

Paper 143-30

So You Want to Be a Manager? - A Panel Discussion On Issues to Consider Before Aiming for a Management Career Path

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ABSTRACT

Are you thinking your next career move should be moving into a management position? Have you thought through all the pros and cons? This panel discussion will give you some things to think about before making that decision. The panelists have had different experiences. One panelist moved into management - and then moved out of management. Another juggles management responsibilities with coding responsibilities. The other panelist focuses on managing people and projects. The panelists will share their experiences and provide an opportunity for you to ask questions.

INTRODUCTION

People enter the management arena for different reasons. Some search out management opportunities aggressively, others are forced into it, still others are in the right spot at the right time. What do people find when they become managers? Chances are good that they are overwhelmed by the responsibility that now rests with them and are not prepared for the myriad of new tasks that await them. In addition, these people are forced to learn the art of management.

So what is management? For this presentation it can be defined as any responsibility for work other than your own and/or supervision of people other than yourself. How do people succeed at becoming good managers? What don't people think about before going into management? How do I get my old job back once I determine management is not the place for me? Countless books have been written on the subject of management. In these next few pages the panelists will give you some idea of their real world experiences in management, and at the panel discussion they will attempt to answer these questions and many more. As you digest this information try to see if the environment you are thinking of stepping into is similar to that of one or more of the panelists. If so, can this information be applied to your situation?

STEPHEN M. NOGA: MANAGER AND PROGRAMMER

I am the Director of the Statistical Programming group (all SAS[®] programmers) for a contract research organization, which means that I am expected to be a manager 100% of the time. This doesn't mean that I spend my entire day managing the department. On the contrary, I still continue to program (in SAS) about 40 to 50% of the time. However, my management responsibilities are always present and occasionally they cause havoc with my programming duties.

My management style is derived from nineteen years as a SAS programmer, with fourteen of those years managing SAS programmers. I have never managed non-SAS programmers so I cannot speak to what that experience would be like. My views in this paper and during the panel discussion are based on what has worked and not worked for me within the groups that I have supervised during these last fourteen years.

Moving On Up

So, you're ready to take that next career step? Your reasoning for wanting to make the move to management has hopefully been thought out and you are comfortable with the decision to move forward. I know that assumptions can be dangerous but I think it is safe for you to assume that you will continue to experience most things (tasks, relationships, likes/dislikes, etc.) that you have experienced on the job thus far, although in different ways as you move into a management position.

Is the move within your current organization or are you going after a management position in a different organization? It is a simple question but one with some important distinctions for you to consider. Let's first look at the case of an internal promotion and some thoughts that merit your consideration:

- Will you be managing some/all of the same people in your current group? If so, you have an advantage in that you already know the people that will be working for you. If you have had a lot of interaction with these people then your advantage is increased because you should have some knowledge of their strengths/

weaknesses and also of their inter-personal relationships within this group. However, you managing former equals may be an awkward situation for you, them, or both.

- Do you already have a working relationship with your new boss? If so, then you might have some indication of what it is like to work for that person. If not, do not believe what you have heard about this person. Form your own opinions after working for them.
- Because this is an internal move I will make the assumption that you are satisfied with the company as a place to work. Think about what makes you happy with this company. Will those things/situations/environments still be in place after you make the positional move?

Some things you should consider if your new management position is at an organization other than your current employer:

- Not only will you have to learn a new position, you will also have to adapt to a new company.
- You will be expected to perform right from the start. You may have to work under a probationary period meaning there will be added pressure on you to meet their expectations right away.
- Whereas you have a performance track record at your old company, no one at the new company knows anything about you except what is on paper. The people who you will supervise and your supervisor will have to develop working relationships with you.
- You do not know anything about the people reporting to you. You may not have time to develop an accurate assessment of an individual before you are making decisions based on that assessment.
- You may have to learn a whole new way to do similar tasks. You may not have tools available to you that you did at your old job to do these tasks or you may have different tools that you will have to become familiar with.

