

Preface

Thousands of managers dream of becoming CEOs. But only a handful will make it.

What separates the career climbers from the others?

For starters, CEOs need people skills, political savvy, and lots of good luck. Yet there's one easy-to-overlook prerequisite that every chief executive must possess: *the ability to solve problems*—in other words, the ability to *survive* the daily onslaught of technical and people problems that require skillful analysis, intelligent decisions, and effective execution.

Surviving—and prospering—in organizations requires a keen awareness of what's wrong now (as well as what's right), what can go wrong later, and what must happen to fix it. Mediocre managers dread problems. They turn away from them, sugar-coat reality, and then wait in blissful ignorance for the other shoe to drop.

Fast-track leaders, by contrast, detect trouble early. They solicit advice, list their options, and take decisive action to extinguish potential fires before they rage uncontrollably. Their confidence and experience teach them to view problems as positives. When discussing setbacks or disappointments, most CEOs will reframe negatives. They'll say, "This presents an opportunity" or "We look forward to this challenge."

Adopting a can-do, let's-solve-this attitude pays off on many levels. It empowers your peers and employees to maintain hope and optimism in the face of mounting threats. It motivates you to muster the enthusiasm and inner strength to persevere when disasters hit. And it helps you think like a tactician, so that you take responsibility for identifying and weighing the best solutions.

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Reputations are built at the bottom, not the top. As you climb the ladder, your determination to confront problems head on and attain your goals despite adversity will give you an edge in surviving organizational shake-outs and earning high-profile assignments and promotions.

Managers blossom into leaders when their bosses turn into raving fans. If you want higher-ups to champion your cause, get them to give you the ultimate compliment: *There's someone who doesn't let problems stand in the way.*

Why Read This Book?

Face it: you're going to fight off all kinds of problems as a manager. Some mishaps will result from your poor judgment, from faulty information, or from innocent mistakes. Others will just drop into your lap. You may inherit someone else's screw-up or simply wind up in the wrong place at the wrong time.

This book gives you the tools to identify problems, diagnose them, and plan the best course of action to address them. Whatever the causes of conflict—difficult employees, unreliable suppliers, spineless peers, or irate customers—the key is developing a strategy to stay calm, think clearly, and devise solutions.

Speed matters. Tackle problems quickly and you can reduce or eliminate disruptive aftershocks. You can also prevent the same frustrations from recurring in the future.

The more you prepare to solve problems, the stronger your resilience when they collapse upon you. In the pages that follow, you'll gain the knowledge and best practices to take setbacks in stride and reach for a toolbox of strategies that will ensure your survival—and success—as a manager destined for greatness.

Overview of the Book

In the first chapter, you'll learn to see into the distance to anticipate and disarm problems before they gather steam. By recognizing warning signs, rather than falling into the trap of the three

D's (downplaying, distorting, dismissing), you can set reasonable expectations for solving conflicts. You'll also develop a more watchful eye for abrupt changes in the way workers communicate, sudden disruptions of previously predictable patterns, and the hasty imposition of new, restrictive workplace rules.

Chapter 2 traces the evolution of a typical workplace problem in six stages, from the kindling fire to multiple outbreaks to the final push for action. By treating a problem as a multi-step event and separating what you can and cannot control, you gain the knowledge and confidence you need to take charge and make the right moves.

By Chapter 3, you're ready to plunge into solutions. By taking even the most formidable problems and breaking them into bite-size chunks, you can make headway against all odds. Even if you're ultimately responsible for fixing what's broken, you need allies such as a trusted advisor and your employees to give you their best advice and efforts.

Chapter 4 exposes one of the main culprits at the core of many problems—misunderstandings. That's why most leaders listen so well; they know that if they hear only what they want to hear, they may draw the wrong conclusions.

In Chapter 5, your response to problems takes center stage. You can devise speedy, brilliant, creative solutions. But if you panic, yell, or hold grudges, you sabotage yourself and divert attention from your great results.

Warning: Chapter 6 is fraught with conflict. But you're going to practice strategies to restore peace when tempers flare and referee when bickering employees threaten to come to blows. You'll learn to speak a positive language, free of war metaphors, to calm frayed nerves and lure everyone toward a mutually agreeable outcome.

Chapter 7 highlights the need to balance emotions with reason when solving problems. Using scientists as a model, you'll develop tools to gather information and evaluate it dispassionately.

There are two kinds of people—problem-solvers and prob-

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lem-creators—and in Chapter 8 you'll learn about the differences. Adopt a healthy, solution-oriented mindset and you're way ahead of the game. If you react to mishaps by thinking of what's possible rather than lamenting, "Why me?," you're on the right track.

So many problems in today's workplaces are caused at least in part by organizational change. Chapter 9 confronts this threat head on. You'll gain techniques to cope with change from above and to communicate it to your employees.

Many challenges arise when managers are working with employees who are unmotivated and apathetic. Chapter 10 offers motivational tips for a range of tricky or delicate situations, from dealing with survivors of layoffs to leading your off-site, telecommuting workers to give 100%.

Finally, in Chapter 11, the discussion shifts from solving problems to preventing them. Take proactive steps to ward off mishaps and you'll save yourself countless hours of stress.

Special Features

The idea behind the books in the Briefcase Series is to give you practical information written in a friendly person-to-person style. The chapters are short, deal with tactical issues, and include lots of examples. They also feature numerous boxes designed to give you different types of specific information. Here's a description of the boxes you'll find in this book.



These boxes are designed to give you tips and tactics that will help you more effectively implement the methods described in this book.



These boxes provide warnings for where things could go wrong when you're dealing with a management problem.



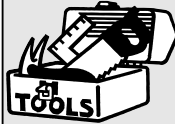
These boxes highlight insider tips for taking advantage of the practices you'll learn about in this book.



Every subject has its special jargon and terms. These boxes provide definitions of these concepts.



It's always important to have examples of what others have done, either well or not so well. Find such stories in these boxes.



This identifies boxes where you'll find specific procedures you can follow to take advantage of the book's advice.



How can you make sure you won't make a mistake when dealing with a problem? You can't, but these boxes will give you practical advice on how to minimize the possibility.