

Expert Insights



Eight Signs of Incompetent Managers

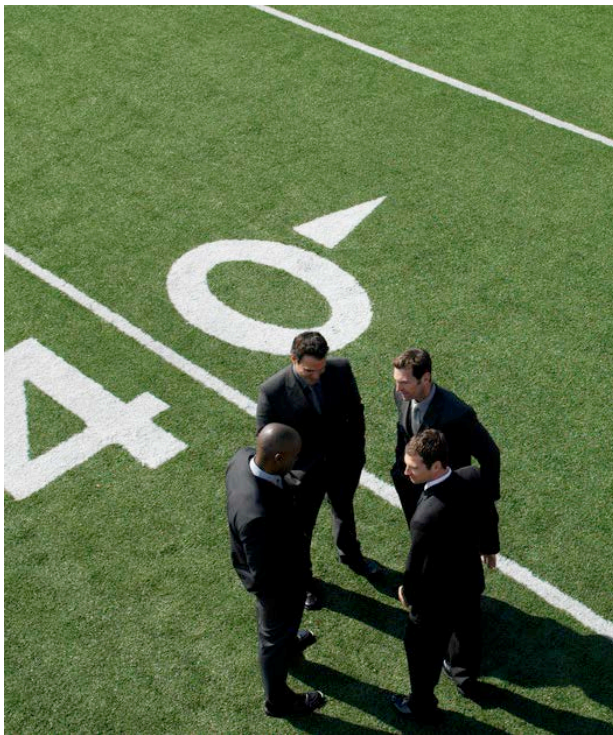
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Lessons learned from America's Most Productive Companies

Effective managers do more than just supervise employees. They take responsibility for ensuring that an individual succeeds, and that the team, department, or business unit achieves expected results. Effective managers are like successful coaches who develop teams that win championships year after year.

Like winning coaches, successful managers are both talented and skilled. Of course, managerial skills can be developed through training, mentoring, and experience. But if a manager lacks natural talent, his or her odds of success will diminish significantly.

In our work with [America's Most Productive Companies](#), we have seen time and time again that these organizations are typically more proactive than their peers when it comes to identifying and developing effective managers. The most productive companies provide their managers with the information and tools they need to understand the capabilities and styles of their teams. This gives managers a solid foundation for more effective coaching relationships.

Over the years we have identified eight signs of incompetent managers:

1. Poor communication skills
2. Weak leadership capabilities
3. Inability or unwillingness to adapt to change
4. Poor relationship-building skills
5. Ineffective task management
6. Insufficient production
7. Poor developer of others
8. Neglectful of own personal development

Sound familiar? Let's take a look at each of the signs in detail, and then we'll offer practical remedies to help your managers achieve greater effectiveness.

Eight Signs of Incompetent Managers

1. Poor communication skills



The problem with communication ... is the illusion that it has been accomplished.

Poor communicators forget that [manager-employee communication](#) is a two-way street. They talk (some more effectively than others), but they seldom listen. Often they don't read subtle cues from other people's gestures and tend to interrupt when others are speaking. Even when they don't interrupt, they're often too busy formulating what they'll say next to listen to what other people have to say.

Instead of communicating clearly in writing, in person, and when using body language, poor communicators often work in a vacuum. They neglect opportunities to listen to peers, subordinates, customers, or vendors – even when the issue has a significant impact on these very same people. They don't try to understand other people's positions and are quick to dismiss other points of view.

Poor communicators demonstrate negative body language that discourages others from elaborating on their ideas, and rarely, if ever, give others their undivided attention. They often write inaccurately and don't adequately prepare for public speaking, which means that they come across as disorganized, insincere, or unconfident.

Did you know?

A 360° competency feedback system like **Profiles CheckPoint 360°** identifies performance gaps, and provides coaching guides and personal action plans for improving communication skills. **How?** By getting objective feedback from both manager's employees and peers.

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2. Weak leadership capabilities



The **ProfileXT** helps you identify your current and future leaders by measuring the characteristics of your best leaders and matching candidates against this criteria.

Weak leaders are sometimes afraid to bruise egos – including their own.

Sometimes it's tough to speak the plain but inconvenient truth when people really need to hear it – or to give direction to subordinates who don't want to do what needs to be done. No one likes to be criticized, but that's what makes organizations effective. [Great leaders](#) can set an example; they walk the walk and talk the talk. Weak leaders are sometimes afraid to bruise egos – including their own.

