



## Nine Good People Rules for Technicians

With apologies to Stephen Downes (<http://www.downes.ca/post/196>) who wrote the original "Nine Rules for Good Technology" which I have used as a framework here.

1. **Good technology is always available.** This distinction is what makes buses, in spite of all their other advantages, bad technology. You can't always count on the bus being there. That's why people prefer cars.

A good manager will ensure that "**Good People are Always Available**" – that is, that the people they require for a task are "available" in the sense that they are not overwhelmed by unrealistic workloads and deadlines or by disorganisation and a lack of basic task management skills.

That tends to imply that the manager will have acquired sound task management *skills* (note: Skills = learned behaviour) and will ensure that those for whose productivity they are now responsible will be provided with similar skills and systems that support the application of those skills when "under fire".

2. **Good technology is always on.** Or if not always on, can be turned on with a single one-stroke command, or better yet, start automatically when the need arises. One thing which makes the telephone useful is that we do not need to boot up the operating system before we make a call. Electrical lights are a significant improvement over systems which required individual ignition with a match or candle. Streetlights are practical because they turn on when it gets dark outside.

An expert in people management will ensure that their "**Good People Are Always On**". So how do you achieve an "always on" state in team members? There are 6 basic requirements for this state:

- i. There must be a *clear and agreed Vision* (or "Picture of Ultimate Perfection") towards which the team is striving. That Vision may be to become the world's largest provider of widgets, or the most profitable provider (better), or the provider of the world's best widgets (best – since that should drive profits quite nicely, as well as giving a heightened sense of achievement, and a lot of market freedom and control).
- ii. There must be a *shared conviction* that in the process of achieving the Vision, team members will achieve their own goals (financial security, job satisfaction, membership of a winning team, recognition as winners in the field, input to the grand plan).
- iii. There must be a *clear plan of action* designed to achieve the Vision, complete with milestones and measures.
- iv. There must be *explicit commitment* on the part of each team member to achieving the Vision.
- v. There needs to be a *constant focus* on doing the things that will achieve the Vision, and on *not* doing the things that won't!
- vi. There needs to be *feedback and celebration* as the journey progresses so that everyone stays motivated, stays focused and stays productive – stays "on".

3. **Good technology is always connected.** Fire alarms are useful in this way. Indeed, were the detector not connected to the warning system, the fire alarm would be



useless. Telephones again are useful because no procedure is required to connect to the telephone system.

One of a good manager's key tasks is to ensure that **"Good People are Always Connected"**. Let's look past the connection technology to the purpose of the connection – to keep everyone informed of what is happening throughout the team, in their chosen marketplace, with their target clients.

Connection also tilts at the need to have people focused on ensuring that what they are doing is "connected" with achieving the overall Vision while focussing on the immediate ends required of the current project.

Communications is a key role of managers. They are a bit like bees in that they circle in the wider world, picking up valuable information from other teams in the organisation, from higher management, and from clients, suppliers and competitors and the marketplace in general, and then sharing that information with the workers when they return to the hive, ensuring their connectedness to a bigger picture.

4. **Good technology is standardized.** One television will function much like another television (televisions became less good when brand-specific remotes were introduced). One telephone will connect to any other telephone in the world.

Good managers recognise that **"Good People are Anything But Standardised"** and adjust their management according to need. Good technicians should find great comfort in the fact that there are a number of simple tools designed to profile the strengths and weaknesses of different personality types, and different behaviour sets, and would ensure that they would equip themselves with the tools required of their new role.

On the other hand, a good manager would also recognise that there is merit in a certain degree of standardisation in the way that people are treated – equality and even-handedness are important in establishing that everyone has the same basic rights – and obligations – to contribute to the whole.

5. **Good technology is simple.** 'Simplicity' is a slippery concept, but you will notice that the best technologies can be learned by looking at the input device, and not by studying a manual. When I have to stop and think (and read some very small print) about how to get rid of that paperclip icon so I can type a letter, I know I am dealing with bad technology. Good technology, by contrast, is intuitive: to use an elevator, I press the floor number. Simple. To make a phone call, I dial the number. Easy. When looking for good technology, look for technology which does exactly what you want: no more, no less.

Good managers **"Keep Things Simple"** for their people. A manager is, almost by definition, someone who has a number of task specialists available to them to get a complex job done. Each person has a speciality, the output of which is required to dovetail with the outputs of other team members, and ultimately, with other teams, to produce a programmed result intended to move the whole towards its Vision.