What A View or How Come They Are Dropping Anvils On Me As I'm Trying To Keep My Head Above Water

You have made the jump and you are now a manager. I bet you never expected to have to deal with all the tasks being tossed your way. I forgot, you do not yet know about these new tasks. Let's look at some of these tasks that you will be expected to deal with, and also the skills needed to accomplish them (in no particular order):

- What is the time commitment to management vs. programming? Are you still programming? If your new position requires you to do both then you will have to hone your time-management skills in order to complete your own work in addition to managing your group's work.
- If you are still programming then it will be up to you to assign programming tasks to yourself. While you might think it will be really cool to assign all the interesting or even easy tasks to yourself, I bet your group would not think the same thing.
- If you supervise teams of programmers a team lead may ask for your assistance with a programming task. In cases like this you need to act as a programmer and let the team leader lead.
- What are your people skills like? Can you handle conflict or will you hope that the problem goes away if left alone (bad move)?
- You will need to develop a management/leadership style that fits your needs. This is something that you can't learn from a book, but from experience, and it will take time for you to develop one.
- Paperwork. You're a programmer. Logic should be one of your strong suits; writing grammatically correct documents may not be. That will need to change. SOPs, guidance documents, memos to upper management, etc. etc. etc.
- You will have input, either partial or full, on the hiring of new employees. You are now the interviewer instead of the interviewee. What kind of interview do you want to run? If the company has a HR department then you will be working with it to ensure that you are not wasting your time interviewing non-qualified candidates. What are the traits that you will look for in a prospective candidate?
- You will have input, either partial or full, on the firing/laying-off of employees. Do you think you can make the call to get rid of an employee, and then actually tell that person they no longer have a job?
- If you want your group to follow you then you will have to earn their respect. This may mean, at times, acting as an umbrella to shield them when it starts raining from above. Your group stays mostly dry while you get soaked. Get used to it, it is part of the job. Of course you can always deflect blame from yourself or delegate additional work to your group even though they cannot handle their current workload. I'm sure your group would react positively to either of those actions.
- You are going to have to choose your battles wisely both within your group and the company. Sometimes you have to fight the good fight and hope for a favorable outcome, while knowing that you may have to accept an unfavorable one. Other times it is better to deal with an issue as is and save your ammo. As with life, you cannot win every time. Strive for the wins that will help your group the most.
- Chances are you will be required to keep your group and their projects within the budget allotted. You will most likely have input on new budgets. Budgets affect everything in your group. Will the company let you

hire at will? Will there be a hardware/software budget for your group? If your company does individual raises/bonuses instead of company-wide one then you will have input on what these will be for your group.

- Your input may be needed in determining time to complete tasks. If your company submits proposals for client work, upper management will use your input for proposal budget numbers.
- If your company has given you the responsibility for having the right number of people in your group then you will have to determine the right size for your group. What kind of workweek do you want for your group? If you have too many in your group then chances are good that they will not have enough work to keep them busy. This is not a good situation for you because upper management expects your people to be working for their paychecks, not taking it easy, and it is not a good situation for your group if they are clock-watching during the week (very boring). You will have to find meaningful work (not an easy task) for your group. On the other hand, your group being overworked is not a good situation for you or them either. This will lead to burnout (you/them), shoddy work, low morale (didn't know you needed to be a morale officer, did you), and possible resignations (you/them).
- You will need to learn and follow federal, state, and local employment laws. Hope your company has a HR department to help you out.
- You will need to hone your ESP skills. People will expect you to know what you do not know.
- Everybody deserves a vacation. No disputing that tenet. However, do not assume that because you are the boss your vacation plans take precedence over those of your group. Unless the company closes for a week or two at Christmas (and some do), assume that most of your group is going to want some or all of that time off. It is up to you to determine a vacation schedule for your group during the holidays and year round that provides coverage to the company. Depend on a client to need something the first week of January, the last week of November or the last week of December.
- You may have to develop and institute a professional development policy for your group if the company does not have one. I do not think your group will be pleased with you if you choose to attend the best conferences in the best locales and leave the rest for them. Will you require papers to be presented in order for an employee to attend a conference?
- Think of yourself as a Fire Marshal. It will be up to you to know the difference between a trashcan fire and a forest fire, and also how to prevent the former from turning into the latter. Neither your group nor upper management will respect you if you treat every bit of adversity as a crisis. Hopefully, in your current position you have learned to ask the right questions and also know when to call in the cavalry. In management, not only will you need to apply these skills to your own work, but also to the work of your group. You may have a team lead who is determined never to ask for help, even to the detriment of the team or group. It will be up to you to know when that team is in trouble and get them the help they need.
- Meetings, Meetings, Meetings (see Paperwork above).
- You are the boss which translates as 'you have all the answers' to your group. You may not know the answers but you sure better know where to find them.
- Most of all you need to remember that Life Happens! You need to be flexible and think on the run.

