

2 What Great Managers Do

Capitalizing on the Unique Strengths of Your Team

INSTRUCTOR-LED TRAINING SESSION | BASED ON THE WORK OF MARCUS BUCKINGHAM

Session Learning Objectives

1

- Analyze the fundamental difference between “average” management (**Checkers**) and “great” management (**Chess**).
- Distinguish the role of a **Manager** (individual focus) from that of a **Leader** (universal focus).
- Apply the “**Three Levers**” framework: Strengths, Triggers, and Learning Styles.
- Evaluate strategies to manage weaknesses without forcing personal transformation.
- Create a management plan that “**releases**” rather than “**transforms**” talent.

Average Managers Play Checkers

- **Uniformity:** All pieces are assumed to be uniform in capability.
- **Standardization:** All pieces move at the same pace on parallel paths.
- **Goal:** Coordination toward a goal using a standardized method.
- **The Flaw:** Failure to optimize performance because individual nuance is ignored.



Great Managers Play Chess

- **Uniqueness:** Each piece moves differently (Knight vs. Bishop vs. Rook).
- **Integration:** Success comes from integrating diverse moves into a plan.
- **Strategy:** Knowing the specific abilities of each piece.
- **The Result:** Capitalizing on eccentricity and unique ability.



Distinguishing the Manager from the Leader

The Great Leader

Focuses on the Universal

- Job: Rally people toward a better future.
- Method: Find shared needs, cutting through differences.
- Tools: Stories, heroes, and shared vision.

The Great Manager

Focuses on the Individual

- Job: Turn specific talent into performance.
- Method: Identify and deploy differences among people.
- Tools: Observation of unique traits and eccentricities.

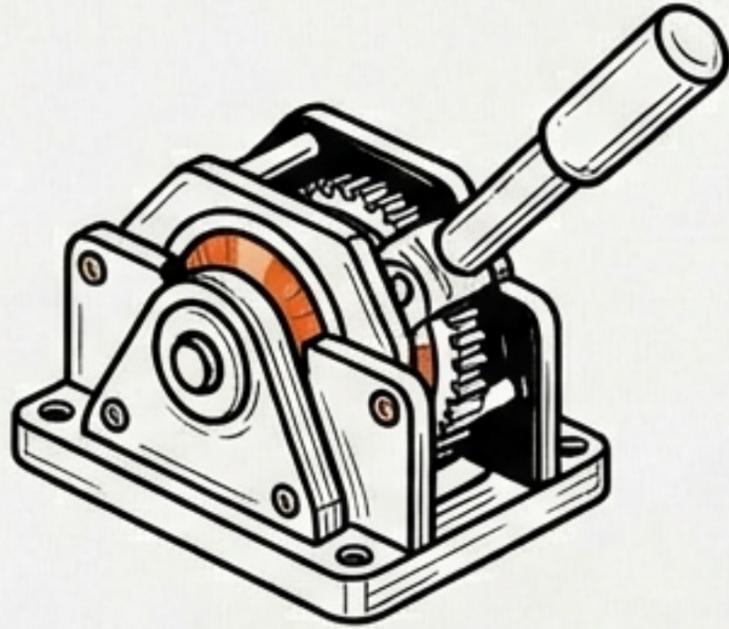
The Business Case for Capitalizing on Uniqueness

- Efficiency: Stops the futile effort of trying to “fix” people.
- Accountability: Employees take ownership of their natural strengths.

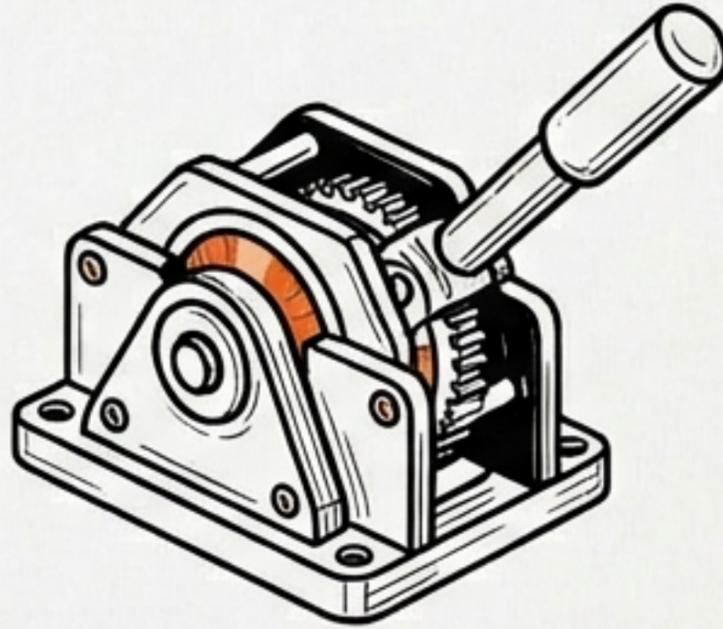
**Management is about release,
not transformation.**

- Team Building: Creates interdependence; the team is well-rounded because individuals are not.
- Disruption: Challenges orthodoxy regarding who does what.

