

## Are You Cut Out for Management?

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**Q.** *You're very good at your job and although you didn't ask for it, you have been promoted into a management position for the first time. How different will it be from your current job?*

**A.** They may call it a promotion, but moving into management is really like changing careers. "It's a field unto itself," says **Billie G. Blair**, an organizational psychologist and C.E.O. of Change Strategists, a management consultancy in Los Angeles. "You will be doing things well outside the duties of your old job, and you have to learn management's literature, language and techniques."

Becoming a manager requires a transformation of your professional identity, says Linda A. Hill, a professor at Harvard Business School and author of "[Becoming a Manager: How New Managers Master the Challenges of Leadership](#)."

People often think that being a manager is about money, power and perks, Ms. Hill says, but it's more about interdependence. "Your success is dependent on others, both those you manage as well as your bosses and your peers," she says. "You are an instrument to get things done in the organization by working with and through others, rather than being the one doing the work."

**Q.** *Although you want to do the best you can, you don't feel well prepared. What can you do to succeed as a manager?*

**A.** Ask a manager you respect to help guide you, says Rich Wellins, a senior vice president at DDI, Development Dimensions International, a talent management consultancy in Pittsburgh. And build a network of others who are relatively new to management.

"Connect with those who are still in the early stages of their career, like you, and meet with them regularly. Ask what they found most challenging in the first year," Mr. Wellins says. "Find out what they did to prepare themselves to successfully transition and what three pieces of advice they would give to help with yours."

The first six months are crucial for a new manager, so meet with your boss and create a development plan that includes any training you need and a six-month action plan. Emphasize to your manager “that although you are stepping up to the plate, you want to be able to reconsider if the new role isn’t a good fit,” **Ms. Blair** says. “If you just rush into it, the company will assume you’re ready for the job and everything is fine.”

**Q.** *Are certain kinds of people cut out for management?*

**A.** Some people are natural leaders — good at listening to others and helping them do their best. “These are people who have a strong motivation to lead, to influence, to get things done for others,” Mr. Wellins says. “Many management skills can be learned, but the disposition and motivation to lead — you either have it or you don’t.”

**Q.** *What if you’ve always wanted to be in management, but once you get there realize you hate it. How do you save face and get back to what you were happier doing before?*

**A.** Don’t be hasty — it will take six months to a year to really know how you feel. At that point, do an assessment so that you can articulate why you may no longer want the job.

“Tease out what specifically you dislike,” says Dawn Chandler, an assistant professor of management at the [Orfalea College of Business](#) at California Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. “If it’s people, then you’re not cut out for management. But if it’s a problem your group is facing that is likely to pass, or an aspect of the job, like budgeting, it could be you need a job redesign, not another job.” For example, you may like the job more if you delegate budgeting to someone else.

If, after this assessment, you still want to leave your management role, have an honest discussion with your boss. State your problems with the job, or why you prefer your previous work. If your company has two career tracks — management/professional and technical — suggest switching tracks, Ms. Chandler says. A lateral move to a different division or department won’t be viewed as a step back and will allow you to use your technical expertise again.

**Q.** *Will you derail your career if you leave a managerial position? Or is it better for an unhappy manager to move into a non-managerial position, despite any negative career impact?*

**A.** In the past, says Ms. Hill, it would have almost certainly derailed your career, but now it depends far more on the company’s culture. “Talent is not as portable as we used to believe,”

she says. “And if you don’t like your job you are less likely to be good at it, and will more than likely end up hurting your career because of poor performance.”

Good results can be achieved by stepping back and setting new goals instead, says Janet Flewelling, director of human resources operations at [Administaff](#) in Houston. “If no lateral position is available, taking a step down — especially in this economy — may be your only option, and it isn’t likely to hurt you in the long term,” she says. “Ultimately, your decision has to be about job and personal satisfaction,” she adds, rather than the title, salary or corner office.

