Beginnings are always tough; first times, inexorably fussy. In this tremendously poignant book, Gunn and Gullickson relate the exigencies brought about by a spanking promotion at work. Both authors point to the experience of walking the high wire—venturing into the unknown without a safety net—as a seemingly disoriented stance of newly-appointed managers/leaders who confront the difficulty of transition into bigger responsibilities and who have qualms about their capabilities to pull off the new job.

Explicit and equally provocative, the book is a pragmatic guide for people who have just advanced in the corporate ladder yet find themselves stumped and stuck in an eddy of self-doubt. It spurs optimism and assurance that the unknown can be unravelled, adapted to, and overcome. It inspires a new approach to leadership that goes beyond what a leader does: it is actually about becoming one.

**About the Author**

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**The Big Idea**

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Edginess Revisited: New Job, New Roles, New Responsibilities

Remember that nauseating anxiety you had to grapple with during your first day at work—that almost unappeasable disquiet horning around your mind the moment heaps of technical reports and research proposals were handed in by your supervisor? You suddenly suffer incapacity—your brains empty and you are unable to act. Somewhere in your consciousness, you surprisingly dig up an idea of how to tinker with the paper load, but you are scared stiff to try. Promotion is not spared from these circumstances. To others, the feeling may even be worse.

Gunn and Gullickson used the metaphor of the high wire to describe what new managers/leaders go through as they step into a more complex (sometimes paralyzing) juncture in their careers. Assuming an increased share of responsibility involves a parallel inconvenience; “old” behavior just won’t work anymore, yet there is fear in attempting a novel one. One trip and it would be disaster for the whole organization.

From being in the fringes, new managers/leaders move to the core and emerge with ever more expectations both from the higher-ups and their subordinates. They are expected to be somebody else, someone who juggles exceptional work together with excellent human relations, someone who knows “what to do” and “how to be” someone who can make a difference.

Coming Into Bud: The Making of a (Fine) Leader

You wake up with a job promotion and you are never the same. You are uncomfortable, discouraged, petrified. A debilitating sense of unfamiliarity engulfs you and your intellectual powers if for the time being, bunged. You try to seek refuge in your erstwhile character not knowing that the script and the stage show itself had been changed. There now seems to be too much at stake vis-à-vis leadership roles and your personal life and your confusion leaves you hanging. How do you cope with this stalemate?

Rule # 1: Embrace Change with Conviction

· **Fear Not.** Bigger responsibilities should neither overwhelm nor prevent you from taking bold action. Bear in mind that years of experience and acquired knowledge have in fact honed your expertise and prepared you for battle, the same reason that brought you exactly to where you are now. Cast off your inhibitions. You are in control. You will have a reasonably good start simply because you know your way around the business.

· **Learn to Let Go.** You should also remember that today's challenge isn't similar to yesterday's. Frameworks which have shown results before may not do so now. When confronted with problems, clinging to old thinking habits may not be the prudent solution. Harbour alertness. Begin with a skilled assessment of your working environment, taking note of symptoms and what they mean and responding to them with great faith. Make use of your innate wisdom to know yourself and become attuned to it. Let faith open your doors to magnificent possibilities.
Rule # 2: Never Push Yourself Too Hard

· The Bee Stings. Contrary to popular belief, being busy does not mean being productive at the same time. Driving your butt to exhaustion by consuming extra hours after your shift does not automatically take your name on top of “productive employees charts.” Both authors held that true productivity is not based on how much inputs (time and effort) were expended; true productivity means greater output while consuming fewer inputs. Putting too much pressure on yourself won’t help. Anxiety increases the weight of the burden and crowds out insight and wisdom that supposedly would enable you to breeze through your puzzles.

· Silence Speaks. You must go beyond “permativity”–behaving on what you assume to be the expected or admired performance (Gunn and Gullickson). This drives you to protect your self-image and “look good” because the bosses are watching. Permativity strews your mind and obfuscates your natural resources for producing brilliant work.

When inundated with a difficult task, don’t panic or be too critical of yourself. Instead, stop, calm your mind, and engage in reflective thinking. Mental breaks are investments in greater productivity. Only when the mind is tranquil that you’ll soon find answers pouring in.

Rule # 3: See In Your Mind’s Eye and Dare the Impossible

· Develop your personal signature. As a manager/leader, your group expects you to employ a fresh perspective so that work becomes enjoyable and outputs come in handy. Employees are fed up with the boss’ largest proclivity to be “too old-school” and droning. They want something that differentiates you from your forerunners, something inventive, something adventurous, and something energizing. In short, you are asked to be creative, to think out of the box and not give in to mental muddle. Ask questions but never force the answers, as your deeper reservoirs of intelligence will come out with gentle, sometimes comic exploring.

· Plan with a Purpose. Go where your vision is. In sync with creativity, a manager must also exercise strategic thinking. Strategy shapes doing and propels mental flexibility and awareness of identified aims. It slots in a continual process of invention–creating novel goals that push organizations to its goals–and refinement–building expertise that makes possible even greater accomplishment (Gunn and Gullickson). Creative strategic thinking would anchor your team to better heights. It’s in seeing with your hidden eye and scheming past your parameters.