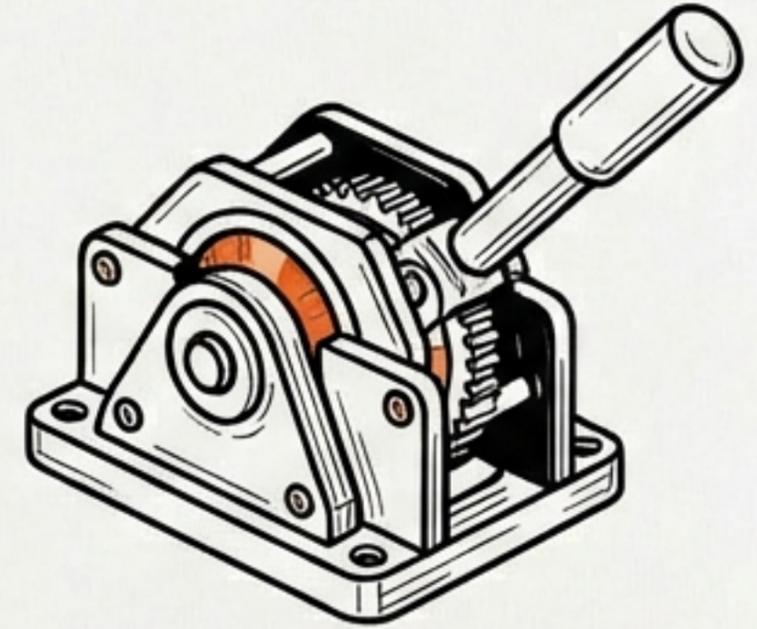
The Three Levers of Management



- **1. Strengths**
What are their unique abilities? abilities? What energizes them?



- **2. Triggers**
What specific conditions activate those strengths?



- **3. Learning Style**
How do they absorb and process new inputs?

Lever 1: Make the Most of Strengths

“A strength is not merely what you are good at; it is an activity that energizes you.”

The Critical Question

What was the best day at work you've had in the past three months?

Method: Management by Walking Around. Observe reactions, not just results.

Cultivating Self-Assurance Over Self-Awareness

■ Self-Awareness

Knowing one's limits.
Often overrated in
management.

■ Self-Assurance (Self-Efficacy)

The belief in one's
ability to achieve.
Strongest predictor of
persistence.



The Manager's Role: Attribute success to specific strengths to reinforce self-assurance.

Strategies for Managing Weakness (1 & 2)

Diagnosis: Repeated failure indicates a lack of talent, not just effort.

Strategy 1: Offer Training

Address potential skill gaps. Allow time for incorporation. If performance doesn't improve, it is a talent gap.



Strategy 2: Partnering

Pair the employee with a complementary partner.
Example: An analytical manager paired with a personable buffer.



Strategies for Managing Weakness (3 & 4)

Strategy 3: Discipline Technique

Use a mental trick or habit to accomplish through discipline what isn't accomplished by instinct.



Strategy 4: Rearrange the World

The 'Nuclear Option'. Change the role to render the weakness irrelevant. Requires creativity and courage.



Case Study: Capitalizing on Eccentricity

Walgreens: Michelle Miller & Jeffrey

Problem



Jeffrey, a “Goth Rocker” employee, struggled with customer interaction but excelled at symmetry and arrangement.

Solution

Miller removed customer duties. Assigned Jeffrey sole ownership of “Resets and Revisions” for the entire store.



Outcome

Efficiency improved. Jeffrey took ownership. Conventional assumptions about roles were challenged.



Lever 2: Trigger Good Performance

Strengths are not always on display; they require precise triggering.



Time of Day
(e.g., Night owls vs. early risers).



Manager Interaction
(Daily check-ins vs. autonomy).



Independence
(Autonomy acts as a trigger for some, stressor for others).

Warning: Squeezing the wrong trigger shuts the person down.

Recognition as the Primary Trigger

Recognition is a more powerful trigger than money, but the AUDIENCE matters

Peer Audience

(Needs public celebration)



Expert Audience

(Needs professional/technical awards)



Customer Audience

(Needs feedback or letters from clients)



Private Audience

(Needs one-on-one validation from the manager)



Lever 3: Tailor to Learning Styles

Adult learning theory identifies three predominant styles.

The Analyzer

(Understands by taking tasks apart).



The Doer

(Understands by performing the task).



The Watcher

(Understands by seeing the total picture).



Coaching the Analyzer

Analyzer Profile



Behavior: Craves information; examines elements; diligent preparation.

Role of Mistakes: Hates them. Views mistakes as a failure of prep.