In addition to failing to provide clear direction, weak leaders:

- **Don't instill trust.** They don't keep their promises or respect confidences. When asked difficult questions, they tend not to respond forthrightly. Either they avoid taking responsibility or they're quick to blame others for mistakes. They lack integrity – and their inconsistent actions and words prove it.
- **Neglect to clarify each team member's responsibilities for accomplishing objectives.** They often wait for a communication gaffe to address questions about team members' responsibilities.
- **Don't distribute responsibilities so that all bases are covered.** They don't bother to ensure that efforts aren't duplicated. That may be because they are either ignorant of—or indifferent to—the workload of team members.
- **Fail to translate tomorrow's vision into today's activities.**
- **Don't effectively delegate responsibility.** They may be insecure and reluctant to give up control for fear of being shown up. Or they want to keep others down as opposed to building them up. We've observed weak leaders who delegate without considering other people's capabilities, interests or development needs. And we've seen those who micromanage, frequently "hovering" over their people, sapping creativity, and motivation.

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3. Inability or unwillingness to adapt to change



You cannot leap a twenty-foot chasm in two ten-foot jumps.

Change is hard, but effective managers know how to handle it. They can adjust to new circumstances. When things are ambiguous, they remain comfortable. In a crisis, they seek solutions. It's often been said that the only constant is change. The trick is to keep a clear head, manage expectations, and enable change. Strong managers are change agents.

On the other hand, those who can't adapt to change:

- **Panic when faced with unexpected problems** and sudden crises. They expect the worst.
- Lose perspective of the magnitude of the problem. They **tend to agonize** over minor adjustments to a big plan.
- **Get stuck in reactive mode** instead of proactively anticipating issues and developing contingency plans.
- **Don't think creatively** to overcome obstacles. They view problems as annoyances instead of opportunities to learn and improve.
- Are risk-averse when it comes to trying new approaches to solving problems. They're **reluctant to involve others in the problem-solving process**, even when they have more experience or can bring a fresh perspective to the table.

You **CAN** measure a person's attitude toward change. Profiles Performance Indicator, a 15-minute assessment, provides insight into 6 behavioral indicators including attitude toward change. Knowing how people process change allows your manager to identify challenges early, understand motivational needs of his employees and maximize team performance.

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4. Poor relationship-building skills



Relationship building is an art, but not every manager is a natural relationship artist.

Relationships – professional as well as personal – require some work. For example, good communication is a cornerstone of a healthy, productive relationship. So are trust and respect. Good relationship builders respect people’s differences; they’re tolerant. They praise more than they criticize. And when they do criticize they focus on the behavior, not the people. They’re always careful not to embarrass other people. And they say what needs to be said – even when it’s uncomfortable to say it.

Aside from neglecting to maintain strong personal relationships, poor relationship builders:

- **Don’t seem to appreciate the impact** of words and actions on others. They don’t understand about keeping morale up and making others feel good about themselves and their work.
- **Fail to respect the members of their team** by not being consistent and fair, and by not showing appreciation for their experiences and viewpoints.
- **Criticize people** instead of people’s *behaviors*. They sometimes scold people in the presence of others, and rarely offer specific, constructive suggestions for desired improvement.
- **Don’t regulate their emotions** well, especially during times of stress.
- **Rarely facilitate team success**; they tend to ignore conflict between co-workers, or they rush to judgment before listening carefully to all viewpoints in a disagreement. Poor relationship builders don’t establish team objectives or encourage cooperation to reap the benefits of a unified effort. And they fail to capitalize on each individual’s strengths and experiences.

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5. Ineffective task management



When everything is a priority, nothing is a priority.

Effective task managers know how to establish priorities and make sure work gets done! They know how to say “No!” to activities that will divert them from priorities. They can see the big picture and break it down into specific tasks required to complete a project. They are skilled at assessing their resources, allotting time and materials, [motivating people](#) on the job, and ensuring that each and every milestone and deliverable is accomplished on time and on budget.

Ineffective task managers:

- **Do not ask for help** when they need it.
- **Procrastinate**, especially when a big project seems overwhelming.
- Work carelessly. They accept sloppy work from their team. **They don't set a good example** by consistently delivering quality through their own work. And, not surprisingly, they maintain poor quality control procedures.
- Tend to **blame others** for their own lack of oversight.

