

# THE MACRIS GROUP

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## *From Dean's Desk:*



### Prologue

Google “The Human Equation” and see the myriad of hits. Music by Ayreon to blogs, treatises' plus even more. To us the Human Equation is the complex set of variables that need to be balanced for leadership to be effective. That includes leaders and followers. We continually are assessing the variables, and to further complicate the issue, the variables themselves change. So as we attempt to sort through the Human Equation, we also note that even though we look at each variable, the synergy of combining variables creates yet other dynamics. This issue we discuss the critical aspect of shifting from a relatively simple position as company employee to the more complex and dynamic position of leader or supervisor. One specific factor which we feel is central to any successful leader or individual for that matter, is knowing oneself. We commit a significant amount of time initially and throughout the programs we administer to knowing oneself. It is woven into the fabric of our programs. Central to this article is both those in leadership positions as well as “doers” to know themselves. Leaders need to be able to learn to listen and understand what motivates their people and make assumptions that, while very logical to them, may have no bearing or interest for some of their people. As you read this article, we are confident that you will be able to relate to the various situations and outcomes we discuss. For those of you in leadership development programs, please note, that making that “turn” is keenly important to your success. For those who administer leadership development programs, assisting your attendees in making the turn is a serious responsibility, and more so, if there are individuals who just may not want to make the turn, hopefully they have learned things that will help them support their leaders more effectively.

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## Turning the Corner – Moving from “Doer” to Supervisor

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### **Introduction**

One of our ongoing themes regarding leadership development has been the results these programs produce (or don't produce) and the challenges facing both the programs' designers and attendees. In this article, we address yet another perspective. People making that first move from being a member of an organization or “doer” to supervisor are facing one of the biggest challenges of their working lives. Subsequent promotions along the leadership pipeline will likely present larger challenges but that first move into the area of supervising people is arguably the greatest. As administrators of leadership development programs, we can do all the programs in the world, but if those attending cannot or do not want to turn the corner from being an employee, or ‘company doer’ to becoming a leader (at any level), they will not be effective, happy in their new position, or motivated to do a good job

of leading. For the most part, when individuals are selected to participate in leadership development programs they have been vetted and designated as high potential individuals who may be well suited to move up the corporate or company ladder. In this article we will be discussing the phenomenon of ‘turning the corner - moving from doer to leader.’

We will explore issues such as:

- What should an individual do to prepare for this step?
- Is such a move even desired?
- Do these individuals have a choice in accepting such a move?
- Is this consistent with their desires and career goals?
- What has been or is being done to help prepare the individual for the change?
- What support system exists to help before and after the change?

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We are focusing on this topic precisely because being a good “doer” does not automatically translate to being a good supervisor.

We believe this transition is important for several reasons. First, in the industries we work with, our research and work experience reveals difficulty in recruiting and retaining qualified doers or supervisors. Sounds strange in a period of US history where unemployment is and holds at unusually high levels. Next, there is the issue of training doers to be supervisors. For those doers who are motivated to move up the traditional corporate ladder, this training is a great opportunity for them. For those who like being doers, who want to be the best doer there is, the thought of having supervisory responsibilities can be very disruptive to them, and actually impact their typically good doer performance. Another reason is the staffing strategy of the organization. If that strategy is to develop and promote from within; when faced with moving a doer-focused individual into a supervisory position, several potential downsides result.

Continuing along this train of thought, assuming the newly ordained supervisor/leader is happy in their new position, motivated to do the right thing, and has had some training in the new position, we introduce the notion of what we refer to as the GPS Effect. We will discuss this later in the article, but briefly the GPS effect comes into the mix when the specific details and tasks at hand interfere with the bigger perspective. Think about the commercial where the GPS tells the driver to turn now and—bang—he crashes into a store front.

We are good at posing questions, so here are a few more. How does all this happen? What is the organization’s responsibility? Is there a planned approach to developing new supervisors? Is it a sink or swim approach? What “normally” happens and what should happen? What responsibility does the new supervisor’s manager have? How do you deal with the talented but reluctant candidate? Or what is appearing today: how do you deal with the super-motivated, talented doer who is chomping at the bit to become a leader, but needs more time? What happens with the individual if he/she fails in the supervisory role?

