

BOSSSES PROVIDE A "HOW TO MANAGE ME" MANUAL.

By JOANN S. LUBLIN
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This hospital executive's long hunt for a vice president of performance improvement unexpectedly improved his performance, too.

Ron B. Goodspeed, president and chief executive of Southcoast Hospitals Group here in Fall River, Mass., assembled an "owner's manual" about himself shortly after launching his search early last year.

The one-page document, based on a self-assessment and input from associates, was designed to offer tips to the new VP on how to work for the man who oversees three hospitals and 5,000 employees in the nonprofit Southcoast Health System. But compiling and circulating his candid sheet also taught the 56-year-old Dr. Goodspeed a lot about his managerial assets and liabilities.

As the new-year begins, we all yearn to be better at what we do. This unusual approach shows how continual, honest feedback can bolster chances for success.

An owner's manual "is a relatively simple and inexpensive technique to reduce the risks of failure in filling a position, while potentially increasing the effectiveness of a hiring manager," says psychologist Dr. Laurence J. Stybel, co-founder of Stybel Peabody a leadership and career-management firm.

Dr. Stybel proposed the idea of the manual to Dr. Goodspeed and some other clients after he noticed that even a \$25 tape recorder comes with detailed operating instructions. "I thought wouldn't it be nice if managers came equipped with an owner's manual that said, 'Here's how to turn me on. Here's how to turn me off. And warning! Here's what will get you in trouble,' " the executive coach recalls.

Dr. Goodspeed, a burly internist with a reddish-brown beard, embraced the manual concept because he has long pursued performance critiques from superiors and subordinates. "It sounds trite and apple pie," he explains. But "I want to do a really good job."

The hospital chief wrote his "how to manage me" manual in May while trying to recruit an outside physician for the vacant post. The document told the future vice president, "Ask me to 'get to the point.' Hint: If I use analogies that are not clear, please ask me to be more concrete."

In addition, the manual instructed the newcomer to warn Dr. Goodspeed if he

was "charging down the wrong path." He also advised him or her to supply more rather than less information, and not to test the waters before making recommendations.

Dr. Goodspeed shared his draft with five colleagues, then beefed it up. Chief Operating Officer Robert Millen, for instance, knows his boss has qualms about a proposed project when he starts challenging statistics. So at Mr. Millen's suggestion, the CEO inserted this line: "I can sometimes refer to statistics and research data when I am uncomfortable with an idea."

The revised owner's manual impressed external prospects. One doctor "was just blown away that somebody would share that at the start of a potential relationship," says David DeJesus Jr., human-resources vice president for Southcoast Health System.

The VP search dragged on until late fall. Meanwhile, formerly timid lieutenants emboldened by the Goodspeed manual started to question their leader more during meetings. They asked him to curb his verbosity and clarify his points. Some staffers say the requests also improved Dr. Goodspeed's effectiveness by forcing him to take stands faster than usual.

Such real-time feedback "keeps you on track -- as opposed to learning a year later that you got off track" during an annual performance review, Dr. Goodspeed says. He peruses his manual, tucked inside a small leather binder, almost every day as a reminder to avoid rambling, seeking too much data or always using analogies.

In November, Dr. Goodspeed decided to fill the vice presidency with insider Patrick Gannon, a hospital pharmacy and respiratory-care director who had handled some of the post's duties on an interim basis. Dr. Goodspeed gave the finalist the owner's manual two days before he gave him the job.

Mr. Gannon read the document several times. "This is really very helpful because it saves a lot of time figuring out what the boss thinks of things," he remembers thinking. "My respect for him went up a notch. I said, 'Wow!' "

The 46-year-old official heeded the manual's instructions to confront his superior's shortcomings. And Dr. Goodspeed continued to refer to it himself. At one meeting, he says he found himself "talking around" something. "As you'll recall from the owner's manual, this means I'm having trouble understanding what you're trying to do," the doctor told Mr. Gannon. Mr. Gannon immediately proposed a more specific action.

The new vice president intends to write his own manual for employees reporting to him.

"As a measure of success," says Mr. Gannon, "you could say that Ron's work

inspired me to think and act along similar lines -- a true reflection of his leadership abilities to inspire others."

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SAMPLE: HOW TO MANAGE JANE R, CFO OF A HIGH TECH COMPANY:

JANE IS CFO. SHE IS HIRING A NEW DIRECTOR OF GLOBAL TAX.

AS PART OF THE ONBOARDING PROGRAM BEFORE THE FIRST DAY OF EMPLOYMENT, JANE GAVE THE NEW DIRECTOR THE "HOW TO MANAGE JANE" MANUAL AND ASKED THE DIRECTOR TO PROVIDE JANE WITH A "HOW TO MANAGE YOUR NEW DIRECTOR" MANUAL.

NOTE THE STRUCTURE OF THE MANUAL IN TERMS OF THREE CHAPTERS: "DO," "PERMISSION," AND "STOP."

DO:

1. Be Results Oriented. Our conversations should have a purpose.
2. Be Time Sensitive. I like meetings to start on time and I like them to stop on time.
3. Use Email.
4. Take initiative. If you don't take initiative, I will.
5. Conclude meetings with action steps, time-tables, and a clear understanding of who is responsible for accomplishing what. If you don't do this, I will. I would rather you do it.
6. Start your presentation with a focus on the strategic objectives BEFORE you go into the details. Always show me you understand the forest AND the trees.
7. Keep me informed. I don't like surprises.

PERMISSION:

1. My cruising speed is 95 miles an hour. If you want me to slow, down just say so.
2. I respect people who know what they do not know and are not afraid to say it.
3. It's OK to laugh and to make jokes.
4. If you don't understand, it is OK to say you don't understand.

STOP (Do this and you are in trouble).

1. Focus on your job and work in the best interests of the company. If you develop a reputation as someone who stabs people in back, do not expect to remain here long.
2. Check your numbers before you submit it to me. I do not want to be your proof reader. I do not want to worry that your numbers are properly added. If I find one problem with numbers added wrong, I will find it hard to trust you. Check your numbers!
3. Fail to follow-up on what you said you would do. Never assume I will forget a verbal commitment you made to me.
4. Don't expect me to micromanage you.

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The basic concept behind How to Manage Me is to remove uncertainty about boss-subordinate relationship management during the first critical weeks of starting a new job.

Load the dice in in your favor through this technique: mistakes made during the first two weeks of a new situation are harder to recover from than the same mistakes made 12 months later.

A second concept behind "How to Manage Me" is to make the implicit explicit.

For example, one might think it is not necessary for a CFO to tell a direct report "follow up on what you said you would do." And yet how many bosses complain that subordinates fail to do what they say they will do.

In "How to Manage Me," Jane is flating how important follow-up is for her.

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