The manager can help by keeping each team members focussed on producing the best possible output for their assigned task, while sharing as much awareness as is required (and not much more) of how that output fits into the larger scheme of things.



Managers also have a function in simplifying the lives of their team members so that they can get on with their jobs. That may consist of controlling or removing distractions (unnecessary bureaucratic intrusion); ensuring consistent availability of the inputs to production; resolving personal frictions between team members; or providing feedback on performance to maintain focus.

6. **Good technology doesn't require parts.** You don't need to replace anything in your telephone. Cars are bad technology: they require a never-ending array of parts from gasoline to air filters to oil filters to oil. DVD-players are not good technologies, but MP3 players are – because nothing moves and nothing material is required. A solar powered MP3 player would be better technology!

**“Good People Don’t Require Parts”** in the sense that they don’t require constant maintenance and “fixing”; they don’t require constant changes to incentives and “motivators” – they are self-winding, self-regulating and self-correcting.

So, how to you find these magic people? You don’t! You *make* them! Or, at least, you create the environment in which you can grow them.

Nordstrom’s, a US service giant, has simple values (“Service to the customer above all else”) and one rule (“Use your best judgement at all times”) and those two components are enough for their 51,400 employees to just keep building the Nordstrom reputation for exceptional service.

Good managers articulate to their team – and live – the values of their organisation. That implies, of course, that those at the top have actually worked out what their values are, and have shared them down the line. Not to do so creates the necessity for “lots of rules” to control behaviour. Doing so creates the possibility of gaining buy in to the values, and equipping people with what they need to work out, from first principles, the answers to *“What do I do in a situation like this?”*

7. **Good technology is personalized.** One of the things which makes a telephone useful is that you have your *own* telephone number. In a similar manner, email is useful because you have your own email address. Bank machines would not be at all useful unless they opened your bank account - and only your bank account. Things like credit cards, smart cards, pagers, cell phones and eyeglasses are other examples.

**“Good Management is Personalised”** both in the sense that good managers deal with each team member in a manner that is optimised to meet that team member’s communications paradigms, and in the sense that the Manager brings their own personality to bear in how they fulfil their role.

There is plenty of latitude in management to “be yourself” and no real basis to any requirement that you be a corporate clone and it is your true self, and not the “party line”, to which your team will respond.

8. **Good technology is modular.** By ‘modular’ I mean composed of distinct parts which may be arranged or rearranged into a desired configuration with a minimum of fuss and effort. Legos are good because they don’t require parts like nails or cement (which is why Lego, and not Meccano, is the construction toy of choice).



**"Good Management Is Modular"** in the sense that you need only a few basic concepts to successfully address 80% of all of the issues you will face as a manager.

For example, *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* is often a revelation to new managers when it comes to understanding what motivates the people reporting to them.

Robert Cialdini's *Influence, the Psychology of Persuasion* is another iconic work that strips the mystery out of how to influence a team.

Jim Collin's *Good to Great* contains half a dozen key management paradigms that stand like bright beacons in the mysterious landscape of people management.

Sun Tzu *The Art of War* is a great source of clear concepts when it comes to managing competing interests in business. And the list goes on. In fact, I've put together a "Recommended Reading List" over the years, and at some point or other in most coaching engagements, I end up suggesting that my Client would be well served by dipping into it. If you'd like a copy, just ask me.

9. **Good technology does what you want it to do.** And not something else. A good ship will take you across the Atlantic Ocean. A bad ship will collide with an iceberg and sink. Software which crashes instead of running is bad technology, obviously. Telephone systems which connect you to India instead of Indiana are not useful.

**"Good Managers Have People Do What They Want Them To Do"** That's the bottom line of this article.

Good managers are *made* not born, and "the lack of good management skills" has been identified as the Number One inhibitor to business growth, productivity and profits.

It makes sense for any technician who has been promoted out of their area of competence and into the realm of management – of leading people – to re-enter the education process that made them such good technicians in the first place, and begin acquiring the concepts (the people paradigms, as I called them earlier) that will enable them to rise to the top in their new field.

It is as insane to expect that a good surgeon will become a great hospital administrator - without acquiring specific new skills - as it is to expect a great general to become a great surgeon.

The good news is that good technicians are easy to train into good managers *if you take a technical approach* to understanding how to lead people.

And that's where we come in. [www.profitune.com](http://www.profitune.com)