Deming observed that 85% of all operational failures are the fault of fallible managers, not failing workers.

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6. Insufficient production

Is your manager on track to achieve reliable results?

Insufficient production can have a myriad of causes. It could be a simple lack of resources or funding; it could be unrealistic expectations. Some managers lack the technical knowledge to ensure that production demands are met. And, of course, some people just seem to have a bias against taking action. They lack a sense of urgency and won't take initiative, even on matters that are critical to the organization. They take a "wait and see" attitude when they should be taking concrete action.

These managers:

- **Find plenty of reasons not to make a decision.** They wait for more information; they wait to hear about different options. Some are paralyzed for fear of making a mistake. They rarely consider making adjustments to plans later if necessary. Instead, they simply freeze up and stop producing.
- **Waffle,** remain indecisive and show insensitivity about holding up projects. They don't see the big picture; they don't think through the consequences of their team's, department's or business unit's failure to produce.
- Fail to achieve reliable results. **They are generally not clear about what they want or need to accomplish.** They're easily distracted, unreliable, and erratic. They may lack the will to overcome adversity.



Profiles Performance Indicator helps managers better understand how to motivate each individual on their team. This helps them increase productivity, improve communication, and achieve results.

Eight Signs of Incompetent Managers

7. Poor developer of others



Cultivating talent and motivating others doesn't always come easy.

Just like relationship building, developing other people's talents is an art – one at which not everyone is adept. Developing others can be hard work. Not everyone is naturally capable of delivering constructive criticism. Nor is everyone observant enough to make note of another person's habits, including the habits that need to change. Being a role model or a mentor takes commitment. Unfortunately, not all role models and mentors recognize that. They think their protégés will simply observe and learn. But the fact is, [developing skills and talents](#) in others takes much more than just showing up.

Managers who face a challenge when it comes to cultivating individual talents:

- **Don't generally make learning opportunities available** because they feel threatened by employees with greater skills than their own.
- **Disregard the goals and aspirations of their team members** because they don't want them to get ahead. They give feedback on performance only when someone's expectations haven't been met – and only then in a negative and de-motivating tone.
- **Seem more intent on breaking down** than building up.
- **Can't motivate successfully.** They **fail to recognize or show appreciation for the efforts** of their team, even when team members go above and beyond the call of duty.
- **Have a negative influence in the work environment** as a result of their pessimistic outlook and lack of enthusiasm.

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8. Neglectful of personal development



Manager, improve thyself

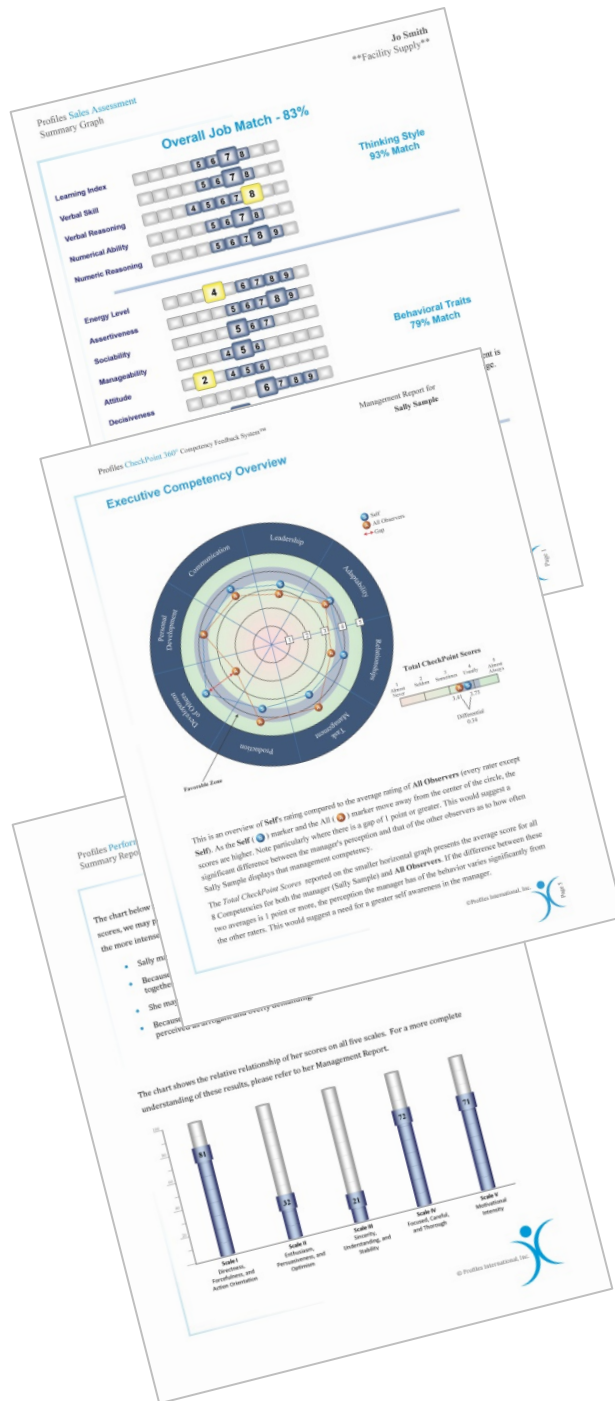
It sounds reasonable enough, but we've observed many managers who fail to develop their own communication styles, organizational skills or work habits. They might claim that they're committed to the organization or the team, but unless they're willing to continually improve their own skills and talents, how will they ever recognize how important personal development is for the whole team?

