions." In small firms one person may handle all human resources tasks, but in larger firms it's broken down into separate jobs, supervised by a Director of Human Resources.

Working conditions for HR managers may be very different from most managers. For one thing, they tend to only work the standard work week of 35-40 hours, and like most managers lots of travel time may be a requirement (U.S. Department of Labor, "Human Resources" 3). Travel may include attending "professional meetings, and visit[ing] college campuses to interview prospective employees." Most of their work is done within "clean, pleasant, and comfortable office settings," very little time is spent on the business floor. Wages vary depending on they type of human resource manager. Median annual salaries of general human resource managers in 2004 were \$81,810, \$66,530 for compensation analysis managers, \$67,460 for training and development specialists, and \$41,190 for employment recruitment and placement specialists. Pay may also vary depending on whether the job is in management of a company or enterprise, in local or state government employment, or in scientific and technical consulting services.

The duties of a manager can be broken down into five main tasks: mission planning, strategic planning, organizing, leading, and controlling (Pride 199). A mission, or mission statement, is what defines an organization or a firm; it is "a basic purpose that makes an organization differ from others" (200). A mission statement is developed by the top managers, and most companies already have a mission statement, but it is often updated to meet new demands and expand the company. The next step is strategic planning, which essentially means understanding the mission statement, and deciding how and where to "allocate the resources to achieve it" (202). After it has been decided where resources are going to be allocated, the next step is organizing the business, which is essentially carrying out the strategic plan to "accomplish some end result in an efficient and effective manner" (202). This step includes grouping resources and people within the company to accomplish tasks, assigning jobs, hiring people, and developing a system within the company. The next step is providing people with a reason to work: leading, and convincing them to do so: motivating. These two combined are known as directing. There are many different ways of motivating people. Directing requires several skills, but mainly requires you to be critical of subordinates, which leads to the next step: controlling. Controlling is "the process of evaluating and regulating the ongoing activities to ensure that goals are achieved" (203).

One of the most important parts of controlling is evaluation. There are many different forms of peer evaluation, from scheduled reviews to informal conversations around the workplace, and opinions differ on which is more effective. In her article "In the Lead: A Bosses Best Advice Isn't Always the Kind that Comes in a Review," Carol Hymowitz interviews several CEO's and top executives who give their opinion on the best advice they have received in their career. Larry Johnston, a CEO of Albertsons food group, and formerly employee of General Electric, explains how he believes advice given in formal reviews was essential to his rise to the top of the company. He states: "A good review has to help you understand how you are truly viewed, and what experiences and skills you have to acquire if you want to pursue a certain path" (2). Some would argue that formal reviews are not as valuable as advice given "on as-needed basis – while riding in cars to meetings, or on airplanes, or in the office hallway." (2) George Fisher, a former CEO at both Kodak and Motorola, believes the best career advice he received was in the hallway on his way to lunch, not in a formal review. "I can still remember what the hallway looked like and the people who were in it at the time," describes Fisher recalling the incident indicating just how important and life changing a seemingly insignificant in the hallway can be (2). Ned Barnholt, chief executive of Agilent Technologies, further supports that the best advice "comes during frequent, informal conversations on the job". To achieve the greatest productivity "Barnholt encourages his managers to consistently critique and guide employees" (2). Whether it's a traditional review or advice given in passing, employee feedback is essential to the business world.

Managing a company, as well as supervising other people is not an easy task and requires certain skills. Leadership skills are essential in keeping things organized and under control. Communication skills are essential to be able to convey not only your own ideas but also to

understand and translate those of others. To manage time and affairs and keep things orderly, organization skills are important, and to deal with any difficulties one might encounter, problem solving skills are essential.

David Schaffer, author for the national publication *Careers & Colleges*, states early on in his article: "The most important thing you can bring to business and law are good communication skills" (1). Susan Giunda, director of the office of career services at the University of Michigan Law School, states, "You need to be detail oriented, and have good research and analytical skills... Writing skills are also very important, and so are interpersonal skills" (Schaffer 1). Communication and interpersonal skills are very important in the business world, as described in *Business 8<sup>th</sup> Ed.*: "the ability to deal effectively with other people, both inside and outside the organization," which includes "the ability to relate to people, understand their needs and motives, and show genuine compassion" (Pride 206). Most people don't realize the importance of being able to communicate with not only your own employees, but also with other firms. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* states that most advising, marketing, promotion, and sales managers spend much of their time communicating with other firms that they have either contracted or have contracted them (1). Most business environments revolve around memos, emails, meetings, evaluations, etc., and each one of these things requires some kind of communication skill.

