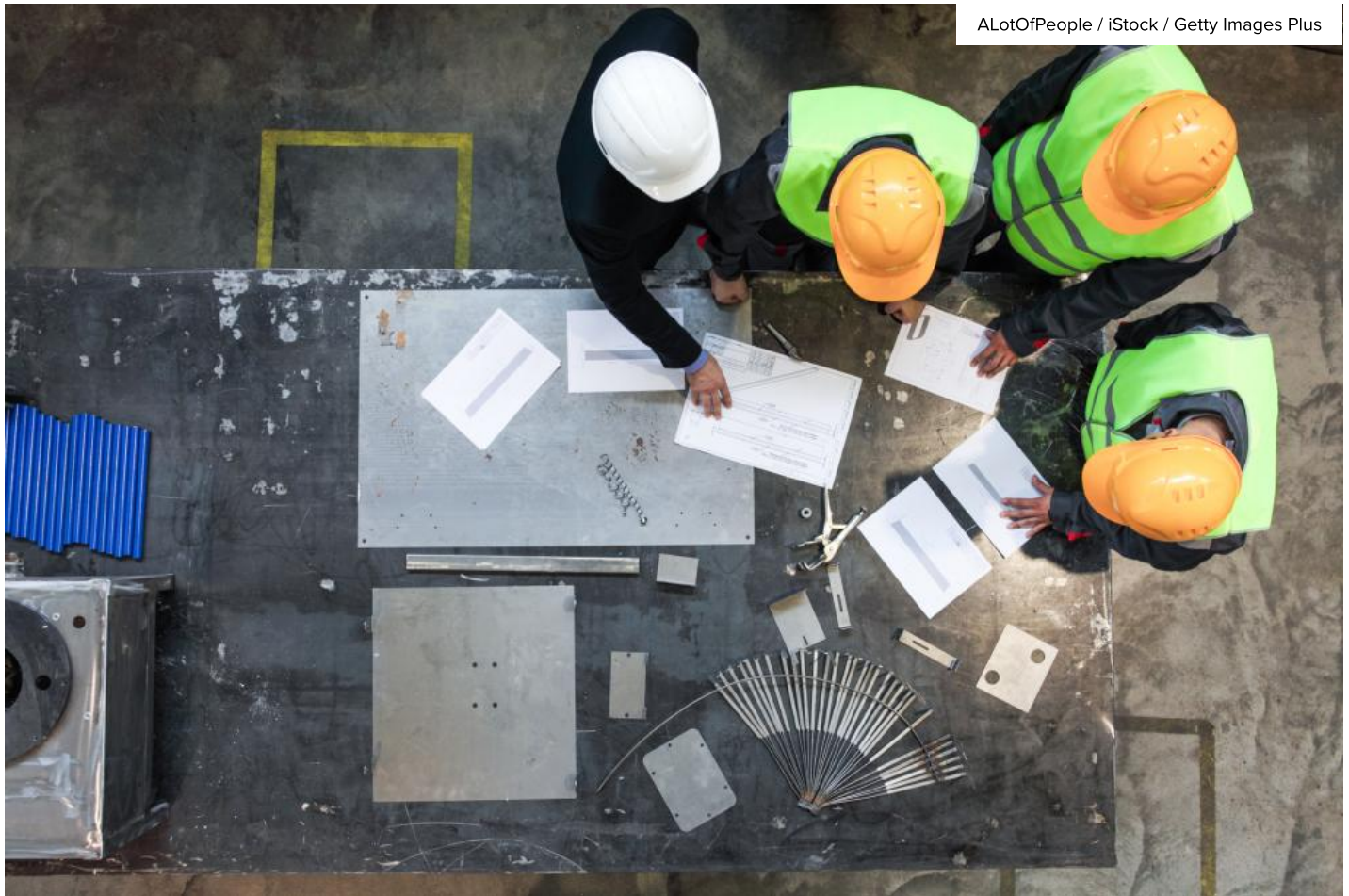


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Management—How Do You Do It?

In today's pressure cooker economy and labor (or lack thereof) market, managing your assets effectively is the end you should strive for.

