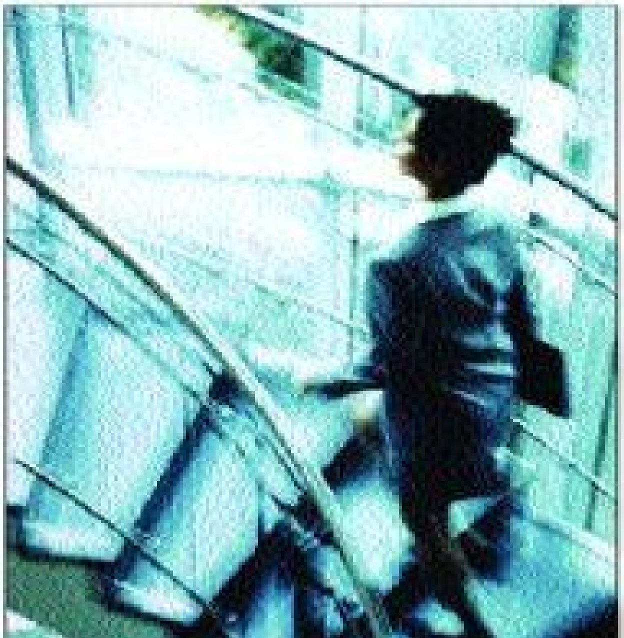
NEW EXPANDED EDITION

BECOMING A MANAGER

How New Managers Master the Challenges of Leadership



Linda A. Hill

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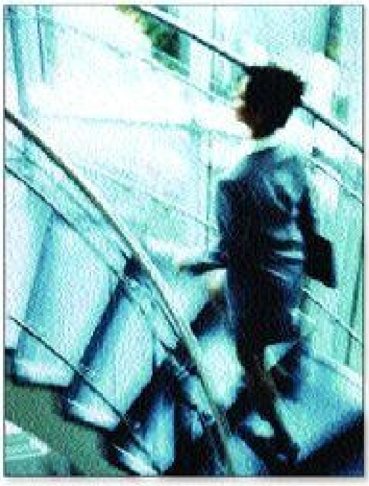

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To my parents,
Clifford and Lillian Hill,
who encouraged me to be inquisitive
and to have an optimistic outlook on life.

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Preface to the Second Edition

It is hard for me to believe that more than ten years have gone by since I began collecting data f *Becoming a Manager*. At that time, although we knew much about what effective managers did ar what they were like, we knew little about how they became that way. My ambition wa straightforward: permit new managers to speak for themselves about their experiences of learning manage and lead. Nineteen new managers allowed me to chronicle the triumphs and tribulations their first year on the job, and their experiences have resonated with managers around the worl Rarely a month goes by in which I do not hear from a new manager relieved to learn that his or h experience is not unique. As an experienced executive at a *Fortune* 100 company once said to m *Becoming a Manager* is about the “fundamentals.”

New managers—from a new parish priest in New York to a new R&D manager in Shanghai- report that becoming a manager is a transformational experience for which there are few shortcut They often express surprise at how stark the transition from individual contributor to manager actual is, and tell me how relieved they are to learn that others have experienced and worked through t varied intellectual and emotional challenges they confront in their new positions. First-time manage have to unlearn the deeply held attitudes and habits they had developed when they were responsib simply for their own performance.

Prior to a managerial promotion, most people work as “doers,” or individual contributors; the primary responsibility is to perform specific tasks in, for example, sales, engineering, or financi analysis. Their contribution depends primarily on what they do personally, drawing upon their ow expertise and actions. Managers, on the other hand, must see themselves as responsible for setting ar implementing an agenda for a whole group. To use an orchestral analogy, they must move fron concentrating on one task, as an accomplished violinist does, to coordinating the efforts of many, lik a conductor. To set the agenda for a whole group and to motivate and inspire others to accomplish th agenda is much more complicated than most people anticipate, particularly in flat, fast-movir organizations. As one new manager remarked, seeing himself as a network builder and a leader was fundamentally different way of looking at who he was and what he was supposed to do. It mea learning to frame problems in ways that were more broad, holistic, and long-term. It meant learning cope with the stresses associated with his new position as well as discovering new ways to measu success and derive satisfaction from work. It meant evolving an entirely new professional identity.

