

# How to Give Orders

Many people believe that to be a good manager you have to give orders to the people below you. They are wrong. You do not have to give orders. In fact, you should **not** give orders.

## **Don't give orders**

When you give orders, you tell someone to do something. "Put that file on my desk", is an order. So is, "put Roger on the late shift". When you give an order, you do not allow the other person any latitude to think about what to do or how to do it. All they can do to satisfy your order is exactly what you ordered. There are two reasons why this is bad. First, you do not allow the person to figure out the best way to do the task. Second, you do not let them learn.

Sometimes it is appropriate to give orders. In the military, there are times when a leader has to give orders.

When you tell a squad to "charge that hill" you don't want them to think about it. You just want it done. However, even in the military, leaders don't give orders unless they have to. Instead of giving orders and telling someone what to do, good managers give instructions. Instead of telling them what to do, you tell them what you want done.

## **Give instructions instead**

When you tell an employee what you want done, instead of giving an order, you give them the freedom to come up with their best way of getting that task done. It may not always be the best way, and you may have to do some monitoring and guiding, but there is also the chance that they will come up with something better than what you planned.

When an employee is given an instruction instead of an order, they have to think. They can't just do what they were told and say they were following orders. They have to think of ways to get the job done. They have to decide which is the best way. They have to invest a little of themselves in the solution.

Also, when you give an employee an instruction, instead of an order, and let them decide for themselves the best way to accomplish the task, you are more likely to get their buy-in and support. If they have made the decision about the best way to accomplish the task they are more likely to believe it is correct and valuable. They will defend it against others who question it.

## **Be clear**

Orders are generally very clear. "Get the report to me by Thursday morning", does not leave much room for interpretation. So when you give instructions, instead of orders, you need to be as clear about what results you expect.

Instead of saying, "I'd like you to review the past month's data and get back to me on it", be more precise. For example, you could say, "Please review the past month's data. By Monday morning, I expect your recommendation of the best course and a couple of alternatives for ways to close more sales." Or you could say, "By our meeting on Friday, I want you to have consolidated all the department's projects into a single master schedule. I want you to tell me where we are over committed and where we have excess capacity."

When you give instructions instead of orders there is a tendency to be less clear about the expected outcome. A good manager makes instructions clear.

## **Give instructions, not orders**

Your job as a manager is to get things done. However, it also means getting things done through others. When you give orders, you limit the group to your level of expertise. When you give instructions, you let the employees contribute whatever they can. It may not be as good as what you would have done, but that is an indication that you need to do further training. However, it also might be better than your idea. When that happens, you have an employee who feels involved and motivated and you look smarter.

The next time you start to give an order, give instructions instead. Tell the employee clearly what you want done. Let them figure out how to do it. It is a better solution for both of you.