Book Review:
What To Do When You Become The Boss: How New Managers Become Successful Managers

Bob Selden (2008).

Outskirts Press, Inc: Denver, Colorado

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In an ongoing effort to develop a psychological profile of materialistic values and attitudes in Australia, the present study aims to explore the relationship between materialism and Type A behaviour.

In a marketplace where the bookshelves are crammed with nonacademic 'how to' guides for new and aspiring managers, as well as a seemingly never-ending succession of 'the X number of secrets' to success, it would be reasonable to view any additions to the business genre with some reservation, and to ask what (if anything) distinguishes the latest book from all the others? Fortunately, Selden's guide for new managers deserves attention for all the right reasons.

Management guides are often written from the perspective of a manager/consultant offering years of experience in practical aspects of managing people. However, to the academically inclined reader, and especially those with knowledge of behavioural science applied to work, these guides — although well intentioned — may appear as greatly watered down versions of academic papers and texts. Hence, while they are likely to be easier to read by the layperson, they might offer little if any addition to the body of knowledge of the relevant discipline, or improvement in terms of specific application of what is already known to contemporary work issues.

Another shortcoming occurs when a guide's recommendations conflict greatly with that validated by research. One example here would be where the author's own lack of self-knowledge is painfully obvious when advocating principles for survival and 'getting ahead' in the corporate world that have much more in common with Machiavelli than the acknowledgment and successful application of emotional intelligence.

What To Do When You Become The Boss counters the first shortcoming by ably translating contemporary management and behavioural theory into practical processes. Moreover, it does so while catering to four different learning styles — activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist — by providing a diagnostic survey at the start of the book, with hints at the beginning of each of the book's five sections specifically matched to these individual styles. For example, in section 1, Leading and Managing, 'activists' — who are described as 'open minded and enthusiastic about new ideas but get bored with them' — are advised to go straight to "How to implement the ideas in this chapter' at the end of chapters 1 and 2 and develop an action plan. Of the other three learning styles, 'pragmatists' are persons who become impatient with lengthy discussions and prefer to try things out; 'reflectors' take a back seat and observe and listen before forming conclusions, and theorists integrate their observations with theory, and approach problems in a methodical manner. While there does seem to be some overlap between the categories — which Selden admits — they do make intuitive sense.

What To Do When You Become The Boss bypasses the second common shortcoming noted above by paying equal attention to both ends of the corporate ladder. By doing so, Selden answers the very question that distinguishes between management per se and effective leadership: that is, 'who do you satisfy at work?' Should attention be focused on the boss (with the result of being considered effective, and one day promoted), or subordinates (and be considered effective and liked by those below you on the corporate ladder, but perhaps not acknowledged by those above and hence ultimately unsuccessful …)? Taken to the extreme, this problem can be simplistically reframed as politicking and networking versus communicating with, supporting, and developing subordinates and peers while still managing your boss and your own career. *What To Do When You Become The Boss* adopts the latter stance.

Section 2 — 'Managing Your Team' — can be viewed as a concise primer for anyone aspiring to broader management responsibilities, as it covers recruiting and selection, performance management (including motivation, appraisals, feedback and coaching), and how to fire someone.

Part 3 — 'Managing Upwards and Sideways' — addresses managing and influencing peers and senior management, or, to paraphrase Selden, 'how to get things done when you have no formal power'. In the next section, this theme is applied to group settings, while the

final section covers 'Managing Yourself'. This includes two chapters worthy of specific mention: 'How to Manage Your Email', and 'Five Of The Worst Mistakes New Managers Make and Five Principles on How To Avoid Them'. The first mention might seem obvious at first, but then, how many organisational members do actually have specific personal strategies in place for managing their email traffic? Further, Selden posits that emails are easier to read when their intention is explicit (which is all the more important given that once sent, they form an organisational record, and one whose meaning should not be ambiguous) and summarised in the subject line. The simple advice in this particular chapter should be included in all employee inductions (and the guidelines for managing emails incorporated in human resource policies and procedures).

The 'Five Of The Worst Mistakes New Managers Make' Selden lists in chapter 20 are: treating employees as resources, and not individual human beings; not following through on what you say you will do; failing to set up ground rules and performance expectations; not helping employees to realise their full potential; and neglecting to give credit where it is due. It would be difficult to disagree with this list: each of these 'mistakes' are contrary to both contemporary organisational behaviour theory and innumerable case studies and research papers documenting their cost not just to organisations' bottom lines but also their corrosive effect on interpersonal relations at work. With that in mind, an argument could be made that this chapter could have been placed first in the guide. Alternately, readers of *What To Do When You Become The Boss* might benefit more if they reflect on this chapter before approaching the others.

In order to manage others effectively, aspiring leaders need a thorough understanding of their values and personal worth. This necessity to manage from the 'inside out', as well as being able to put themselves in others' shoes, is considered to be a key requirement of managing in the 21st century. Fortunately, *What To Do When You Become The Boss* provides ample opportunities (in the form of numerous case studies and exercises to reflect upon) for readers to get to know themselves, and their likely effects on other people at work. In summation, *What To Do When You Become The Boss* is just as useful for 'old' managers as it is for 'new' ones, and would make a very useful addition to any MBA 'required reading' list in the Pacific Rim and further abroad.