In short, becoming a manager demands that individuals engage in each of the three fundament kinds of learning: learning something new, changing one’s mind, and changing oneself.[1] The learnin something-new aspect of becoming a manager (i.e., the task learning) seems to receive the mo attention from organizations and academics. New managers find it challenging to develop the myria of technical, human, and conceptual competencies necessary to be an effective manager. But the va majority are *more* surprised and unnerved by the unexpected necessity of developing new attitude mind-sets, and values (i.e., the personal learning involved in changing one’s mind or onesel consistent with their new positions. Despite this, managers’ need for personal learning is rare acknowledged in management books or programs. When new managers contact me, they invariab end up talking with me about Chapters 6 and 7 of the book, “Gaining Self-Knowledge” and “Copir with the Stresses and Emotions.” There are still few safe havens for new managers to admit the deepest fears and insecurities.

WHAT ABOUT LEADERSHIP?

This second edition reflects what I have learned in the process of trying to develop resources for ne
managers in the intervening years since I wrote *Becoming a Manager*. In that time, I have designe
and delivered countless educational programs to managers at my own institution, the Harva
Business School, and for a variety of companies. I was also part of the new technology start-up tea
at Harvard Business School Publishing that designed our first multimedia distance learning product
Perhaps most importantly, for five years I served as the faculty chair of a new required course c
Leadership and Organizational Behavior for our MBA program. The ambition of this course was t
prepare our students for their first managerial assignments and help them develop the willingness ar
ability to learn how to lead over the course of their careers. We took seriously the notion that we coul
not teach our students to manage—they had to teach themselves. Our primary ambition was to develo
a course that would provide the critical resources MBAs would need to capitalize on their on-the-jo
learning experiences after leaving business school.

Of course, my colleagues and I realized that we could not predict just what those experienc
would be. Just think how much has changed in the past ten years. For example, consider some of tl
new terms that have entered our vocabulary in the last decade: 24/7, e-commerce, virtual teams, ar
euro, to name just a few. One thing we knew with certainty was that the work of management wa
becoming more complicated and vexing than ever before. In today’s environment, managerial wor
and especially the leadership functions associated with that work, are key drivers of organization
success. I do not doubt that if I were to study new managers today I would hear much more insistent
about “leadership,” “change,” and “diversity.” The ubiquity of these ideas in managerial conversation
reflects the most immediate challenges facing today’s managers. With increasing globalization ar
significant demographic changes in the workforce, a premium is being placed on the ability to lea
diverse others through turbulent times. Not only do managers need to develop the personal capacity
manage, but they also must be able to create a context in which others are willing to learn and chang
so their organizations can continually adapt and innovate.

New managers must move beyond the pervasive myth of management as simply coping with tl
status quo. Too often, managers focus only on execution and handling the complexity of their curre
assignments, neglecting their responsibilities for innovation and preparing for the futur
Organizations must continually revitalize and transform themselves to compete today. Thus, manage
must be effective change agents who understand how to overcome resistance to change, deal with tl
inevitable stresses associated with change, and implement appropriate change strategies.

In the twenty-first century, new managers must be prepared to cope with both complexity *ar*
change. John Kotter, a renowned leadership expert, argues that:

> Leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary systems of action. Each has its own function a
> characteristic activities…. Management is about coping with complexity…. Leadership, by contrast, is about coping w
> change.[2]

As Kotter goes on to point out, most managerial positions require both types of expertise. H
worries, however, that often managers neglect their leadership or change agent responsibilities. Kott
and others argued that in the 1980s and 1990s organizations were too often overmanaged ar
underled. As a result organizations found it difficult to adapt and change as demanded by tl
competitive environment. Indeed, as the reader will see, the new managers I studied did not devo
much attention to their roles as agents of change. Instead, they saw themselves principally as targe

of change, implementing the change initiatives of their superiors. Given the growing scale and scop of ~~organizations today—even start-ups can be global—managers find themselves grappling with~~ muc more complexity. This leads me to worry that, too often, organizations today are both underled ar undermanaged.

When I published the first edition of this book, some contended that I did not devote enoug attention to the topic of leadership specifically. I chose not to because that was not the way the ne managers framed their experience—and my first responsibility was to stay rooted in the authentici of their reported experiences. But of course, leadership, including the functions of setting directio and inspiring others to pursue it, is critical, especially in today’s turbulent times. Delving more deepl into this debate is the subject of my next project, in which I move beyond a conception of leadersh as managing change to one of leadership as developing culture.

For this expanded edition, when I describe the work of new managers, I mean to include bo their management (coping with complexity) and leadership (coping with change) responsibilitie Organizations can only meet the tough challenges of today’s environment if they have effectiv managers—capable of coping with both complexity and change.

