



## A Letter to Management and HR

### Dear Managers: Are you out of shape?

Are you out of shape...as a manager? Or perhaps, never been trained to be a manager but asked to play the role?

Being a manager isn't easy, much less being a great manager. When things are not easy, it is in our nature to find excuses to not invest the energy. "I have no time." "I don't know where to start." "I need a coach." "I don't have the right equipment."

Oddly, these are the same excuses we make to avoid getting in strong physical shape. As a chief human resources officer (CHRO), coach, consultant and #MakeManagersAwesome software entrepreneur, I've adopted the fitness metaphor to address the resistance that leaders feel when trying to achieve their vision/strategy through traditional goal-setting, feedback, and performance processes.

Think of it this way: no one ever really believes that going to the gym once a year will result in any meaningful results. In fact, most people laugh, as the answer is so obvious. To take it a step further, it actually hurts *more* when you work out once a year than if you worked out every day because your body is not used to the routine.

So why do we continue to believe that taking six months to set goals or that filling out a performance review form once a year will achieve greatness? Does it get any better if we go to the "gym" once a quarter? Of course not. Being a great manager, like being a great athlete, requires a *shift* in how you practice your craft. It requires a commitment to a continuous routine. There is no "get rock hard abs" shortcut.

### You Have to Really Want It

If we believed every ad we saw, then anyone could take a pill to be in shape. Similarly, as

managers, we are told that by reading a book or the latest article or taking a free online course, that we will have the skills to become great managers. Sure you can say you checked a box, but there's no true long-term development at play, and quick fixes aren't real fixes for athletes or managers. Like anything meaningful, you have to firmly commit to it if you want to be great. That means you must adopt a regular routine that is data-driven to ensure continued growth and performance.

Sometimes just the idea of working out really hard is enough to make us break into a sweat. However, in spite of that, at Squadley, we are looking to change the conversation from performance management to *management performance*. Performance management is a phrase that often evokes feelings of angst and fear. It is often a backward-looking exercise rather than one that focuses on moving an individual's performance and career forward. In this spirit of acceleration, great *management performance* can be the catalyst for great team performance and, ultimately, business success.

So, what does great management performance look like? At Squadley we have some core principles (The 6 C's) that we believe make not just great managers, but great places to work. So if you are a manager or leader at your company, ask yourself the following questions:

**Clear Purpose** – Who are we and why do we exist?

**Cascading Goals** – What are we doing this month/quarter/year and how does it align with the purpose of the company overall?

**Clarity of Role** – Does everyone know their roles and expectations?

**Continuous Feedback** – Do we have regular feedback channels?

**Coaching** – Do I have effective one-to-one (1:1) communication and recognition with my team?

**Career Journey** – Does each person on my team invest in their development?

Some of the answers to these questions are probably found in a mix of spreadsheets, presentations, emails, text messages, notebooks, Slack messages and your memory. Others may have never been considered. So, yes, it takes time to sort this into something cohesive that people can follow. Yes it takes discipline to get into a routine of continuously updating the narrative around a dynamic, multi-layered plan of record. And no, it's not easy and there's always a reason to wait until tomorrow. Again, *you have to want it*.

Most trainers and HR tech products disconnect all these elements and many companies fail to see value in some of them. But the truth is all of them are connected and integral to having a fully productive and engaged team. So until your team, your division, or your organization can answer these simple leadership questions, there's work to be done to get your leadership game into shape. When you do, you will have more fun, be a better coach for others, spend less time in meetings, be more personally engaged and perform at levels never seen before.

### How this Impacts HR

There are plenty of definitions out there as to what people think the role of HR is inside a company. The definition we subscribe to is that HR's role is to ensure the business achieves its goals by representing the biggest investment it makes...its talent – and we are there to guide the process. Full stop. This comes in many forms. A few areas include recruiting talent, being a beacon of communication and information around what and how work is done, and making sure people are set up for success in their roles with the right tools, resources and skills.

One of the most foundational programs to guarantee business success is management development. However, executive coaching is limited to the highest levels and coaching apps are a bit too disconnected from the busi-

ness to really be impactful. At best, companies may bring in a trainer to do a few Management 101 sessions. But, how do you take that training and truly put it into practice?

The answer also requires a shift in the role of the HR team and the data we relinquish to the managers directly. In the spirit of setting our talent up for success, HR should not be the “owner” of goal and performance data... the managers themselves should be. We are entering an era where managers need to be more and more accountable as we evolve from a traditional workforce to one that is continually more agile, not just in how we work towards goals, but also in who we work with. The gig economy and the overall competitive nature of finding great talent is driving companies to seek creative ways to get work done, including hiring temporary workers, outsourcing the work, or internally hiring someone and training them versus hiring externally. Turnover is high at even some of the best companies with 1.4 years being the average tenure in the tech industry for full-time talent. Your managers need to deliver on certain goals, and with all of these moving parts in play, they need all the tools and data they can get to ensure that goals get met. That can't be centralized with HR.



Think of the Iron Man helmet. Jarvis is constantly displaying data so that Tony Stark can make the right decisions in the moment. That is how we need to think about our managers data. Right now, HR is the channel for managing (often analyzing) and distributing performance or engagement data...but what if the role of HR was not to administer data, but rather be the strategic coach and partner with the manager, much like the role of an execu-

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tive coach? It would make it easier to hold managers truly accountable to their roles as the excuses of “I don’t know what the goals are” or “I don’t have the right information” no longer exist. Secondly, it would most certainly raise the level of the HR function to be a true business partner. If every manager had this type of on-demand data and coach, just think of the accelerated performance of your organization.

### **It All Starts with a Routine**

But, you may still be asking yourself, how can you really make this happen? At Squadley, we focus on what we like to call your Base Management Index (or BMI). This determines if your managers are in shape. This is a combination of key performance metrics from how people feel about the company, the

manager, and team and individual performance. Insight into all levels is critical to really understand how managers are driving team success. But, like going to a gym for the first time, this can be overwhelming to confront all at once. Whether you are a new manager, or one that just wants to continue to improve your craft, take a moment to get some coaching on how to use the equipment and the best exercises to try from an expert. Then, make strides towards working through a routine that combines the 6 C’s. Be patient with yourself, seek advice and ask for feedback. Managing others is one of the hardest tasks, and we often don’t appreciate how that can feel, especially for those new in the role. However, you won’t get in shape by just showing up to the gym...you have to want it, and work out regularly to achieve greatness.

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### **About the Author**

Jennifer Farris is a seasoned Bay Area HR executive and consultant with over 12 years’ experience in HR management. She is the CEO and co-founder of the successful consulting firm Farside HR Solutions as well as the CEO and co-founder of Squadley, a management development platform that combines the value of OKR alignment, continuous feedback and 1:1 coaching into a fast, total-management fitness routine to help #makemanagersawesome. Through her career, she has held HR leadership positions at Kabam, Practice Fusion, Ampush and Flexport. She received her bachelor’s degree from Santa Clara University and her master’s in Science from the University of Edinburgh. You can reach her at [jennifer@squadley.com](mailto:jennifer@squadley.com).