

Reclaim your job

Sumantra Ghoshal, Heike Bruch, Harvard Business Review, March 2004

The ability to take initiative is the most important quality of an effective manager. Average managers remain trapped in inefficiency because they feel constrained by the lack of time, resources and opportunities. But, these are just excuses for not being able to spot an opportunity and grab it. Truly successful managers have a sense of purpose, follow their beliefs and pursue long-term goals that are in line with those of the organization.

Managing demands: Most managers find it difficult to handle all their demands for the following reasons:

- They are worried that they may lose their importance, if they say no.
- They fear that if they do not take up more responsibilities, it will reflect poorly on their ability to cope with multiple tasks.
- They attach more importance to what is expected from them, and not what really needs to be done.

To get out of this trap, managers should ask themselves a basic question: What do I really want to do? This will help them to prioritize the tasks at hand. Instead of getting involved in everything, they will make themselves available to people who really need them. They should also focus on aligning their own passions with the company's goals. This will make them more motivated, and ultimately become high-performing managers.

Generating resources: The average manager has the wrong notion that the company's policies impose several restrictions on the resources available to them. But resource limitations do not limit an effective manager's vision. Great managers set long-term targets, and work towards achieving them, slowly and steadily. Such a methodical approach helps them to distinguish between the absolutely necessary resources and those that can be managed without. Then, they try to convince the top management to trust their cause. Eventually, senior leaders in the organization will see merit in what the manager is proposing and lend their full support.

Exploiting alternatives: The average managers do not look for alternatives and unexplored choices. But effective managers have the ability to spot and grab alternative options. If one method fails, they look for others.

Concluding notes

What limits managers is not time or resources. It is the thinking and mindset of the managers themselves. Once they learn to seize the initiative and focus on the big picture, nothing can stop them.