## The Individual

Some people question why anyone would not want to be promoted to a leadership position. Your authors have seen several real-life examples where an individual is not interested in that promotion. In some cases, the individual was just not confident enough in themselves to take

that step. In other cases they were happy with what they were doing and had no interest in taking on supervisory duties and doing less “actual work”. There are some organizations that will just promote regardless of the desires of the individual. In many cases it becomes a mutually-exclusive proposition: accept the promotion or lose your job. Such organizations are setting themselves up for future problems. We have all seen cases where the opposite happens, and the individual lacking self-confidence is moved out of his comfort zone and provided a challenge where he becomes very successful. In one case the individual who was being looked at for a promotion continually exhibited outstanding technical skills and was the person many of the peers went to for guidance. The individual repeatedly indicated that a supervisory position was not something they could be successful. Through counseling and providing opportunities to train newer doers this person saw that they did have such skills. Had the move been done directly before the self confidence was developed the results would probably not have been nearly as successful.

With the right training and mentoring that individual can become a confident and successful leader. However, forcing the happy doer into a leadership position is a formula for disaster. No matter how much training and mentoring, certain individuals want to be doers and not leaders. They will fight the new position either overtly or covertly. In either case, their impact as a leader will be limited and they may in fact do more damage to the organization. If there are safety issues associated with the position those reporting to that person may also be at risk. A classic example is a term ‘step-up foreman.’ This is a case where a crew member is bumped up to a supervisory role – foreman of the crew. If that person is not ready, or does not want the position, the crew as a whole will suffer. This example is a very real problem in the construction industry. It is incumbent upon an organization’s leaders above to know the difference between a lack of self-confidence and a lack of interest, and be able to seek the necessary guidance to ensure the right people are in the right positions.

With this all said, let’s assume a doer is promoted from within to a supervisory position. What are the issues here?

- How do you deal with those who were your coworkers and now report to you?
- After the move, how do you deal with your management and your peers? Do you know how to anticipate and deal with issues from your team, anticipate the needs of those above you, and work right and left with your new peers?

- How is your life going to change? It may well be like drinking from a fire hose for a while. Will you have time to learn or are you being thrown into the deep end of the pool?

Let's take a look at these issues facing the newly promoted supervisor. That individual is no longer going to be "one of the boys" and now has to direct, evaluate and assign work to those who yesterday were peers. This is a big deal.

All of us who went through this first big promotion had to learn to deal with it. Some of the former peers will be happy that the promotion was from within and will willingly accept the supervision as long as it is effective. They will be accepting of rough spots and mistakes by the new supervisor and will often try to help smooth the transition. However, there are always some who will be resentful and think the promotion should have been theirs. Some will openly fight the new leader. This can be dealt with more easily than those who openly state support but covertly work against the new leader. *Our Update issue 03-03 of 2003 we introduce the idea of Subversive Leadership. This article looks at the traditional perception of subversion as malevolent and how people attempt to undermine their leaders. Our follow on issue 01-04 of 2004 addresses the opposite, and redefines subversion as benevolent, where people will support and aid their leaders despite their shortcomings to assure their success. We feel there will and can be both at play here depending on specific situations organizations and their culture. (These articles can be found [www.themacrisgroup.com](http://www.themacrisgroup.com))*

Good leadership development can help the new leader learn to recognize these situations and can provide some tips for dealing with them. More importantly, the new leader needs a strong mentor who can coach and assist in dealing with the subversives. We can't just provide some training and dump the new leader on an island with no active support system.

The new leader now has a team but also has new leadership above and new peers. The importance of learning how to work with the new leadership is fairly clear. *I'm now a boss but I have a new boss that I will be working for and will probably be interfacing with bosses higher up. I've got to get a good understanding of relationships and expectations. That is only going to come from one-on-one time with my new boss and careful observation of his/her style and interactions. Learn to anticipate expectations. Easier said than done in many cases but a lot of face time with the new boss and asking a lot of questions will help build this relationship and understanding of expectations.*

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The new leader has another set of resources – his/her new peers. The other supervisors can provide a lot of insight and support. They have been in their positions longer and dealt with the new boss longer. Their support has to be cultivated. Some will willingly support the new leader, some will be cautious and there are always some who for a variety of reasons will not help the "new kid on the block". The new leader has to again be cautious of advice she gets from the new peers until a level of trust (both ways) is established. The other aspect of this peer relationship is understanding the working relationship between the groups and working with the peer to continue to build and strengthen the working relationship.

