

Dattner Consulting, LLC

# Writing your managerial user's manual

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# User's Manual

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- **Definition**
- **Why a user's manual is helpful**
- **How to write your user's manual**
- **Components of your user's manual:**
  - **Motivation**
  - **Work style**
  - **Management and delegation style**
  - **Communication and feedback style**
  - **Learning and decision making style**
  - **Values**
  - **Personal style and other**
- **Recommendations**
- **Sample user's manual**

# Definition

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A user's manual is a clear and concise document or set of talking points that communicates to others one's motivations, work style, management and delegation style, communication and feedback style, learning and decision making style, values, personal style, and any other information that can help reduce misunderstandings, accelerate mutual understanding and facilitate better collaboration

# Why a user's manual is helpful

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- The quality of working relationships is one of the biggest determinants of job satisfaction, if not the biggest determinant
- It takes an estimated 6 months for people to develop comfortable working relationships with their co-workers and even longer to develop comfortable working relationships with their bosses
- During the first 6 months there is a high risk of preventable misunderstandings leading to resentment and mistrust. Even after the first 6 months there can still be a high rate of preventable communication breakdowns
- Writing a user's manual not only accelerates the getting-to-know one other process, it also sets a positive precedent for open dialogue and a framework for ongoing clear and candid communication
- Most managers welcome the opportunity to write a user's manual, and find it enhances their managerial self-awareness

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# How to write a user's manual

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- Review past performance reviews and/or 360 degree feedback
- Consult trusted current or past colleagues for input
- Take assessment tests such as the Hogan or the MBTI
- Consider strengths, development needs, and hoped-for changes
- Create a first draft and then ask for feedback and suggestions
- Check in periodically to ensure accuracy, relevance and usefulness

# Components of a user's manual

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# Motivation

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- What motivates you

*Description:* I am completely dedicated to continuous improvement and prefer to work with people who are similarly motivated

*Suggestion:* it's important that you consistently challenge the status quo in everything you do

- What demotivates you

*Description:* I get frustrated when people ask me to attend meetings where my presence isn't necessary and where I can't add value

*Suggestion:* Consider why, when and how I can be most helpful and only involve me when necessary

- How you try to motivate others

*Description:* I sometimes make the mistake of assuming that others are motivated by the same things and in the same way, as me

*Suggestion:* Let me know what motivates you

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- How you like to work

*Description:* I like to get things far done in advance in order to avoid the stress of deadlines

*Suggestion:* When preparing things for me, don't leave things until the last minute, even if you can pull it off at the last minute, it makes me nervous

- How you don't like to work

*Description:* I don't like to be interrupted when I'm in the middle of something

*Suggestion:* In order to get my full attention, schedule a meeting

- How you like others to work

*Description:* I like others to be proactive in problem solving

*Suggestion:* Don't present problems to me without also suggesting potential solutions



# Management and delegation

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- How you like to manage and delegate

*Description:* I like to specify goals, but try not to specify how to get there

*Suggestion:* Let me know that you have fully understood what I'm looking for by articulating it back to me

- How you don't like to manage and delegate

*Description:* I have a tendency to do things myself instead of delegating

*Suggestion:* Be proactive about suggesting things that you can take off of my plate, and I will be most appreciative

# Communication and feedback

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- How you like to communicate and give feedback

*Description:* I like to be kept in the loop, and really dislike surprises

*Suggestion:* Err on the side of over-communicating with me rather than under-communicating

- How you don't like to communicate and give feedback

*Description:* I don't give that much positive feedback, but if I have a concern about what you are doing or how you are doing it, I will let you know

*Suggestion:* Don't be disappointed if I don't give you frequent praise and don't hesitate to ask me for suggestions for improvements

# Learning and decision making

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- How you like to learn and make decisions

*Description:* I ask a lot of questions, and it doesn't mean I'm skeptical, just curious

*Suggestion:* Learn to anticipate the questions I might ask so that you can prepare in advance and we can get more done when we meet

- How you don't like to learn and make decisions

*Description:* I don't like to be rushed in making decisions before I understand the context for a decision

*Suggestion:* Send me data, even if it is incomplete or unconfirmed, as soon as it's available so that I can begin to get a picture of what's going on

# Values

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- What your values are

*Description:* I take the company's values very seriously, and insist that everything we do conforms both to the letter and the spirit of our values

*Suggestion:* Don't present any ideas that conflict with our company values, even ideas that might appear on their surface to conflict with our values

- What your values are not

*Description:* I don't believe in sacrificing the trust of our customers even if it will be expensive

*Suggestion:* Look far into the future for issues that may emerge that might make it challenging for us to meet customer expectations

# Personal style and other

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- How you would describe your personal style

*Description:* I strive to be friendly, but get very focused on the work at hand and may cut short small talk

*Suggestion:* In order to have less formal or focused interaction, I encourage you to put a lunch on my calendar once a quarter

- How you would not describe your personal style

*Description:* I don't mind being interrupted any time if you have a personal crisis that I can help out with in any way

*Suggestion:* Count on my full support if you have a personal or family issue, and don't hesitate to bring it up any time, no matter what else is going on

# Recommendations

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- A user's manual should be an evolving, living document and should be updated every year or two
- Managers and executives should solicit ongoing feedback from staff and colleagues about how accurate and useful their user's manual is
- A user's manual should be used for the multiple purposes of developing managerial self-awareness, reducing the likelihood of miscommunication, and providing a framework for discussions about improving collaboration
- A user's manual should provide explanations and suggestions, not rationalizations or justifications
- A user's manual should be a supplement to candid and constructive conversations, not a substitute

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# Sample User's Manual

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- My style: Be ready to answer the question “why” five times for any given issue. If I ask a lot of questions, don't be worried or defensive, that is my style
- My style: I get right to the point, don't take it personally, and I prefer when others do the same
- My style: I have a unique sense of humor, don't take everything I say so seriously. If you have a good sense of humor, it will be much easier for you to work with me
- My style: When I am under pressure, I get serious. This does not mean I am angry
- My style: If you have an important issue to discuss, schedule a time and book a conference room to make sure I can give it my full attention
- Values: Don't make short term suggestions that ignore the long term or systemic implications or that are not strategically aligned with our principles
- Values: I treat the company's money as if it were my own, you should too
- Values: It is very important to me that I and everyone else in this organization treats people with equal respect and dignity
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# Sample User's Manual (continued)

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What I like:	Have conviction for your point of view, and push back on me. If you are not convinced or prepared, don't bother presenting something to me until you are
What I like:	I respect people who push back and challenge me
What I like:	I value out of the box thinking, but you should always include the value to the business and the customer of what you are proposing
What I don't like:	Don't present problems without also suggesting solutions
What I don't like:	I am unforgiving of people who don't admit or who cover up mistakes
What I don't like:	I hate surprises. Err on the side of over communicating with me
What may be Misunderstood:	I don't give much positive feedback. If I'm dissatisfied, I will let you know. Assume I'm satisfied with your work unless I tell you otherwise
Work-life balance:	When people need my support for business, personal and family issues, they can always count on it



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