Given these challenges, it is no wonder people are less enamored of managerial work these day Fewer people express interest in becoming managers, noting that today’s managers tend to occup demanding and insecure positions that offer significantly fewer perks than ever before. Furthermor too many of those who take on management positions only do part of the job, burn out, or drop out managerial careers entirely. With a global trend toward flatter, leaner, and more agile organization managers are trying to cope with the ever-changing marketplace and increasing responsibilities— agenda setters, network builders, and change agents. Countless anecdotes illustrate how the “peop issues” continue to grow more complex and demanding. How can managers prepare themselves take on increased managerial responsibility?

WHY A SECOND EDITION?

While it is gratifying to see that the central themes developed in *Becoming a Manager* have stood th test of time, I have deepened and refined my sense for what new managers need to know and how the can learn it. I did not offer much explicit advice in the first edition about how to handle the day-to-da challenges of management; instead I encouraged readers to learn vicariously from the documente experiences of the nineteen new managers. In this edition, I have tried to address the operation issues raised most by new managers. Their concerns come in many forms, but can be distilled in three basic questions:

- How can I be more effective dealing with organizational politics and in influencing my peers and superiors?
- How can I develop and lead a diverse team in times of change?
- How can I build a successful managerial career?

Thus, in three chapters new to this book, I adopt a more prescriptive approach. I present framewor and suggestions that have helped new managers cope with these tasks and their associated challenges

For those of you familiar with the earlier edition of *Becoming a Manager*, the heart of the boo remains untouched. The lessons of these nineteen new managers' experiences are as instructive toda as when the book was first published. In fact, as you read them you should experience som foreshadowing of the themes elaborated on in the new chapters, which are included in section V of th edition. Chapter 10 focuses on the challenge of dealing with the political realities of organization life, especially exercising influence with little or no formal authority. Chapter 11 focuses on leadin diverse teams. Chapter 12 describes my latest thinking about what managers can do to prepa themselves to lead over the course of their careers. We now know for sure that managers must prepar themselves for a lifetime of learning and personal reinvention. The rate and magnitude of chang appear to be escalating. And change not only means leading and changing others, but changin oneself. Hence, building on the political framework shared in Chapter 10, I propose a power an influence model of learning for a lifetime.

In the Epilogue I'll explore what organizations can do to help managers in their journey to lea and learn. When I first wrote *Becoming a Manager*, not much attention was paid to the development new managers. Instead, organizations focused much of their attention on senior executive Organizations now recognize that human capital is a source of competitive advantage. In today organizations, we have come to appreciate that managers on the front line are critical to sustainin quality, service, innovation, and financial performance. Corporations are beginning to realize th financial and human costs of even one failed manager. Attracting and developing young manageri talent is becoming a critical strategic challenge for organizations that hope to prosper in the yea ahead, and there is growing investment in the development of even junior managers. We are finall beginning to take seriously that the first managerial assignment is a pivotal developmental experienc for future executives; it is when an individual's basic philosophy and management style a established. In this final section, I discuss some of the latest thinking on these issues and consider ho we can nurture and prepare star individual contributors to play critical manage-rial roles in th organizations of the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When *Becoming a Manager* was first published, I did not realize the journey upon which I ha embarked. Much of my professional work in the past ten years has been a direct result of that ac Among other things, John McArthur, the former dean of the Harvard Business School, challenged m to apply what I had learned. Serving as course head for the new required MBA course on leadersh was my first managerial assignment, and I experienced all the stresses and emotions of the ne managers interviewed for this book and made many of the same mistakes they did. Based on the experiences, however, I was able to shortcircuit some of the angst and take to heart the lessons of m missteps. Because we have a very collaborative culture at HBS, I have had the privilege of workin with and learning from generous colleagues—many of whom have written more books o management and leadership than I ever will. I am particularly indebted to the teaching group membe who supported me through my earliest attempts to lead.

I must also thank the research assistants who worked with me over the years in developing cour materials and articles for new managers in the making—the foundation for new chapters of this boo I would especially like to note the contributions of Katherine Seger Weber, Stacy Palestrant, Kristi C. Doughty, and Maria T. Farkas. Jennifer M. Suesse, the assistant director of the Leadershi Initiative that I now chair at the school, has been a true partner in this endeavor; her creativit incisive mind, and gentle prodding have kept this project on track.

Finally, I am indebted to the many managers, new and experienced, who have taken the time t contact me and share their reactions to the book. Their questions and insights are what encouraged m to prepare this second edition.

