



January 28, 2015: Business and Industry Training Blog 5: The Traits of a Good Manager

- OUL Community and Corporate Learning Interim Director Ron Cullums writes a [monthly blog](#) on business and management strategies. He also highlights ways that OUL can assist businesses in the community with growth and development.

What traits does a person need to have to become a good manager? Just what skills do managers need? Harvard University's Robert Katz suggests that a managerial candidate have skills in three areas: technical, human, and conceptual. Let's take a look at each of those areas individually, then as a whole.

Technical skills are normally learned before a person becomes a manager, often during a college education. The ability to perform certain tasks well (such as an accountant balancing the books, or an engineer calculating pressure) is further developed on the job. Individuals that repeatedly demonstrate strong technical skills often become top candidates for entry-level managerial positions.

Human skills, sometimes called interpersonal or soft skills, are the ability to communicate, cooperate, and generally work well with others. Managers with solid human skills are able to manage relationships effectively, and are able to understand the feelings of their co-workers, as well as their own feelings. Human skills are very important at all managerial levels, from supervisor to CEO.

Conceptual skills include the ability to logically analyze in order to solve difficult problems. Often this involves mentally breaking down an issue into smaller parts, then putting it back together again for improved results. In other words, this is a thinking skill. Having strong conceptual skill is very important in higher levels of management, as problems or issues have much higher stakes and less information to consider.

Sometimes organizations will promote a person based primarily on technical ability. The thinking skill may be assumed, based on the expertise displayed with the employee's technical work. Many individuals will accept the new position due to increased pay, prestige, or other benefits. However, a strong technical person does not always make a good manager. Someone lacking interpersonal skills will likely have difficulty supervising, because a large part of being a manager is helping and supporting those employees around you through face-to-face meetings.

Changing a personality type is very difficult, and faking an improved personality is not usually effective either. Most human skills are developed at a young age, so trying to drastically change into a "people person" is nearly impossible. Smart people with technical skills certainly are needed in the workforce, but those low on human skills may struggle in managerial roles.

So if someone shows expertise on the job, relates well with others, and has quite a bit of mental "horsepower," they might be a candidate for a managerial position. To find top-notch managers in your organization, keep an eye out for those that possess all three of these important skills.