Rule # 4: Balance Power and Find Yourself in Others

· Delegate and Inspire. Just because you are first in command doesn’t mean you control the entire course of decision-making. Sound decisions are upshots not of one head but of the collective wisdom of the team. Foster team effort and facilitate engagement. Set aside the ego, greed and fear; never be afraid to admit what you do not know. Bring out the best in everyone by reaching beyond the surface of your own knowledge and experience. Share responsibility and square it with authority and accountability.
· **Trust and Empower.** An efficient manager is adept at using both sides of the brain, garnering a good mix of analysis and insight, of logic and reflection. Reflective decision-making enables you to accept your humanness as a leader and obtain strength from your limitations by believing that others also possess the capability to step up and the commitment to make substantial contributions for the good of the team. Acknowledge what each member does and integrate it in the whole web of your operations. Let every employee find his/her own niche and shine in it.

■ **Managing from Within: Reawakening the Soul at Work**

After testing the waters and somehow finding their feet on track, the next big task for new managers/leaders is to make sure that they are able to sustain the posture and constructive “effect” they have on their subordinates. Productive results are not achieved overnight, neither are they guaranteed by the virtually robotic concession of subordinates to their leaders. Managers must ceaselessly strive to be noble and efficient so that they may preserve the respect and loyalty of their people.

**Rule # 5: Set the Right Tone**

· **Moods Say It All.** Inevitably, as managers, all eyes are on you, paying close attention to every move, every gesture, every facial expression, and every slip of the tongue. Because your subordinates rely so much on your “call,” and take cues from your actions as to how the working day shall proceed, they are mostly affected when your mood swings from good to bad or bad to worse and vice versa.

Stay closely attuned to your temper. Guard your language and manifest anger sensibly. Productivity is derailed when stress is triggered by a negative working atmosphere. A light-hearted workplace, on the other hand, helps get things done and is the foundation of organizational success.

· **Create Safety.** A “safe” working environment is one in which team members feel they can give input openly without fear of ridicule or reprimand. They feel safe to say, “I made a mistake,” or “I don't know,” to admit errors without being hauled over the coals. When people feel safe, they are naturally inquisitive and creative. Conversely, when they think they are “close to injury,” they may become apprehensive, timorous or indignant--none of which promises maximum performance.

Be gentle and imbibe the Work Ethic, that belief in your indelible self-worth and the potential worth of those around you. Feelings of worth can flourish only in an atmosphere where individual differences are appreciated and mistakes, tolerated.

· **A Little Tease Can't Hurt.** Being professional does not suggest being glum or sternly polished. Quick-witted humor especially during meetings or critical situations unlocks a valuable doorway; for candidness and laughter are great affirmations. Motivate your team by instituting rapport and projecting wellness to others. Lubricate team friendship and interaction by moderating your team's skates and creating a feeling of mutual goodwill. A positive tone is the precursor of better outcomes.
Rule #6: Feel the Floor Before You Get Into the Grind

- **Put your senses to work.** Commonsense dictates that you do not slurp your hot coffee without first puffing into the cup and sipping small amounts to test your “tolerance.” Otherwise, having the nerve to do so (carelessly) would be painful. The same applies to client calls and staff meetings. Top-quality managers are aware that before doing hard-core business, they must first establish personal connections and make clients feel comfortable. They must stir up inter-subjective meanings that pave the way for clearer understanding.

In meetings alike, a good manager should initially check the emotional pulse of the group and start with the grim details after cultivating warm and supportive feelings. For this particular context, never strike the iron while it's hot, or else, you'll get smouldered.

Rule #7: Harness Collective Energy

- **Choreograph your job like a dance.** Excellent managers who attend to their mental being and have their egos intact rarely work single-handedly then take all the credit for it. Fine leaders work in a team and with the team. They transcend individuality and divergent thinking and rather believe that working together would make them accomplish far more than anybody could do separately. They ground their operations based on what Gunn and Gullickson referred to as, The DNA of Teams, which include:

  1. **Respect**—appreciation or esteem; treating others as you wish to be treated yourselves
  2. **Integrity**—saying what you mean and doing what you say
  3. **Trustworthiness**—knowing that you will never deliberately do harm to others
  4. **Service**—helping others achieve and grow

Creating a team is a “spiritual act.” You surrender your self-interest for the greater good of the whole. You accept the fact that your being a leader does not necessarily make you any different from the rest for you are one with them, dancing to one tune and jumping to one beat.

- **Cement relationships.** Once you've formed your group, the next step is to maintain its shared identity and togetherness so that productivity also presses forward. Your task as a manager is to continually solidify your team through the following:

  1. Providing clarity on the **common purpose**
  2. Defining **performance goals**
  3. Instituting **procedures and systems** and work
  4. Making room for **interpersonal dynamics** and constructive exchange
  5. Emphasizing the entity’s **accountability**