Should I Stay or Should I Go

After being in a management position long enough to make an informed decision, you will have to make the call. If you like the job, that is great and hopefully you will continue to grow with the job. If your management job is not everything you thought it would be then you need to figure out if it is the current job or the management aspect that is causing your dissatisfaction. A management position is no different than any other type of job. The current management job may not be suited for you but that is not to say that the next management job will not be more to your liking. If you choose to leave the management arena, there is no reason to be down on yourself. Not everybody is suited for this track.

If you choose to stay in management you will become, if you are not already, comfortable with a number of skills. Among them are: accepting responsibility for the work of others; delegating tasks and following-up; reporting to management grades higher than yours; fostering an environment that people want to work in; evaluating talent and deciding how best to utilize it; juggling multiple projects and priorities; diplomacy. In addition, you will be expected to make tough decisions that affect people other than yourself even though you may never become comfortable with this aspect.

I have some final thoughts to leave with you. You already know programming and you know what you have liked and disliked about your managers. As a manager you will have the opportunity to shape how a lot, but not all, things are done in your department. This responsibility is truly a double-edged sword so be careful. Above all, have confidence in yourself. Do not be afraid to have smarter people than yourself working for you. You do not know it all and you will need your group's help to succeed.

LAUREN HAWORTH: MANAGER

After working 11 years as a programmer, I moved into management on a part-time basis. When my manager departed, there was no one else to fill the void, so I stepped in. To my surprise, I found I liked it. From that point onward, I sought out management positions. For the past 7 years, I've been in a full-time management role.

I got into management by accident, but there are a lot of reasons for intentionally moving into a management position. Here is my top-10 list of reasons I've heard for why a programmer might want to move into management.

1. Making More Money

We may say that we want to become managers for the challenge, for the benefit of the company, etc., but if we're being honest, the pay scale is a key factor. Everyone knows that the managers get the big bucks, right?

In the long run, this may be true. However, an entry-level management position often pays the same or less than a senior programming position. You're going from being an expert at your job as a programmer to doing something where you have little or no experience. There's no reason for your company pay you more at this stage. You're going to have to earn that big pay raise.

Eventually, a senior manager is eligible for higher pay than a programmer is, but the difference isn't as big as you might think. If this is your main reason for wanting to go into management, think again.

2. Telling People What to Do

Another reason to move into management is to be in charge. You know there are better ways to do things. Maybe you'd like to improve your company's standard reports by using new ODS techniques, or improve efficiency by using PROC SQL instead of multiple data steps. By becoming a manager, you can tell people how to write their SAS code, right?

As a manager, you can occasionally get away with dictating programming technique, but you'll have a very unhappy staff if you do it very often. Not that you can't convince a programmer to do what you want. You just need to make it more of a discussion. Lay out the issue. Ask for their suggested solutions. Add your own ideas. Then let the programmer make the decision. A good manager can get things done without telling people what to do.