Managers who neglect personal development:

- **Don't build enthusiasm** among their team members – and in general they are not very enjoyable to work with
- **Give up easily**
- **Often possess a negative attitude**
- **Appear highly defensive** when constructively criticized
- **Have a low level of self-awareness**
- **Fail to learn** from mistakes
- **Don't stay current** on important developments in their field

Did you know?

Profiles CheckPoint 360° targets specific development needs. Managers become more effective by receiving feedback from a full circle of people with whom they interact and a complete report on steps to improve challenge areas. This process measures 8 management and leadership competencies and 18 supporting skill sets.



Remedies

With the symptoms we've just identified in mind, would you say there is a degree of incompetent management within your organization? If so, here's a strategy for handling it:

Determine if the individual has what it takes to be a manager. That involves a thorough assessment of his or her behaviors and interests. ProfileXT® and Profiles Performance Indicator™ provide insight into the total person, giving you critical information to improve management selection and team performance. These tools can be used separately or together.

If yes, you should try to help them become aware of their weaknesses. Honest, straightforward feedback from peers, superiors, and subordinates can help open people's eyes by revealing how others see them. But don't stop with feedback – use it to create a targeted development plan to address specific needs. Profiles CheckPoint 360™ does this for you by identifying performance gaps, and by providing coaching guides and personal action plans for improving communication skills.

If no, then determine how they can best serve the organization. Some incompetent sales managers never should have been promoted from sales. In other disciplines as well, there are practitioners who, based on their performances, are promoted to management. But not everyone has the skills and talent to manage. In some cases, redeployment is a good solution for both the employee and the organization. Profiles International's unique job-matching process will help you take an underperforming manager and move him into a role where he can be highly successful, increasing morale as well as the bottom line for your organization.



Need to improve your management team?

Profiles International has helped thousands of organizations identify high-performing managers and develop them to their full potential.

Summary: Eight Signs of Incompetent Managers

Like winning coaches, successful managers are both talented and skilled. Of course, managerial skills can be developed through training, mentoring, and experience. But if a manager lacks natural talent, his or her odds of success will diminish significantly. We identified and explored the following signs of incompetent managers:

1. Poor communication skills
2. Weak leadership capabilities
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Recognize any of these symptoms in your management team? If so, we recommend:

- [Identifying natural leadership skills](#) and abilities within your organization
- Evaluating current managers by using a 360° competency feedback system to gather feedback from direct reports, peers, supervisors, and managers
- Using reports with individualized action steps to create development plans for struggling managers
- Reassigning underperforming managers, who likely have less interest in or aptitude for leadership, to other positions in your organization where they can be top performers

imagine great people™

Profiles International – Who We Are

Profiles International is the best source for talent management solutions, with over 20 years' experience and more than 40,000 clients in over 120 countries. Our data-driven talent management solutions – built on complex behavioral science, yet simple to administer and read – help you find the right people, shape them into a winning team, and lead them to their full potential.

Contact Us

