

12+ Irina E. Dormidontova

NEW TO LEADING?

10 Real-World Stories About Leading People
Insights. Practice. Results.

PEOPLE
TEAMS
TOUGH SITUATIONS
REAL-WORLD SOLUTIONS
YOUR GROWTH

*For those taking
their first steps
in management*



Irina Dormidontova

**New to Leading? 10 Real-
World Stories About Leading
People. Insights. Practice. Results.**

«Издательские решения»

Dormidontova I. E.

New to Leading? 10 Real-World Stories About Leading People.
Insights. Practice. Results. / I. E. Dormidontova — «Издательские
решения»,

New to Leading? is a practical guide for first-time managers, built around 10 real stories from the workplace — from managing former peers and delegating to giving feedback, difficult conversations, and responsibility for a team. If your new role calls for different decisions, start with the story in which you recognise yourself. Each chapter offers analysis, reflection questions, and practical guidance to help you understand what is really going on and develop an authentic leadership style.

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About This Book — A Note from the Author

Dear Reader,

New to Leading? is a book about a transition that can happen on paper in a single day, but takes much longer professionally and psychologically.

At the heart of the book are diary-style stories about difficult questions that almost every first-time manager encounters. Each story is followed by a brief analysis, practical recommendations, and one concrete next step.

The analysis and recommendations draw on research in psychology, organizational behavior, and human resource management. At the end of each chapter, you will find additional reading for those who would like to explore the topic in greater depth.

The diary entries are composite scenes built around common workplace situations; they do not describe specific people or organizations. If you recognize yourself in them, then part of my goal has already been achieved.

This book is designed to help you notice what really changes when you move from expert to manager, where the transition tends to get difficult, and how to find your footing in the new role.

This book is not a substitute for training, mentoring, or professional advice. But it can help you step into the role more deliberately — or prepare before the transition begins.

I would be very glad to hear your impressions after you finish the book. You will find my contact details at the end.

With best wishes,

Irina

How to Use This Book

This book is a practical guide to your first management role. You can read it in any order.

I suggest starting with the Ten-Scenario Map and choosing the scenario that feels closest to your current work situation.

Do not rush from one chapter to the next. After reading, choose one recommendation you genuinely want to test in practice.

Give yourself a few days — ideally a week — to try it at work and notice what changes.

One small change is enough. This book is not meant to be raced through; it is designed to help you grow into the role gradually.

Notice → Try → Make It Stick.

Notice — recognize the moment when your usual way of working is no longer helping.

Try — test a new approach in practice.

Make it stick — repeat what worked until the new behavior becomes part of how you manage.

Before We Begin

Treat others the way you would want to be treated.

I wrote this book with a simple hope: to contribute to a management culture in which high standards and respect can coexist, responsibility does not exclude trust, and strong results are never achieved at the expense of human dignity. I hope that, together, we can make the world of work a little better.

Becoming a manager for the first time rarely feels like a grand transition. Usually it happens in an ordinary way: your job title changes, new meetings appear on your calendar, yesterday's colleagues start hearing your words differently — and the professional confidence you relied on no longer works quite the way it used to.

Before you become a manager, the value of your expertise is usually easy to see: understand the problem, find a solution, spot the mistake, get the work over the finish line.

The responsibility is still yours, but increasingly, you achieve results through your team. It is not just your title that changes. The way you create results changes too.

Today, this transition often happens in hybrid or distributed teams, in international environments, and in work where digital and AI tools handle part of the load. Yet the core management challenge remains: a manager still needs to create clarity, align on outcomes, distribute responsibility, sustain trust, and help people become more independent. The faster the tools change, the more important those agreements become.

Before, you could say, «I do my job well.» Now the more useful question is often, «What needs to happen because of me, even when I am not the one doing it?» There is another question too: «Do I actually want to be a manager?»

Simple as it may sound, this is one of the central questions of the transition. The answer has a great deal to do with whether the new role brings interest, satisfaction, growth, and a sense of accomplishment.

Management is not the inevitable next step for someone who excels as an expert. Remaining an expert, moving into project work, research, or entrepreneurship can be just as demanding and meaningful.

This book does not teach the one «right» way to manage. It brings together my professional experience — mistakes, achievements, and situations I have had to work through — with practices and tools informed by research.

This book explores ten scenarios that are common in a first management role. They rarely appear all at once, and they do not unfold in a fixed sequence. In one situation you may feel confident; in another, you may slip back into the habits of an expert who is used to solving everything personally.

By the final page, you will not have become the «perfect manager» — that is not the goal. But you will be better able to notice when your old ways of working no longer serve the new role, try different approaches, and gradually turn what works into your own way of managing.

Notice → Try → Make It Stick.

That is how a new way of acting stops being a separate exercise and gradually becomes part of your own management style.

