





# Moving On Up

Great news: you got that promotion. But transforming yourself from colleague to boss isn't always easy. Here's how to move up the ladder—without losing your grip.

**A**bout two years ago, when Jason Forrest was promoted to a supervisory position over his former co-workers in a home construction company in Denver, the situation could have become awkward.

"I think it's easier if you come in from the outside, without the history," says the 27 year old of his move to sales manager.

To help ease the way, one thing Forrest did was heed the advice of those who preached the importance of setting boundaries, especially when managing ex-colleagues. "I've always believed the best managers have a combination of grit and grace—meaning they have a structured discipline but they're also gracious as far as trying to understand the needs of employees, what drives them and why they're there. The sooner employees see that and feel you're trying to put their needs above, or at least equal to, those of the employer, it helps lay the groundwork," says Forrest.

You would also do well to remember that the balance in the workplace has shifted, says Curt Coffman, a workplace consultant, author and speaker. "One of the major mistakes made by employees who manage former peers is thinking they have acquired some kind of power. In today's workplace, becoming a manager isn't about power because, frankly, the employer needs the employee more than the employee needs the employer," he says.

"A co-worker turned manager should place great emphasis upon maintaining the relationships they had before with each of those people, because it's through those

trusted relationships that they can have pointed conversations, or focus on areas that need to be done differently. They come in knowing everyone and those relationships are exactly what great managers use to help people achieve things they never have before."

Ironically, Coffman, co-author of *First. Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently* (Simon & Schuster), says promoting some people to a managerial role can actually do them an injustice. If the individual does not possess a natural talent or desire to help those former colleagues to achieve and develop, they won't do well.

"Some people are promoted because they're outstanding at a job. So they go to the next rung on the ladder and often the talents required at that next rung aren't the same talents that made them successful. On the career ladder, we assume one rung leads to the other but it doesn't."

"It's said that to get prestige and respect you have to climb the ladder. But just as you go to the next rung, employers snap off the rung that employees just came from and many times you end up getting a manager who's not a good fit for that role. So you lose a productive individual because of that promotion," says Coffman.

Unfortunately, when it came to refining his approach in making the transition from co-worker to boss, Forrest, now a national sales director, didn't exactly have a long line of examples to mimic. "I've never really had great role models in terms of good managers to follow. So I never knew what to do right. I just knew what *not* to do."

For example, he notes, "It seems like a lot of managers, when they first get promoted, use their title as their authority. They

immediately say, 'I'm the boss!' A lot of people, to try and make people listen to them, use positional authority as opposed to non-positional authority. I've found you don't really respect those kinds of bosses as much: You almost do things for them not because you want to, but because they're the boss."

Of course, a manager might be required to discipline or confront a former colleague. In that case, says Matthew Youngquist of Career Horizons in Bellevue, Washington, he or she should seek out a more objective member of the company (their boss, a human resource professional or a manager from another department) to participate in the process. "Having a third-party 'witness' present will help prevent situations from becoming overly personal or emotional and will also reduce the company's risk of liability."

It also helps, says Forrest, if a person promoted to a managerial or supervisory capacity over former colleagues has earned a degree of respect among them. "A lot of people who get promoted don't have non-positional influence among their peers. There's always that non-positional peer inside a work group who people turn to when they want to run ideas by someone. If that person gets promoted, they have a pretty good shot because all they're doing is adding a title to their influence."

His biggest challenge, he says, is working among those he didn't particularly get along with as a peer. "It's tough but you have to go in there, set the stage and basically make the point that you're there to get the job done." Emphasize the present, Forrest advises. "If you didn't get along before, don't even bring it up. It should be an unspoken understanding. Just forge ahead."