Most people go to school to learn a specific profession that interests them. Then, as they gain expertise, experience and an understanding of their profession and industry, they are asked to do something totally different - manage people.

As a manager, you will still be involved in the work your department is doing, but it will be different. Instead of doing the work, you will be managing people and overseeing the work performed by your team. It is important that you understand that:

- Managing is very different from doing.
- You should make the conscience decision that you would rather be a manager than an individual contributor.

Most of the topics in my weekly column have discussed your responsibilities as a manager. What I would like to emphasize here is that one of your first responsibilities as a new manager is to transition your old responsibilities to a member of your team. If you try to continue doing your old job while learning and performing your new job, you will most likely fail at both. My one caveat to this statement is sometimes a manager’s job is better described as “player-coach,” namely your job description includes a combination of supervisory and task related responsibilities. In this case, it is possible to be successful in both roles because you are being asked to do a little of each, not a full-time job of each.

Over time, particularly if you are in a technical job such as computer programming or engineering, your technical skills will eventually become stale and out of date. This doesn't mean you can't lead the group. It means that without ongoing practice and training in new technology, you will not be able to sit down and personally perform the tasks being performed by your team.
If you truly enjoy hands-on work and don't have a strong interest in managing people, then moving into a management position may not be the right career move for you. I have seen a number of very talented technologists try management, not like it, and go back to an individual contributor role. Managers generally make more money than the individual contributors, so if you want to remain an individual contributor there is a cost, but there is also a cost to having a job that you don't enjoy.

My goal here is not to scare you away from becoming a manager, but rather to help assure that you are moving in the right direction that is right for you professionally. When deciding to move into management consider the following:

- Is being a manager something you will be happy doing?
- Do you need additional training to be the best manager you can be?
- Will you try to maintain your current technical skills?
- If you become the manager, what effect will it have on the relationship with your current co-workers and are you OK with that change?

Personally, I love being a manager. I find it to be challenging, creative and rewarding. That said, I must say that there are also times that I find it to be frustrating and look fondly on the days of being an individual contributor. A friend of mine who has also been a manager likes to joke that management would be great if it wasn’t for the people. For me, moving into the management ranks was a great move.

The primary advice and takeaways from today’s column is to know that:

- Before becoming a manager make sure that a management job is right for you.
- You’ll find that as a manager, managing the work is very different than doing the work.
- Being a manager can be great, if it’s right for you.

Until next time, manage well, manage smart and continue to grow.

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