The first edition of this book starts with a quotation from a new manager comparing becoming manager to becoming a parent. As I write these acknowledgments very early in the morning, my fir child, three-month-old Jonathan, is resting beside me. I see ahead of me a continuing adventure self-discovery and development.

Preface

The goal in this book is to provide a forum for new managers to speak for themselves as they learn th art of management. Although we know much about what effective and successful managers are lik we know little about how they become that way. Here the odyssey of nineteen new managers durin their first year on the job is recounted. Their experiences and observations are instructive, for the give us a rich and textured understanding of the challenges in becoming a manager.

This book is intended for individuals who are considering a managerial career, new manager those responsible for developing new managers—line managers and human resource managers—ar fellow academics and researchers interested in managerial behavior and development. Because th book is designed to appeal to a wide audience, it includes very little technical detail. Those intereste in the theoretical underpinnings are encouraged to consult the notes and bibliography. The Append includes a description of the research methodology.

The fieldwork for this project was done from 1985 to 1988; analysis of the data and writin spanned an additional three years. A great many people made important contributions along the wa For reasons of confidentiality I cannot thank by name the individuals and companies who participate in this research. I am especially indebted to the managers and their colleagues who gave generously their time and took me into their confidence. This book is literally theirs, for it tells their stories. M hope is that I have done justice to their collective insights and presented their words as they intende them to be heard. My appreciation also goes to the organizations that employed these managers. The provided access to personnel and confidential information. They supported the project and asked f no feedback or other return.

The individuals who are most familiar with this research and have seen it through from inceptio to completion are John Gabarro, John Kotter, and Jay Lorsch, colleagues at the Harvard Busine School. I am deeply grateful to them. I have benefited from the thoughtful guidance and support others at the school as well. Samuel Hayes and Benjamin Shapiro assisted me in selecting and gainin access to research sites. Numerous associates reviewed the endless drafts of the manuscript ar continually challenged me to refine the analysis and description of my findings. In particular, I than Anne Donnellon, Robert Eccles, Richard Hackman, Morgan McCall, and Richard Walton. I als express my gratitude to Dean John McArthur and the directors of the Division of Research for offerin me the time and resources to complete this work.

For the past few years, I have had the opportunity to present my research at professional meetin and corporate training programs and in a consulting capacity. I acknowledge the countless academic executives, and managers whose observations and questions helped me interpret my findings ar ascertain their implications. The confirmation received from the managers I met was most welcom They reassured me that my findings were consistent with their experiences, helped them bett understand those experiences, and suggested things they could do to capitalize on on-the-job learning

Many have made invaluable contributions to the production of this book. Barbara Feinberg n only graciously shared her expertise as an editor, but also saw me through the emotional travails writing a first book. My research assistants—Jaan Elias, Nancy Kamprath, and Melinda Conrad- helped me in preparing the manuscript, from locating misplaced references to critiques of the clari and logic of the argument. My special thanks go to Hilary Gallagher, Carolyn Saltiel, and Ro

Giacobbe and her staff in Word Processing. They patiently typed numerous drafts of the manuscrip often under pressure.

I also wish to acknowledge my friends for their good humor and understanding over the year especially my dear friend, Lorraine Delhorne and my “dinner group”—Judy Bodie, Joline Godfre Diana McClure, Janice McCormick, Barbara Toffler, and Rose Zoltek Jick. And, I want to thank m husband, Roger Breitbart, for his affection, unstinting confidence in me, and substantive insights o my presentation and style.

Introduction

Do you know how hard it is to be the boss, when you are so out of control! It’s hard to verbalize. It’s the feeling that all of sudden … it’s the feeling you get when you have a child. On day X minus 1, you still don’t have a child. On day X, all of sudden you’re a mother or a father and you’re supposed to know everything there is to know about taking care of this kid.[*]

This observation was made by a new branch manager in a securities firm. He had been in his ne position for only one month. Before promotion he had been a broker for thirteen years. He was a st producer, one of the most aggressive and innovative brokers in his region. Neither he nor his pee were surprised when the regional director asked him to consider a management career. New branc managers were generally promoted from the ranks for competence and achievements as individu contributors.