It is also important to have people skills and interpersonal skills. As Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones describe it in "What Makes a Leader," leaders should show that they are relatable, not just a "role-holder," that they are "like you – imperfect" (2). Being relatable and understanding of your employees can be more inspiring to them, and "builds good teamwork."

Leadership is not something that can easily be defined, but is essential in the business world, as most lower and middle level managers spend much of their time delegating other employees. It takes followers to be a leader according to Goffee and Jones and in "What Makes a Leader," they describe the importance of "authenticity" in gaining followers (1). You have to be yourself to be a leader, but "with more skill." Emulating others or acting out a formula in some "self help manual" or "recipe for success" isn't going to work. Characteristics that are universally sought out in all leaders include: "energy, a strong sense of direction, and clear vision... self-knowledge and authenticity are necessary, but not sufficient conditions for leadership. Individuals must also want to be leaders – and many talented employees are not interested in shouldering that responsibility" (5).

Managers need to be very knowledgeable, and have good analytical and conceptual skills. They need to be able to think outside of the box, as well as have an understanding of the business as a whole and of each area individually. Although lower levels of management need more technical skills involving product knowledge, learned through on-the-job experience, upper level managers also need in-depth product knowledge and understanding of the company at the lower levels in order to develop the company mission (Pride 204).

Nowadays, not only is a college degree essential to a job in the business field, but prior experience, through internship or operating experience, is becoming more and more important.

There are the obvious choices of majors for prospective business students, including Business Administration, Economics, Accounting, Finance, and so on. It is much easier to land a job with a specialized degree in a certain field, but more and more firms are looking for college graduates with non-business majors. "Depending on their areas of expertise, liberal arts grads do well in business... [they] tend to be good at presentations and writing persuasively... Math majors are recruited for banking... History majors make excellent researchers. Even philosophy majors... have been finding jobs with corporations," comments Patrick Lenahan, director of the career center at Roger Williams University (quoted in Schaffer 1). In my opinion, the best thing for business students to consider is a major in a specialized field of business and a minor in liberal arts, such as English or Speech.

Any college education is to be expected for most business positions, the higher the degree the

better. According to David Schaffer in “Business Law Marketing,” prospective employees with an MBA or master’s might be at a great advantage (2). Most students aren’t willing to spend the extra few years, nor the extra money, in school, and instead opt to enter the workforce sooner. Money may be the biggest factor in this decision, since the cost of “tuition and lost salary can add up to as much as \$200,000” (2). The number of MBA applicants is continually dropping; Schaffer states the University of Chicago reported a 24% drop in MBA applicants in the 2000-2001 school year (2).

Even if one decides not to earn an MBA or other master’s degree, there are still other ways to gain an upper hand in the business job market. For those who wish to enter the work-force right away and not spend the extra years in school, there are still ways for them to advance in the business. Once in the company, employees can further their education and “polish their skills by attending ‘corporate academics,’ classes offered on site by their companies, or by studying for an MBA online” (Schaffer 2). Experience is also an excellent way to gain an upper hand in the business world. “College internships and work experience are... important in landing a job” says Heather Dieter, hospitality manager at Woldorf-Astoria Hotel (3). Most managers get to their position through job experience as operating employees within the company (Pride 204). It is especially advantageous for lower level managers to have experience as operating employees because they will be working alongside the employees performing the same tasks, or training others how to do so (206). A career internship is also a great way to get a head start in the business world. “Internships are a critical part of corporate recruiting,” states Nakisha Williams, writer for the *Wall Street Journal*, in her article “The Jungle” (1). Based on a 2004 survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, she reports that 84% of the 360 companies included offer some type of internship and 45% of their full-time staff come from their intern pools (2). Williams also advises that even if internships don’t work out, and you don’t get the experience you were hoping for, still try and make the best of it. Internships are an excellent way to make important business connections and gain knowledge of the internal workings of a company.

There are many pros and cons to a job in business administration. There is a lot of responsibility in being a leader, but there is also a lot of freedom and opportunity for creativity. The pay is also often a major pro, as are the many opportunities for advancement, but the down-side to this is the long hours, excessive travel, and increase in stress that is most likely to come from each promotion. Management may not be for everyone. Some may not possess the skills or be able to handle the stress and responsibility required by the job. But those who do decide to take charge and lead will find their career very rewarding.

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