Effective Coaching

- Provide ample classroom time.
- Use role-play and post-mortem exercises.
- Break performance into component parts.
- Do NOT tell them to “wing it”.

Coaching the Doer

Doer Profile



Behavior: Learns during performance. Finds preparation boring.

Role of Mistakes: Integral to the process. Raw material for learning.

Effective Coaching

- Pick a specific, simple, real task.
- Give a brief overview of outcomes.
- Get out of the way.
- Gradually increase complexity.

Coaching the Watcher

Watcher Profile



Behavior: Needs to see the total picture. Studying parts is meaningless without the whole.

Role of Mistakes: Unlikely to learn through trial-and-error alone.

Effective Coaching

- Get them out of the classroom.
- Have them “ride shotgun” with a top performer.
- Allow them to mimic cadence and actions.

Common Misunderstandings

Myth:

Treat everyone the same to be fair.

Reality:

Fairness is giving everyone the chance to succeed, which requires different treatment.

Myth:

Fix the weakness to build the person.

Reality:

Focus on strengths for excellence; manage around weaknesses.

Myth:

Great leaders must be great managers.

Reality:

These are distinct roles.
Leading is Universal; Managing is Individual.



Application Scenarios



Scenario A: The Detail-Oriented Creative.

Employee is brilliant at design but misses administrative deadlines.
Partnering vs. Rearrangement?



Scenario B: The Silent Star.

High-performer hates public awards.
Which audience do they value?



Scenario C: The Stalled Onboarding.

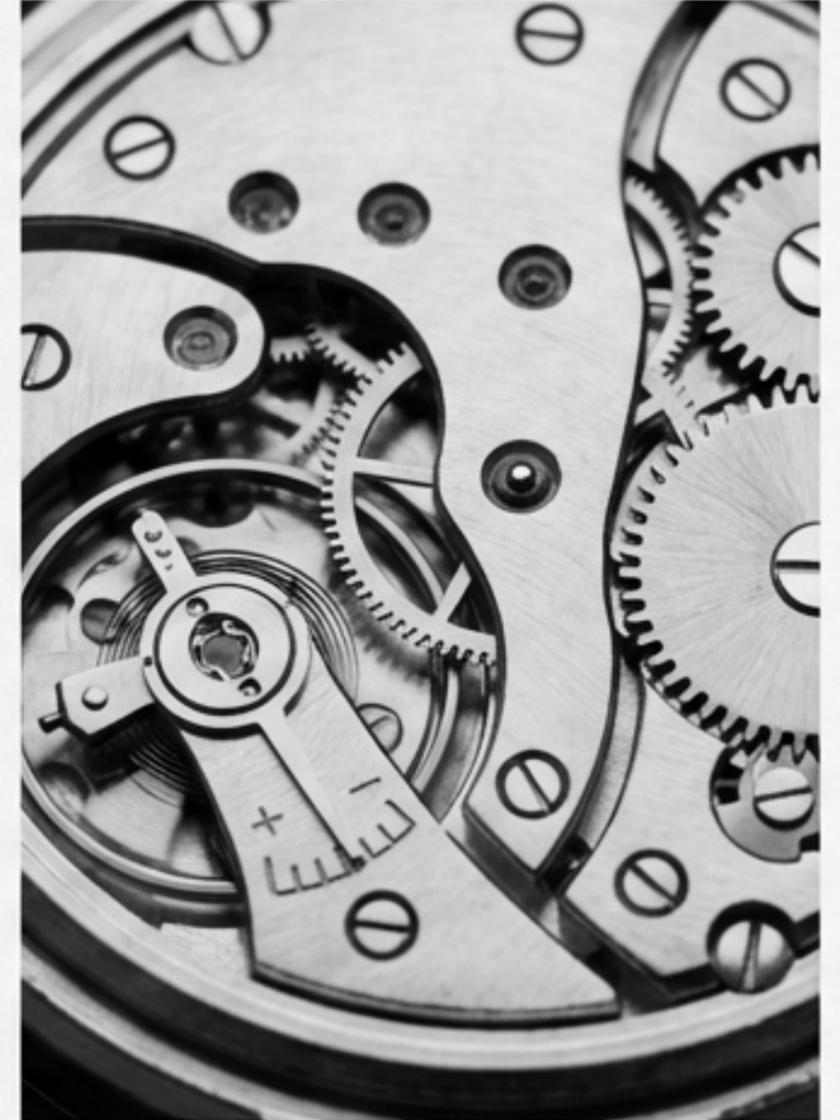
New hire struggles with manuals and disengages in training.
Doer or Watcher?

The “One Thing” Great Managers Do

“Discover what is unique about each person and capitalize on it.”

Key Takeaways

- Stop trying to fix people; arrange the world to fit them.
- Invest time in identifying the unique ‘blood type’ of your employees.
- Don’t put in what was left out. Draw out what was left in.



Great managing is about RELEASE, not TRANSFORMATION.