Do You REALLY Want to Be the Boss?
Consider the pros and cons before you say yes to management

By Margaret Steen

Becoming a manager is a sign of success. It indicates you’re good at what you do, and it comes with more money and responsibility. But before you take a promotion that turns you into a boss, take a clear-headed look at whether management is a good fit for you.

Is this for me?
Yes, you’ll probably make more money and will have more control over some things. But you’ll also get more responsibility – and changes to your life beyond the office. Some people thrive on this. But for others, management is more of a burden than a blessing.

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When you take a management role, more of the job goes with you when you leave work,” says Norm Meshriy, a career counselor and principal of Career Insights in Walnut Creek, Calif. “There’s always a lot to think about.”

Meshriy and other experts suggest considering how you feel about several areas before making the move to management:

People skills. You land a management job because you’re good at what you do. But once you’re leading a team, your job is to help others do well. Motivating others – and correcting them when they make mistakes – is not as easy as it sounds.

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“You have to give feedback, to be able to have a confrontation,” said Alexander Levit, author of New Job, New You. “You may even have to lay someone off. ‘Are you ready for that?’

You will have to watch those who work for you fail occasionally and help them learn from the experience.

“You need to be able to accept less than perfect work from people who are growing and developing,” Meshriy says.

Control. As a manager, you may be able to control some things, like the work schedule for your department. But you won’t be in charge of everything – and you’ll be responsible for getting your team to go along with decisions that come from above you.

“A lot of people say, ‘Oh, you have the power,’ but the truth is everybody has a boss,” Levit says.

Accountability. You’ll get credit when things go well but will also take the blame when they don’t.

“You need to have some critical thinking...” Meshriy says. “When you work 9 to 5, at 5 you’re out of there. But if...you’re in management, sometimes you have to physically stay and perform that task, no matter how long it takes.”

Lifestyle. Some non-management jobs require you to be on call after hours. But in many fields, it’s the leap to management that ties you to your Blackberry.

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If you have never been a manager, how will you know if it’s for you? One way is to consider activities – both at work and outside – that involved leadership. Did you run a school club? Manage a project at work? Coordinate volunteers for a charity?

If so, ask yourself, “Did I enjoy it? Was it fun?” says Michael Beasley, owner of Career-Crossings in Portola Valley, Calif., and a consultant with Right Management.

How to get there
If you do want to be a manager, the next question is how to get there. You’ll increase your chances if you have solid skills in the area you want to manage. If you like accounting, become a good accountant, and someday you may be an accounting manager.

“You need to have some critical knowledge in what it is you’re helping manage people to do,” says Connie Egelman, coordinator of career development at Nassau Community College.

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Some companies and some professions have solid career paths for people who aren’t managers. Start looking for jobs at companies that offer good opportunities for promotion to non-managers.

“You don’t want to be stuck at that bottom level for too many years,” Levit says. “The longer you stay in that, the harder it is to get out. CF

Meeting with someone who currently does the kind of job you’d like is also helpful, says Ben Weihrauch, career development coordinator at the Community College of Denver. “I encourage them to get it straight from the horse’s mouth.”

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