

### What Effective General Managers Really Do (HBR OnPoint Enhanced Edition)

John P. Kotter



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What Effective General Managers Really Do (HBR OnPoint Enhanced Edition) John P. Kotter This is an enhanced edition of HBR article 99208, originally published in March/April 1999. HBR OnPoint articles save you time by enhancing an original Harvard Business Review article with an overview that draws out the main points and an annotated bibliography that points you to related resources. This enables you to scan, absorb, and share the management insights with others. A gap has existed between the conventional wisdom about how managers work and the actual behavior of effective managers. Business textbooks suggest that managers operate best when they carefully control their time and work within highly structured environments, but observations of real managers indicate that those who spend their days that way may be undermining their effectiveness. In this HBR Classic, John Kotter explains that managers who limit their interactions to orderly, focused meetings actually shut themselves off from vital information and relationships. He shows how seemingly wasteful activities like chatting in hallways and having impromptu meetings are, in fact, quite efficient. General managers face two fundamental challenges: figuring out what to do despite an enormous amount of potentially relevant information, and getting things done through a large and diverse set of people despite having little direct control over most of them. To tackle these challenges, effective general managers develop flexible agendas and broad networks of relationships. Their agendas enable them to react opportunistically to the flow of events around them because a common framework guides their decisions about where and when to intervene. And their networks allow them to have quick and pointed conversations that give the general managers influence well beyond their formal chain of command. Originally published in 1982, the article's ideas about time management are all the more useful for today's hard-pressed executives. Kotter has added a retrospective commentary highlighting the article's relevance to current concepts of leadership.

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