Al Schwartz | Sep 30, 2019

Managing, or owning, a plumbing/HVAC company is sort of like herding cats. If you're the go-to guy or the boss your sphere of influence, and the decision making power that comes with it, is pretty large. Even if you manage only one part of a company and interact with other managers, you've got to have intimate knowledge of just about every aspect of your company and integrate that knowledge with your area of responsibility. How do you do it? Assuming you have come from a field position, how do you transition to running things remotely instead of "hands on?" What is there about managing assets as opposed to doing the work yourself?

Keeping all the balls in the air can be quite daunting if you take your job seriously. While not every manager is a good manager, not every manager is a bad manager either. Some got to where they are by being dedicated and really good at their job, others by nepotism or some other promotional scheme that rewarded loyalty or relationship over ability, or it was merely convenience or necessity. Whatever the case, if you manage an entire company or just parts of one, the basics never change. In today's pressure cooker economy and labor (or lack thereof) market, managing your assets effectively is the end you should strive for. Being a good manager means a fatter bottom line and a smoother running company.

Outside of a modicum of trade knowledge, which most would agree is a job requirement, a manager needs to have other skills in order to take charge of his responsibilities and to get things done. How does he do that in 2019?

Education

Although not as popular today as it was 50 or so years back, books and seminars put on by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale (*The Power of Positive Thinking*) were considered required reading if you wanted to have the edge in business. Likewise, Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* helped a generation of would-be entrepreneurs and up-and-coming businessmen to better communicate with their peers and their employees. The popularity of these programs is testament to their effectiveness, even if they have fallen out of favor today.

Over the years there have been many self-help programs aimed at making managers better at their jobs. These ranged from the aforementioned Peale and Carnegie programs to Time Management Seminars to just about any aspect of a manager's job description. Some companies required their managers to attend these classes as a condition of advancement while other managers opt to take them because they, personally, want to be better at their jobs.

The result of attending any of these seminars or courses is pretty easy to observe. Almost everyone who leaves a class comes out fired up and applies the lessons learned with the enthusiasm of a Zealot. Whether or not they continue to work at the lesson learned is another matter entirely. Think of it this way; how many people do you know who have dieted to lose weight? After religiously following a prescribed regimen and losing the weight, how many have managed to keep the weight off after, say, a year or so? Management seminars are like that.

A Better Mousetrap

In my humble opinion, all of these commercial "better management" programs have something to add to the training of good managers. None, however, have invented a better mousetrap. Where they go off the rails is in trying to make a one-size-fits-all class. People are not automatons. They are not all the same in the way that they act, work or think. Even if we all agree on a specific way of approaching a problem, not everyone can do it that way. Not to mix metaphors, but there is always more than one way to skin a cat.

If you are a meticulous craftsman (read: anal) and you approach your job with the same meticulous attitude, you will manage that way. You will keep copious, accurate records. You'll demand your employees provide you with accurate and detailed accounts of the project(s) you manage. You will, when asked, be able to pinpoint exact times and locations of project progress if asked.

If you're more of a laid back sort of craftsman ("almost is close enough," "it's behind a wall, no one will see it!") you'll probably manage the same way, allowing a certain

amount of leeway in your people, reports and results. “Did I order that cast iron last week or the week before...?” That’s not a knock, it’s a fact.

If you’re sort of in between the two previous examples, your management style will reflect that. If you’re an owner, your concern for your company will be reflected in your management of it.

Going back to the one-size-fits-all seminars, perhaps instead of absorbing the whole program and trying to incorporate the lessons in their entirety into your management style, the better alternative might be to include and practice only one, or possibly two, of the lessons that you were taught instead of the whole program. If you find that the one or two things work for you, use them until they are second nature to you and incorporated into your management style.

If, on the other hand, these new elements don’t work with your style or with your company, you can discard or modify them and try other aspects of the course. After all, the object is for you to become a better manager, not to pedantically parrot phrases and euphemisms while trying to force a round peg into a square hole.

Never lose site of the goal: a better manager means a better run company. A better run company means more efficient use of resources and a fatter bottom line.

The Brooklyn, N.Y.-born author is a third-generation master plumber. He founded Sunflower Plumbing & Heating in Shirley, N.Y., in 1975 and A Professional Commercial Plumbing Inc. in Phoenix in 1980. He holds residential, commercial, industrial and solar plumbing licenses and is certified in welding, clean rooms, polypropylene gas fusion and medical gas piping. He can be reached at allen@proquilldriver.com.