The Ten-Scenario Map

This book brings together ten common scenarios in a first management role. They may appear in different orders, return later, and become relevant again as your experience grows.

No.	Scenario	Key question
1	First management role	What in my experience already suggests that I am ready to manage?
2	Yesterday's peers became my team	How do I rebuild the relationship?
3	Delegation	How do I hand over the work while remaining accountable for the result?
4	My own style	How do I manage in my own voice instead of copying others?
5	An unpopular decision	How do I stay fair and turn a "no" into a development plan?
6	Conflict and trust	How do I preserve the relationship after disagreement?
7	Feedback	How do I discuss something difficult without judging the person?
8	Control and autonomy	How do I stay accountable for the result without controlling every step?
9	Reputation beyond the team	How do I make the team's contribution visible and understandable across the company?
10	Recurring fire drills	How do I move from rescuing the situation to changing the system?

These are not ten rules or one-size-fits-all solutions. Think of them as ten questions the role will keep asking you. Find the scenario on the map that feels closest to your current situation.

PART I

Step Into the New Role

A new role does not begin by abandoning what you already know how to do. It begins with a question: where do I need to use my expertise differently now?

The first challenge for a new manager is rarely just a lack of management tools. You can learn the tools: goal setting, delegation, feedback, one-on-one meetings. What is much harder is noticing that the logic of the job itself has already changed.

Experts are used to being responsible for what is in their own hands. That is why, in the first weeks, it is so easy to keep operating by the old rules: give the best answer yourself, step in to rescue the work, personally safeguard quality. The new title is already there, but the way you create results remains the same.

The first three chapters are about exactly this: recognizing your readiness for management, rebuilding relationships with former peers, and delegating while remaining accountable for the result.

Scenario 1. How Do You Become a Manager When You Have Never Managed Before?

Four entries from a new manager's diary

Monday, 7:20 p.m.

Today my boss said a manager role on our team is opening up. For some reason, my first thought was, «I want it.» Then I got scared.

Me? I have never managed anyone.

I opened the job description. Almost everything looked familiar: strategy, priorities, people, projects. Then I saw it: at least two years of team management experience. I closed it. Five minutes later, I opened it again.

How are you supposed to get your first two years of management experience if no one gives you the first chance?

Wednesday, 9:10 p.m.

We had another discussion about a difficult project. At one point I noticed something strange: my manager was barely involved. I brought the right people together, we agreed on who would take what, and then, together with another team, we resolved an issue that had been sitting unresolved for a long time.

Emma said afterward, «Good thing you got everyone together, or we would have spent another week emailing back and forth.»

That evening I thought about the opening again. Does that count? Or is it only management if you have a team reporting to you?

Friday, 6:40 p.m.

Today a new employee came over and asked how to talk to his manager about deadlines. Then a colleague asked me to look over a presentation before a meeting.

Actually, this happens all the time. People come to me for advice, I help newcomers get up to speed, I sometimes help colleagues find common ground, and on projects I often take on coordination because otherwise everything starts to fall apart.

But I have never called any of that management. To me it was simply, «Well, someone has to do it.»

Maybe I am taking the phrase «I have no management experience» too literally.

Sunday, 10:15 p.m.

The role is still open. Today I found several more reasons not to apply: no experience; there are probably stronger candidates; maybe they want someone who has already managed a team.

Then I asked myself a different question: what am I already doing that managers do?

The list was longer than I expected. No, I have not yet run employee performance reviews or made decisions about promotions or terminations. But I've actually been doing parts of a manager's job for years — just without the title.

Tomorrow I will talk to my manager. I am not going to pretend I am fully ready. I will be honest: I am interested in the role, and I want to understand what experience I still need.

What Matters Here

She genuinely does not yet have formal people-management experience. There is no reason to embellish that part of her background or try to hide it.

But management experience does not begin only when you get the title. Long before your first management role, you may already be bringing people together around a task, coordinating across functions, helping new colleagues, resolving disagreements, and keeping a shared outcome on track.

It helps to separate two statements. «I have not managed a team yet» is a fact. «There is nothing in my experience that suggests I am ready to manage» is an assumption worth testing.

Most people grow into their first management role while they are already doing it — there is still a great deal to learn. Performance reviews, difficult conversations about performance, resource allocation, and decisions about promotion, hiring, or termination cannot be fully mastered in advance.

But before you formally become a manager, you can lead a project team, mentor someone, coordinate several contributors, take responsibility for a shared outcome, and learn to influence without formal authority.

One Good Conversation

I am interested in a management role. I want to understand what I already do well and what experience I still need. What could I start doing now to prepare for that role?

That is how wanting a promotion becomes a professional development plan.

Three Questions

— Where am I already responsible not only for my own result, but also for helping others achieve a shared result?

