



Are You Ready to Hire Middle Management?

5 things to consider before putting another layer between you and the work

There comes a point when a growing business needs more than good employees. It needs people who can **lead other people, make decisions, solve problems, and own results** without the founder being involved in everything.

Hiring your first real managers sounds simple: hire someone good, give them responsibility, and get some things off your plate. In practice, it is one of the biggest transitions a founder makes. You are not just hiring another employee. **You are putting another layer of leadership between you and the work.** That requires the company to be ready - and it requires you to be ready.

1 Do you actually have something big enough for a manager to own?

Sometimes founders hire a manager because they are overwhelmed. That is not necessarily the same as needing management. A manager needs a meaningful area to own - production, sales, installation, a location, customer service, or day-to-day operations. Before hiring the person, define the seat: what results should they own, what decisions should they make, and what should no longer come to you once they are successful?

ASK YOURSELF: If this manager is doing an excellent job one year from now, what will I no longer be responsible for?

2 Are you ready to let someone make decisions differently than you?

You have spent years developing instincts about your business. Then a manager makes a decision you would not have made. The temptation is to step in, correct it, and take control. Sometimes you should - especially around safety, ethics, major financial consequences, or company direction. But if every decision has to be your decision, you have not delegated authority. Good managers need room to develop judgment, including making some good decisions differently than you would.

ASK YOURSELF: Can I accept a good decision that is different from my decision?

3 Will you give them real authority - or just responsibility?

A manager cannot own results if they cannot change the schedule, address poor performance, authorize reasonable spending, or make normal decisions in their area. They also cannot lead if employees know they can walk around them and ask you instead. Define the authority that comes with the role, make it clear to the team, and resist solving issues that belong with the manager.

ASK YOURSELF: Am I willing to let this person actually manage - even when it would be faster for me to step in?



4 Can you handle knowing less about the day-to-day business?

As your organization develops, you will know less about some parts of the company than you used to. A customer problem may be solved without you hearing about it. A manager may change tomorrow's schedule without checking with you. Employees who once came directly to you will go to someone else. That can feel like losing control when it may actually be evidence that the organization is getting stronger. The goal is to replace knowing everything with knowing the right things.

ASK YOURSELF: What do I truly need to know - and what am I accustomed to knowing simply because I have always been involved?

5 Are you ready to become your manager's manager?

Hiring a manager does not eliminate management. It changes who you manage and how you manage them. Your conversations shift from 'Did we get this order finished?' toward 'How is production performing? What's getting in your way? What decision do you think we should make?' You need clear expectations, regular communication, useful numbers, and accountability - while resisting the urge to solve every problem they bring you.

ASK YOURSELF: Am I prepared to develop leaders instead of simply directing employees?

The Psychological Side of Letting Go

For many founders, the organizational chart is the easy part. **Letting go is harder.** For years, your attention, judgment, effort, and willingness to step in protected the company. Being needed may also have become connected to being useful.

The goal is not to convince yourself that control was bad. Control helped you build the business. The question is whether the same amount of direct control will allow you to build the next version of it.

"Confidence that you can build people and an organization capable of handling more without you."

That means tolerating some discomfort. Someone will occasionally make the wrong call. Things will be done differently than you prefer. You will not know everything. Someone else may become the person employees go to first. That is not losing leadership. **It is changing how you lead.**

A SIMPLE READINESS TEST

Is the business ready? Does the role have clear ownership? Enough people and complexity to manage? Can you define success, afford the position, and give the manager meaningful authority?

Are you ready? Can you let someone else make decisions, allow employees to go to their manager, coach instead of immediately fixing, and judge the manager by results rather than whether they do everything your way?

Successful middle management requires both sides of the transition.

BUILD THE BUSINESS BEYOND THE FOUNDER

AgStrat helps founders of rural and real-world businesses build the leadership, financial, organizational, and operating foundation needed for the next stage of growth.

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