

# Leadership That Drags at the Top: Five Steps to Prevention for CEOs and Owners

By Lydia Jones

In [The Future of Management](#), Gary Hamel writes about the challenge of preventing top management's out-of-date beliefs from impeding strategic renewal and how to minimize the drag of old mental models. The issue is, understandably, one usually more obvious to middle managers than to top management.

As small businesses grow, a common practice is to promote into management positions those loyal employees who started with founders. Some have specific management and leadership training, but often many are thrust into top positions without formal training. Some continue with practices that were learned from previous generations of older leaders who were often in different industries and who used leadership styles also learned from previous generations.

Linda A. Hill, a professor at Harvard, wrote about first-time managers who operate under incorrect assumptions about authority ("Becoming the Boss," *Harvard Business Review*, January, 2007). We have all seen the newly appointed manager who wields authority much like a badge that sets him or her above others and then uses any number of excuses to justify high employee turnover rates.

Helping employees of any age and experience to bridge the gap BY EXAMPLE can make all the difference in bottom-line performance and provide an environment of enviable innovation that is essential to growth of any business in today's competitive marketplace.

Consider the following five steps:

1. Train all new managers.  
Today's workplace is far too complex to expect new managers to perform correctly without formal training. Legal issues, reasonable expectations, performance incentives, and creating/sustaining an innovative work culture are intangibles that must be learned.
  2. Show trust and support in actions of your newly appointed managers.  
Build trust and support from the top down. When actions need correction, discuss the issue quickly with the manager. Choose a private venue rather than a public forum, and offer support or use techniques of a fierce conversation only as required by the event at issue.
  3. Interact without all the answers.
4. Stress the importance of communication about expectations – both ways.  
How can middle managers know what's expected of them without constant communication and reinforcement? Ray Margiano, the founder of Foot Solutions, a multi-million dollar company with locations around the world, commented about his expectations of communications, "I encourage middle managers to bring me the good, the bad and the ugly."
  5. Teach the use of common courtesies when dealing with others.  
The person at the top establishes protocol for interactions among employees. If rudeness is the

mantra of top management, expect others to interact similarly and watch as negativity filters into complacency.

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*Business Sense*

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When the proper workplace culture is encouraged and nurtured, watch as the transformation toward innovation from the ranks diminish drag at the top.

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