All of this will seem, to many new leaders, like drinking from a fire hose. So much to learn, so much to observe, so much to do, so many relationships to build and rebuild and all the while making sure the work is being done accurately and in a timely manner. Truly life is going to change and it will take a toll on the individual. Good friends are now subordinates. A new reporting structure is in place. New skills have to be learned. How are you going to assimilate everything and keep the product coming out? It is going to take time and patience on all fronts. Unfortunately we have seen too many instances where there is no patience shown and no time given to a learning curve. New skills can be gained through a strong Leadership Development program. The skills can be taught but the receiver also has to be open to learning and not being pressured to just focus on getting the work out. Mentors have to ensure that there is time and support for the learning process. This is where the organization has to take an active role in assuring the success of the new leader.

### The Organization

As noted in our Introduction, and as should be intuitively obvious, the organization has an equally critical role in assuring the success of the new leader. We have discussed some of this above but the organization must have a succession and development plan that lays out expectations for mentoring and supporting new leaders. What is the Leadership Development program and the plan for each individual? Time must be allowed for learning and assimilation of new duties. There must be a tolerance for mistakes while learning and a willingness to help turn those mistakes into learning experiences. If the plan is "sink or swim", many, if not most new leaders will fail. And yet we have seen in different industries this approach. The magic wand has been waved over a good analyst, engineer, technician,

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accountant, and she has been promoted. Months later, she is struggling and the blame is placed squarely on the new leader and not equally on the organization. Leadership Development, mentoring, patience and tolerance are all the responsibility of the organization.

Another organizational phenomenon affects turning the corner. While many openly endorse leadership development, and believe it is a good thing for their high potential performers, when those who attend the leadership programs bring their learnings back to the workplace and attempt to implement various aspects, we have seen a cultural backlash. That meaning, while it is good to learn these things, we don't do that here. This is an incredible demotivator for the excited newly ordained supervisor or manager. With the commitment to leadership development, there is a de-facto commitment to applying those techniques and learnings in the workplace. With endorsement of the program comes an endorsement of change.

## The GPS Effect

In our opening we introduced the concept of GPS Effect. What in the world are we talking about? On a turn by turn basis the new supervisor may be prepared to handle the traffic or the new route they have been assigned. It would be similar to programming the destination into a GPS and trusting it to get you there. The issue here is does the new supervisor have the big picture. A large map provides that overview. Does he use a map and plot his own course, or does he accept the task at hand (like he did as a doer) and hope to get where he needs to go? This is where the turning the corner from doer to supervisor comes into play. The supervisor must make a rather significant departure from ground level task work to a higher altitude perspective on his overall area of responsibility and even higher on the organizational level. Everything we have discussed above has an impact on the GPS Effect. As a doer, the individual is driving down a road as prescribed by his supervisor. He may not even fully understand the destination or all the turns and possible detours facing the journey. Once he is in a leadership role, he certainly needs a lot more information about the big picture. He must be able to fully understand the destination and be prepared for roadblocks and detours that might be needed to reach the destination. The new supervisor must know how to read the map and not just blindly follow the steps on the GPS. In fact the new supervisor probably should put the GPS away and start unfolding and using the map to ensure the best course is being followed. But, he has to be taught how to do that and mentored to ensure he knows how to apply this new knowledge.

## Turning the Corner

Turning the corner means good business. As an organizational leader, developing the right people who know the company, who know the culture, and who have proven themselves is smart business. The operative words here are 'right people.' In addition, providing them with quality leadership development and then allowing them to exercise what they have learned is essential. So the point of our whole article is very simple. Make sure when a person is tagged as a high potential performer that she really wants to move away from what she is currently performing well at and move into an arena of supervision and leadership. You must also be observant of the individual who does not want to be promoted primarily due to a lack of self-confidence. These people may take a little more work to prepare them to turn the corner but should pay dividends after they see they can be successful. With that confirmed, arm them with the best leadership development training possible. We believe that training strikes a balance between knowledge, skills, and the opportunity to practice in a safe environment. Singular events may have an impact, but it is fleeting and soon forgotten. Leadership development is a continuum of learning and practicing. It takes on different forms along the journey, but it is a journey. Then ensure the organization is ready. There is nothing more demoralizing than learning something new, wanting to try it, anticipating a positive outcome only to be told "we don't do it that way around here." Leadership development is a bold move, one that takes guts on the part of organizational leaders, but they must be ready for the result. Sending a new potential supervisor or anyone to a leadership development program must be viewed as an investment into the future of the attendee and the organization. If you are using leadership development programs as a "paid vacation" or getting the proverbial ticket punched then you are wasting money. Finally, perspective, keeping the big picture perspective is essential. Leadership is not a turn by turn GPS; it is a combination of keeping the overall big picture in mind while knowing that the path to get there may be surreptitious.

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