3. Hiring and Firing

One area where you do have decision-making authority is in selecting your staff. Over time, you can build the team you want by hiring the right people, and facilitating the departure of staff that haven't been performing as well.

While it's tempting to hire the best SAS programmers you can find, don't forget the other skills. You don't want a team of prima donnas that can't work together. In interviewing, be sure to focus on the softer skills. I highly recommend taking a behavioral interviewing course before doing any interviewing or hiring.

Remember that if you hire someone who is brilliant but difficult to work with, it's you as their manager who will have to deal with the disgruntled customers and coworkers. Find the people who are a joy to work with, even if they are newer to SAS. You can always improve their SAS skills. Changing someone's personality is much harder.

Hiring good people is a lot easier than getting rid of those that don't work out. Legal issues can make it difficult to fire someone, even when you have good documentation of their performance issues. The best managers help their staff figure out for themselves that things aren't working out, and help them exit voluntarily. But if that doesn't work, a manager has to be ready to make the tough decisions and deliver the bad news. Firing an awful employee is hard. What's even harder is telling someone that you like, on a personal level, that they just aren't cutting it as a programmer and they're being fired. If you don't think you could do this, then don't get into management.

4. Buying Cool Tools

As a manager, you have a lot more say in software and hardware purchasing decisions. You get to decide things like: when to upgrade to the new version of SAS, whether or not to license add-ons like SAS/Intrnet, which operating system is best for the SAS server, when to upgrade to a new server, and whether other reporting or presentation tools should be explored.

Of course a manager still needs to get input from the programmers and customers about what they need, and input from senior management on how much they can spend, but a manager has a lot more say in the final decisions.

Also, if your ego needs stroking, just show up at a conference or trade show, walk into the exhibit hall, and let people know you're a manager who can make purchasing decisions. You'll shortly be swarmed by salespeople who are only too happy to tell you how great you are and to send you all sorts of demo software. There is a downside to this, however. I highly recommend never giving out your phone number to salespeople, or you'll never get any work done once you're back at the office.

5. Ensuring Adequate Resources

As a programmer, you may feel like you've got too much work and not enough staff. You can complain to your manager and/or work longer hours, but there's not much you can do to solve the problem.

As a manager, you're involved up front in staffing and budget planning. If you do a good job forecasting needs and negotiating your budget, you can resolve resourcing issues. It's very rewarding to see the look of relief and gratitude on a programmer's face when they come to you asking for more help and you're able to deliver.

6. Designing SAS Training Programs

You can't tell a programmer that you want them to change their programming technique and expect to get results. Programmers are a stubborn bunch and not likely to follow your advice. However, you can get away with telling a programmer that they must take a certain training course.

If you have a new technique you want people to start using, you can set up a training class or a demo to entice them into learning and incorporating the new technique. If you have a team of programmers who are good at data step programming, but their reports are basic and ugly, send them off to an ODS class or a SAS conference to they can see the advantages of newer technologies.

Even if you can't teach the old dogs all of the new tricks, as a manager, you get to set up how your new junior programmers are trained. You can groom your staff to do things the way you like it. This could include areas such as programming style, documentation, use of macros, and reporting techniques.

7. Keeping Yourself Challenged

If you keep working as a programmer long enough, at some point you're going to start getting bored. Some people will choose to learn and use a new technical skill (web development, statistical analysis, application development, etc.) to keep themselves challenged. Other people decide to go into management.

Learning how to be an effective manager is not easy, and you will be anything but bored in your first year or two on the job.

8. Working with People

Programming can often be a solitary task. You may have team meetings to plan strategy, but you still do the majority of work by yourself, sitting in front of a computer typing in SAS code.

As a manager, your job is all about people. You have to interact with your direct reports, peers, customers, and senior management. You will likely spend the majority of your day in meetings. This includes 1-on-1 meetings as well as team meetings.