He thoroughly enjoyed being a broker, and had never seriously considered management. Th money had been “real good” for the past few years. He worried intermittently, though, about burno from the unrelenting pressure—“Will this bull market last forever?”—or boredom as the years we by. Reflecting on the four branch managers for whom he had worked, he concluded he had som insight into what it took to be an effective manager. In fact, several times he had commented that if h had been in charge he would have known how to fix things so that he and his fellow brokers cou perform to their full potential. He decided to find out more about the branch manager opportunity, an eventually chose to pursue it. When the branch assignment came through, the branch manager too him out for a congratulatory lunch and welcomed him to the “big leagues.” Over the next week, as h distributed his clients to other brokers, he felt moments of intense panic, but there was no turnin back. He was giving up his “security blanket.” After a short time on the job, he lamented that he mig have “bitten off more than he could chew.”

That experience is by no means unique. Indeed, the promotion to manager is a pivotal juncture a business career, for both the individual and organization. It is frequently both a reward for goo performance, and also a means by which to infuse talent into the managerial hierarchy. But th odyssey from individual contributor to manager is often difficult, full of horror stories abo promising careers that wither along the way. In spite of their established qualifications as individu contributors, many new managers never adjust successfully to managerial responsibilities. First-lin management is the level in the organization from which come the most frequent reports incompetence, burnout, and excessive attrition.[1] The human and financial costs are staggering for bo the organization and those who fail to make the transition.[2] Even those who make it find that the fir management job remains a potent memory as long as 25 years later.

Despite its ubiquity and importance, we know surprisingly little about the transition management. Very few have studied the manager’s earliest experiences—the first months or year o the job.[3] This is the topic of this book: What do new managers find most challenging? How do the learn to be managers? On what individual and organizational resources do they rely? Although th shelves are stacked with descriptions of what effective and successful managers are like, there are fe books on how they get that way.

THE NEW MANAGERS

This book follows nineteen managers through their first year. All participants were new sales an marketing managers, fourteen men and five women. Ten were branch managers in a securities fir and nine were sales managers in a computer company (see Appendix for a detailed description of th participants and the research methodology).

Before the promotion to manager everyone in the study was an individual contributor, otherwis known as a specialist, producer, or professional. Their primary responsibility was to perform specif technical tasks; their contribution to the organization was *individual*, depending primarily on person expertise, experience, and action.[4] In contrast, a manager is formally in charge of the organization one of its subunits. His or her primary responsibilities include supervising others rather than direct performing technical tasks. The distinction between individual contributor and first-line manager often blurred, for first-line managers often perform technical work. It is the formal authority ov others and the attendant rights and duties that differentiate the manager from the individu contributor.

The new managers were first-line field sales managers in their organizations. They were direct responsible for day-today management and supervision of field sales representatives in the territories and were accountable for achieving specific sales and marketing goals. The job descriptio for both included developing the sales organization; creating a healthy work environment; establishin standards of performance; evaluating, rewarding, and developing subordinates; acting as liaiso between their unit and others in the company; interpreting and enforcing corporate policy; an representing the company to the community. Neither group had responsibility for specific account but they were expected when necessary to call on clients with the assigned sales representative.

Both groups worked for *Fortune* 500 corporations. By almost any financial indicator, the companies were leaders in their industries. They were, however, undergoing significant change response to an increasingly competitive and volatile business environment. Consequently, manageri roles in both companies were becoming more complex and demanding. Managers were he accountable for a broader array of financial, strategic, and human resource outcomes. They were ask to pursue not only short-term financial objectives, but also longterm strategic initiatives. They we expected to focus not only on revenues, but also on profits. The securities firm, after deregulation the financial services industry, was moving from a product to a service focus. The computer compan had recently instituted programs on cost control, service, and quality. Both companies consequent emphasized providing leadership, developing subordinates, and maintaining long-term partnershi with clients.

The securities firm managers (SFMs) and computer company managers (CCMs) and the positions differed significantly. The SFMs were managing retail salespeople who were independe players selling an intangible product (financial instruments) to individual and small busine accounts. The CCMs were responsible for institutional salespeople who sold large data-processin systems to commercial accounts. They were members of a sales team that included systems analys and administrative and operations personnel over whom the CCMs had no formal authority. The SFM were general managers, with profit-and-loss responsibility for an entire branch. They were expected plan strategy and execute programs for their work units. The CCMs, though, were responsible only f the sales function; most of their goals were still revenue and not profitoriented. They were expected build sales and marketing programs for their unit consistent with the branch strategy. The span authority and autonomy, and hence the change in position, was much greater for the SFMs than th CCMs. Not surprisingly, the SFMs had more experience as individual contributors than did the CCM

Despite these differences, the new managers provided strikingly consistent accounts of their fir experiences.[*] We examine these recurrent themes in the managers’ first-year biographies in th following pages.