— In what situations do colleagues already trust me to lead — even without a formal title?

— What management experience am I specifically missing, and where could I start gaining it?

Key Takeaways

The transition into management often begins before the title does.

You do not need to claim experience you do not have. It is far stronger to name the experience you do have — influence, coordination, responsibility for a shared outcome, project leadership — and honestly identify the gaps.

You do not have to feel like a manager before you begin acting in the new role. Readiness often becomes visible in the work itself.

One Action

Over the next week, choose one part of a manager's job that you can try before formally becoming a manager, and discuss with your manager how you could gain that experience.

Further Reading: Morgan, R. H., Braun, S., & Epitropaki, O. (2025). «Pursuing a Future Leader Self: A Multi-Study Investigation of Leader Identity and Its Motivational and Behavioural Outcomes.» *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 98 (1), e70014. DOI: [10.1111/joop.70014](https://doi.org/10.1111/joop.70014). The study links a future leader self with leader identity, motivation to lead, and proactive leadership behavior — useful when considering what already signals readiness for a first management role.

SHORT PRACTICE

Your Manager Is Part of Your New Role

After a promotion, it is not only your relationship with the team that changes. Your relationship with your own manager changes too: it becomes especially important to understand not only what is expected of you, but also how the two of you will work together.

In the first few weeks, clarify a few things:

- What outcomes are my highest priorities right now?
- What criteria will you use to evaluate my work?
- Which decisions do I make independently?
- Which risks do you want to hear about immediately?
- What way of working together will work best for us?

Good management also begins with clarity about what your own manager expects from you.

Scenario 2. Today Is My First Day as the Manager. Yesterday We Were Peers

From a new manager's diary

Monday, 8:40 p.m.

Well, here we are. Today was my first day as the manager of our team.

I came into the office this morning — same desk, same mug, same people. And yet something was already different.

Sam looked in and said, «Coffee?» Then he added, «Or do you have a meeting now?»

I must have heard that word — «now» — ten times today.

At our team meeting, I said almost exactly what I would have said before: «This project won't fly in its current form.» In the past, that would have started a debate. Today everyone simply went quiet and started taking notes.

That was the moment I felt uneasy.

Are people going to stop arguing with me now just because I am the manager?

Yesterday we discussed work as equals. We went to lunch together. We knew who was annoyed with whom, who was looking for a new apartment, who was planning a vacation. Today I have to set goals, give feedback, and make decisions that some people may not like.

And now I am facing a question I somehow did not expect at all:

How am I supposed to be with them now?

What Actually Changes

When yesterday's peer becomes the manager, it is not only the job title that changes. Expectations change too.

You want to stay one of the group. That is natural. But now you have to make decisions, assess performance, decide where to focus your attention, and sometimes say no. Pretending that nothing has changed usually does not work.

At the same time, the new title does not require you to suddenly become colder, more formal, or stricter. Friendship can remain friendship — especially outside work. At work, however, there is an additional requirement: decisions need to be explainable and fair to the whole team.

There is a trap here: a new manager may deliberately become tougher with friends so that no one suspects favoritism. That is unfair too.

A simple test helps: would I make the same decision if any other member of the team were in this person's place?

You do not need to cut off relationships. You need to keep building them while drawing a clear line between work and friendship.

Three Questions for a One-on-One

In the first few weeks, it is worth speaking with each team member individually. Not to deliver a grand speech about your new authority, but to talk about how you will work together now.

— What is important to you to preserve in the way we work together?

— What do you think may become more difficult now?

— What do I need to know to do this new role well?

The conversation may feel awkward. Authority does not arrive automatically with a job title; it grows through consistent decisions and predictable behavior.

Key Takeaways

Impartiality does not mean keeping the same distance from everyone. It means applying the same principles to everyone.

One Action

Over the next week, have a short one-on-one conversation with each member of your team and agree on how you will work together in your new roles.

Further Reading: Westen, W., & Graça, M. (2026). «Managerial Identity Work: A Systematic Literature Review with a Conceptual Model.» *Management Review Quarterly*, 76, 61—89. DOI: [10.1007/s11301-024-00481-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11301-024-00481-6). The review includes first-time managers and examines how managerial identity is shaped, negotiated, and redefined as people move into management.

Scenario 3. How Do You Delegate When It Would Be Faster to Do It Yourself?

From a new manager's diary

Wednesday morning

I decided to put Alex in charge of preparing for the meeting and told myself, honestly: do not interfere.

I made it until lunch.

Then I asked how it was going. I looked at the draft. First I suggested changing the structure a little. Then I rewrote the opening. Then a couple of other phrases.

Alex sat beside me in silence.

At one point he said, «Maybe you should just finish it yourself? You already know exactly how it should be.»

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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