At first it seems as if the endless meetings are a waste of time, and that no real work is happening. But this is where the important business decisions get made. Sometimes in formal meetings, other times in hallway conversations before and after the meetings. You can't be involved in decision making if you spend all of your time in your office. This is the real job of a manager. You spend your time meeting with people in formal and informal settings, and negotiating solutions that meet everyone's needs.

My favorite part of the job is working with people to develop their skills. Mentoring your direct reports can be challenging but it is also extremely rewarding. Teaching new technical skills is fun, but the best reward is when you've taught someone a new communication or negotiation skill, and then you see them put it to effective use at a team meeting. It's kind of like watching your child take their first steps.

9. Someone's Got to Do It

If there weren't managers, there wouldn't be anyone out there to hire programmers and assign work. Some programmers get forced into management because there isn't anyone else available who knows anything about how to manage programming projects.

This isn't a great reason to get into management, but it happens. If you're faced with working with an unqualified manager, maybe you'd be better off to take on the job yourself. At least you know you'll be helping out the other programmers on the team.

10. Avoiding Real Work

As one manager told me, "Prior to becoming a manager I remember thinking how nice it would be to have that cushy job, just sit around and tell others what to do. It wasn't until I was being called out on the carpet by my manager for department deficiencies, ambushed by a disgruntled employee who insisted he should be promoted, and inundated with paperwork, that I really understand the challenges of the role. By the way, all of this occurred within the first week of my first supervisory position!"

Not only is there a lot of work, but it is less tangible than what you did as a programmer. As one manager put it: "as a programmer at the end of the day I could look back and see what I had accomplished (completed a program, finalized a test plan, delivered a set of tables, etc.), I could actually hold something in my hand that showed I was at work that day. As a manager many if not most days are spent talking to people, at the end of most days I had nothing tangible to show that I was even in the office. It took a long time for me to adjust to that."

Even when you do get more involved in project work, it's generally in a supportive role. One manager told me about her initial experiences: "The biggest surprise was that I had to start producing indirectly rather than directly. I was no longer the one who produced deliverables and presented them to customers and meeting participants. I needed to adjust to being more in the background on the projects and encouraging others to be in the limelight. Instead of answering questions and presenting new ideas, I had to bite my tongue and let my staff person do it. This became easier over time, but I think this is still one of the hardest things for me to do as a manager, especially when the project is exciting to me."

If you delegate effectively, as a manager you can avoid doing actual project work. This is good, as you'll need lots of free time for all of the other details that managers need to take care of.

For example:

Paperwork: performance reviews, promotion justifications, salary and bonus recommendations, training records, timelines and project status reports, budgets, contracts, invoices, procedures, justifications.

Meetings: see #8 above

Crises: programmers feuding with other programmers, unhappy customers, budget cuts from senior management, timeline and priority changes, replacing programmers that quit.

Anyone who says that becoming a manager reduced their workload isn't doing a good job as a manager. If you manage to delegate work effectively and avoid crises, that's great, but it just means you need to take your new free time and figure out how you can use it to improve productivity and job satisfaction for your direct reports and your organization.

Conclusions

Notice that one thing that was not on this list of the top 10 reasons to become a manager was getting to do fun technical projects. To be a successful full-time manager, you need to stay up to date on the latest technical trends, but you don't have time to write any code yourself.

My solution has been to use my technical skills after hours. I write and present papers at user group conferences on a regular basis. For example, see papers 043-30 and 132-30 in these Proceedings.

The bottom line, becoming a manager can be very rewarding, but the job isn't what most people think it is. Make sure that you're making this move for the right reasons, and with full knowledge of what the job entails.

ANDREW T. KULIGOWSKI: FORMER MANAGER, FULLTIME PROGRAMMER

Power. Prestige. Money. Aren't those supposed to be the benefits of a position in management? If so, why would anyone agree to surrender them?

I used to have managerial responsibility, but voluntarily gave it up to return to a programming position. To understand why, let me list some of the responsibilities of a position in management, listed in the order of their influence on me:

You need to surround yourself with good people and put your trust in them.

