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The Basic Art of Front Line Management by [Vantage Agora](#)

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The life line of delivery is flawless execution. Meaning, every delivery team has to have flawless execution day in and day out. This battle is won and lost in the trenches. These trenches are run by the first (sometimes referred to as front) line managers/leads. The success and failure of any project depends on how well the entire management has helped FLMs to four areas of their work. The best way to think of a FLM's rule is to think of them as the 4Ps, (Plan, People, Process and Projects).

In this article we talk about some important aspects to consider in each area to become a successful FLM.

Plan: Without Planning/Training these people most companies have failed in execution and if not in execution they have failed in scaling the organization:

The plan for your team should be in-line with your customers plan for the project. You should feel free to ask the goals of every project. What is the Key Result Area (KRA) for the project? What is the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for the project? What is the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the project? What are the business impacts of not hitting the SLA and why the customer/management is setting these objective SLAs.

Based on this understanding you will need to come up with your own plans for your team and your people. This plan should be broken down into plans for the month, week and day and should help achieve the company annual plan.

People: FLMs by nature are the best technical people that have been made into FLMs because they are good at their technology and not because their leadership skills. Given this, most FLMs are not the best of people managers. You as an FLM need to be trained in people management. It is critical for your success. While HR or hiring can hire the best it is critical that there you take ownership and have the mindset to help people. It is as simple as that. If you are kind to your people they will be kind to you. You as an FLM should be the ones training your people with close supervision from other management team members.

Mindset: The most important aspect of being a leader or FLM is to have the right mindset. Remember you can never be lazy or negative about anything. Your entire team is looking up to you. If you say anything negative or get lazy or hide from your responsibility your team will not respect you and will never take anything you say seriously. Being an FLM does not mean that you will try and fight management for your team. While this looks good on the short run it is doomed. Make sure you work with your management to help your team. Be honest, humble, and hungry. Things will take care of themselves.

Review: You must have a monthly KRA review with each employee.

Feedback: Have a daily feedback if required with each employee. Ask if they have understood you. Have the team member repeat what they are supposed to do at the beginning of the day.

Care: Find out how their day has been at least once every three days. Know your team members personal life. That IS your business. Make kindness a way of life.

Who is your backup: Create a second. Will they be able to handle your job if you are on vacation without bothering your manager? That is the only question you have to ask when training them.

Remember your customer is also a person. Here is how every customer thinks. No matter which company, country or type of work, the mindset of the customer is always the same.

The Customer is looking to get ahead in his or her career by managing your project well: Companies are structured in a way that when an employee's career grows, the company grows. This is news to be excited about. The first rule with customers, know what makes them succeed. It is your job description to help them get further in their career and help improve their company's Return On Investment (ROI). This will help you and your career in the end.

The customer is NOT out to get you: The customer actually wants you and your team to succeed. Because when you do they look good. When things are not going right for you and your team the customer is NOT out to get you. Any customer or manager is trying to understand only three things:

Do you have a plan to fix the problem? And if this fix is a permanent fix?

Do you date when your get well plan will bring the project back to GREEN?

How they can help you solve the problem?

Process: Every FLM needs to have a process to run their daily operations and drill or scrum. Without this process you will fail. Some of the critical processes to follow are:

Morning Operating Rhythm (OR): Create a morning OR for your team. Go through this with your management and then make sure that you go through your operating rhythm without fail. Also create an Insurance dashboard for yourself.

Daily Scrum: Spend 15 minutes to make sure everyone in your team understands the tasks for the day "WHAT", "WHEN", "HOW" needs to be answered here.

Talk to your team: Most of the time the individual contributors need to be verbally explained what needs to be done every day even if the information is written in requirements or process documents.

Define the goal to the team: For example if you are going to be testing 100 items with an intent to find out as many bugs as possible tell the team that they have to get to a goal of creating at least 5 bugs each. But make sure you let them know that they have to stick to the test script.

NEVER jump steps: When explaining things to people never jump steps. It is critical that you make sure that your team also understands that they don't jump steps. Jumping steps is a sure way of getting things wrong.

Review: Tell them when you are going to review and what you are going to review at the beginning of the day. Continuing with the QA example, tell your team that you are going to QA every bug that is reported. If you are working on operations or development let your team members know that you are going to do a sample QA of the work done by everyone in the team. Before you QA, THINK!!!! "What is your goal?" "What is the customer going to look at when they see our work?" Then QA the work. 99% of the errors that will come from your team will come from the lack of understanding of the fact that they don't look at their own work from the end user's perspective. Out of these errors 90% of the errors are going to be caused because your team members have jumped steps or trying to take short cuts. Yes even the so called human errors are caused because someone got too cocky about the work they are doing and got careless.

Questions from the team: You have to explain the work at the beginning of the day. Encourage your team members to ask questions. The best way to make sure that your team does not ask questions is to make sure that you NEVER yell at a person that asks questions. When people ask questions, please make sure that you don't just answer it. Make sure that you ask more questions to test if they have understood the process completely.

Timing of your reviews: Again, the operative word is "THINK". Don't review the work of your team at the end of the day. Review a sample of everyone's work after they go through the first pass. Then again, when they are half hour from lunch and then again one hour before the end of the day. This will ensure that the work that they are doing can be corrected during the day and not at the end.

End of Day (OR): Before you send your daily update into your dashboard or your email to your customer/management make sure that you have reviewed all the numbers that you are sending. The simple way of making sure that the numbers are correct is to review the numbers backward from the email or the dashboard as a customer would. Your sample tests at least one or two should come from this message or dashboard to make sure that you are doing what your customer will do when they review this information. Again the operative word is "THINK" customers!

Highlights for the day: Collect all questions and make sure that you put this into the knowledge base of your team. Make sure that you check with your management in your weekly call about where to store this information. Again, don't assume, ask!

Projects:

Timely delivery: Know the timely delivery KRA for your project. Make sure that your team knows about this number every day.

Quality Delivery: Know the quality delivery KRA and SLA for your project. Make sure that you mention it to your team every day as a part of the daily operating rhythm and also put it up on the Insurance dashboard.

Understand the RYG for your project: When to raise your project from G to Y and Y to R and back.

When you in trouble: (And you will be from time to time) make sure that you:

Create a plan with your management on how you going to fix the problem for now and a preventive measure for the future.

Confirm on when you will be back on track

Confirm to the customer/management on the dashboard on what the plan is and when you will be able to get back on track. Also communicate if you need them to communicate anything specific to their customers

When communicating, make sure that you are proactive. If you ever get into a situation when the customer or your management or your employee follows up with you for information then you will always have a tough conversation.

In every part of your 4Ps have to practice consistency of purpose (Rule 22) in everything that you do. You have to move from being a manager to a leader (Rule 11).

Every FLM at Vantage Agora goes through an experiential learning exercise in being an FLM. The promotion to being an FLM means they get baptized by fire. We do this to ensure that your projects and operations get the attention it deserves to be successful!

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As a founder of Vantage Agora, Harsha has been instrumental in the growth of the company since its inception. Harsha has over 20+ years of experience in consulting, running and helping companies and their supply chains worldwide. His work with many companies, has made him a turnaround expert. Harsha has four worldwide patents in the area of supply chain management.

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