FINDINGS

Although countless articles and books offer counsel on how to develop managerial talent, few hav been based on empirical research. And few look at the phenomenon from the new manager perspective or consider on-the-job developmental experience.[5] Most are how-to manuals outlining th knowledge a manager needs about the content of managerial work. Most treat manageme development from the single dimension of task learning: acquisition of necessary competencies (th knowledge and skills necessary to fulfill managerial functions) and establishment of key relationship Becoming a manager is largely presented as an intellectual exercise, albeit a demanding one.

A pointedly different dimension in the development of a new manager emerged from the researc described in these chapters. Here, new managers speak for themselves as they learn a new craft. The experiences and impressions unveil a richer understanding of the challenges. Listening to them, becomes clear that the transition to manager is not limited to acquiring competencies and buildin relationships. Rather, it constitutes a profound transformation, as individuals learn to think, feel, an value as managers (see Exhibit I-1).

The new managers described the transformation vividly, weaving tales of coping with the stress of transformation, reluctantly letting go of deeply held attitudes and habits, and timidly experimentin with new ways of thinking and being. They discussed not simply what happened, but how it felt.

Exhibit I-1

Transformation of Identity

From	***To***
A specialist and doer. Directly performs specific technical tasks. Strongly identified with those tasks.	A generalist and agenda-setter. Orchestrates diverse tasks, including finance, product design, and manufacturing or organization. Strongly identified with a business or the management profession.
An individual actor. Gets things done mostly by one's own efforts. Strongly identified as relatively independent.	A network builder. Gets things done through others, including subordinates over whom one has formal authority. Strongly identified as highly interdependent.

The managers began to make the psychological adjustment as they tried to make sense of an struggled with their new gendasetting and network-building responsibilities. As an outgrowth taking action, they mastered four tasks of transformation:

- Learning what it means to be a manager
- Developing interpersonal judgment
- Gaining self-knowledge
- Coping with stress and emotion

Through on-the-job experience they began to understand and accept their new responsibiliti (learning what it means to be a manager) and to acquire the task (developing interpersonal judgmen and personal (gaining self-knowledge and coping with stress and emotion) competencies necessary ~~meet them. The managers’ expectations of their new job were incomplete and simplistic. They~~ had reconcile these expectations with the daily reality of managerial life and with the seemingly unendin and confusing demands of their new subordinates, bosses, and peers. Over time the managers began develop personal theories of management: a set of assumptions and hypotheses about the manageri role. They became aware of these theories as they reflected on their actions and decisions. In tur these theories came to guide their future behavior. Unequivocally, the managers asserted that the mo demanding task learning of the first year had to do with the “people challenges.” Through th problems they encountered and their interactions with others they began to develop interpersonal rul of best managerial practice. But it was the personal learning more than the task learning that th managers found most unsettling. The first year of management was a period of considerab introspection and personal growth. They matured as they confronted previously undiscovered trut about themselves and were relieved to see that adults like themselves do change and develop. N surprisingly, a major order of priority was learning to cope with the stress and intense emotio associated with their new position and the evolution of a new professional identity.

Although it was possible to distinguish conceptually among the four tasks, the managers dea with and learned about them more or less simultaneously. By “learning,” I mean the sort of learnin after which an individual conceives of something in a qualitatively different way, and which ha lasting influence. Moreover, this learning goes beyond the intellectual sense: it involves bein acquainted with something experientially.[6] The lessons were learned as the managers confronted th daily litany of interactions and problems in their new assignments. And they were learne incrementally, gradually. Sometimes the managers were aware that they were learning, but most ofte they were not. The learning consisted principally of “gradual and tacit change”; with the accumulatio of evidence and experience came the erosion of one set of beliefs, attitudes, and values and buildup another.[7] The building-up process was one of iterative refinement and revision. Warren Bennis, a authority on managerial learning and development, writes, “A person does not gather learnings possessions but rather becomes a new person with those learnings as a part of his or her new self.”[8]

Like individuals who must suddenly face the transition to parenthood, the managers had to lea on the job, and it was a critical and overwhelming job at that. They were responsible for the lives others, yet they had to make decisions and act before they understood what they were supposed to d And like new parents, the managers were transformed by the experience. As they confronted an mastered the challenges, they came to view themselves and the world differently.

Most of the new managers in this study were successful. Of the nineteen, their superiors felt th all but three “made it” through the first year. In other words, they were well on their way to makin the fundamental transformation required. But even for this group, the first year was neatly summed by a manager who had served in the Navy: “It was one hell of a tour of duty.”

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