One of my former managers, Ann Goodwin to give the credit deserved, advised me "In order to be a successful manager, you have to place your success totally in the hands of others." Looking over my team roster, I had all of the skill sets necessary to support the software our team was responsible for. However, very few of the members of my team had experience in our team's applications – except for me.

I couldn't step in and handle all of the production problems myself. The team would never gain experience if they didn't get to work on things themselves! Nor was there time for me to both code and manage – I could delegate coding tasks, but not managerial ones. My superiors recognized the need for patience in order to develop the team, but that understanding only lasted as long as it took the phone to ring from an impatient client.

After mulling over the situation, I determined that the ideal solution to my problem was to assign myself to the pool of coders, and let another manager take over the reins of the team. You can hire management candidates from outside the organization, but you have to grow experience from within.

The responsibilities of management are not limited to the 8-hour day.

I never had any trouble with the concept of putting in long hours at the office, and with taking work home. Unfortunately, I had the equation inverted - I had a problem with the concept of "putting it behind you", to the point where I would wake up in the middle of the night wondering if I had properly explained the criticality of Task X to the team, or had forgotten to delegate Task Y, or ...

I value the ability to sleep through the night far more than I value a larger office.

A good manager takes pride in the accomplishments of his team.

I took a great deal of pride in my accomplishments when I was a programmer. When I joined management, I found that I didn't feel satisfied when a task was completed. The only word I can use to describe the feeling upon the successful completion of a project is "relieved". I got into this profession because I liked doing it. I took great pleasure in my accomplishments! It wasn't worth a few extra bucks to sacrifice this feeling for the next 20 years, counting the days until retirement.

A fair and honest annual performance appraisal benefits both the employee and the company.

I found that I had no problem in writing what I considered to be an impartial annual review for the members of my team. (My understanding is that this puts me in the minority of Americans, but I don't have any hard figures to back that up.) I was able to look my team members in the eye and explain my rationale for the review. However, I never felt like I was successful in instituting change – bad habits that were documented in December were still bad habits 12 months later, and 24 months later, and ...

The old expression, "Hindsight is 20/20", has exceptions. Looking back, I still do not know what I could have done to better explain the issues, and to effectively encourage progress through the year – if indeed there was anything I could do. I only know that nothing changed after a year.

A successful manager must have the ability to successfully juggle multiple priorities.

Let's look at a hypothetical situation. At 9:00, a client sends in a query, wondering why a particular number on a report does not appear to trend with the others on the same report. They'll be calling back before noon for a status update. Your manager would like you to look at it personally. At 9:15, very senior management requests a summary of the team's significant accomplishments for the year for a presentation they are giving later that week; they want a response by noon. Question: Which of these tasks is more critical? Answer: Both of them! (This was an easy one!) Failure to complete either assignment by their requested time would risk the anger of management.

I never did figure out how to squeeze 6 hours worth of work into 3 hours real-time. It never seemed to be a problem when I was a programmer, but situations like that happened all the time in management.

After reviewing the situation, it became clear that I did not want to continue in this role. Fortunately, the option to return to an active coding position was still available, and I decided to take it while I could. Besides, the truth is, there was very little difference in the power, prestige, and money separating a high-level programmer from a low-level manager.

Postscript: Déjà vu with a twist

The duties of my current position have either been clarified or redefined – depending on whom you ask – since accepting the invitation to write this paper. Once again, I have some supervisory responsibilities. However, this time, I am quite happy with the changes. The most important consideration is that my primary responsibility is still to design and code software. As long as I can build something, everything else associated with the position is secondary.

CONCLUSION

Hopefully what you have read in the preceding pages, and heard during the panel discussion, has added to the information you have been gathering in your effort to make an informed decision before seeking a management position. The panelists' intent has been to provide you with a first hand look at some of the benefits and pitfalls of management in order to help you decide if management is the next career step for you.

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