

MANAGER FOUNDATIONS

The first 90 days

A workbook for people who were promoted out of the team they now run — and have four months of goodwill to spend before anyone starts comparing you to the manager before you.

BY THE END OF THE FOUR SESSIONS

- You will have had the conversation you have been putting off since January
- Your one-to-ones will be half theirs, and you will have stopped calling them catch-ups
- One recurring thing will have left your plate for good, in writing, with a name on it

WHAT IT IS NOT

- A qualification. Nothing in here is assessed and nothing goes on your record
- Coaching — that is the separate hour in July, and it stays between you and Dana

NAME

TEAM YOU NOW RUN

PROMOTED ON

YOUR COACH

FOUR SESSIONS

14 April – 2 June 2026

FORMAT

Half-days, 09:30 – 12:30, in the room

WHERE

44 Water Street, sixth floor

GROUP

Nine managers, four practices

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

Jordan Ellis

COACHING

Dana Kohl · one hour, in July

You will not be a different manager in ninety days. You will have started three things that make you one by Christmas.

ORIENTATION

How the programme runs

READ THIS FIRST TEN MINUTES BRING THE WORKBOOK TO EVERY SESSION

Four half-days across seven weeks, with real work in between. The room is where you debrief; the work happens on the days you are back with your team. Everything in this workbook is yours — nobody collects it, nobody marks it, and the only person who reads it is **the manager you are trying to become**.

FOUR SESSIONS

TUESDAYS · 44 WATER STREET, SIXTH FLOOR

DATE	TIME	SESSION	WHAT YOU WILL ACTUALLY DO
Tue 14 Apr	09:30–12:30	1 · The team you inherited	Write one honest row about each person who now reports to you
Tue 28 Apr	09:30–12:30	2 · The one-to-one worth having	Rebuild your one-to-one so that half of it belongs to them
Tue 19 May	09:30–12:30	3 · Feedback you can say out loud	Say the difficult sentence, to a person, in the room, and survive it
Tue 2 Jun	09:30–13:00	4 · Where your time goes	Take your unedited calendar apart and hand one thing away
Thu 9 Jul	60 min	Check-in · with your coach	One hour with Dana Kohl, on what held and what did not

WHAT WE ASK OF YOU

THE BETWEEN-SESSION WORK IS THE PROGRAMME

- Two hours between sessions. The room is only the debrief — **if you do the work only in the room, nothing changes on your team**.
- One conversation you have been putting off, had before session two. You choose which; nobody will ask what it was about.
- Your calendar for the fortnight before session four, printed and unedited. Yes, including the meetings you are slightly embarrassed by.
- Tell your own manager you are on this programme, and tell them one thing you want from them while it runs.

THE RULE OF THE ROOM

AGREED BY COHORT 13 AND INHERITED BY YOU

What is said about a **named person** stays in the room. What is said about a **situation** may leave it — that is how nine managers learn from four practices. No laptops between 09:30 and 12:30; your team can reach you at the break, and telling them so in advance is itself part of the work. Bring a problem that is still messy: the tidy ones have already been solved and there is nothing left in them for anyone.

IN THIS WORKBOOK

SEVEN PAGES · WRITE IN ALL OF THEM

PAGE 2	How the programme runs — sessions, expectations, the rule of the room	Here
SESSION 1	The team you inherited — one row per person, and the conversation you are avoiding	p 3
SESSION 2	The one-to-one worth having — a worked agenda, then yours	p 4
SESSION 3	Feedback you can say out loud — before, the frame, after	p 5
SESSION 4	Where your time goes — the two-by-two and the hand-off record	p 6
CLOSE	Your ninety days — three commitments, the dates, what to read	p 7

SESSION 01

The team you inherited

TUESDAY 14 APRIL 09:30 – 12:30 BRING A LIST OF WHO REPORTS TO YOU

YOU WILL LEAVE THIS SESSION ABLE TO

- Name what each person on your team needs from you that they are not getting
- Separate what you can change in thirty days from what you cannot change at all
- Have, this week, one conversation you have been avoiding since you were promoted

WORKED EXAMPLE — ONE ROW, WRITTEN HONESTLY

FROM COHORT 13, USED WITH PERMISSION

WHO	UNMISTAKABLY GOOD AT	NEEDS FROM ME AND IS NOT GETTING	WHAT I DO NOT YET KNOW
Sam O. 18 months in the team	Turning a vague brief into a plan faster than anyone else here	A decision on the Container Co. scope. He has asked twice and I have said "let me think" twice.	Whether he applied for this job and did not get it

Two things make that row useful. It is **specific enough to act on this week**, and the last column admits something the manager does not know. A row that says "great team player, needs more support" is a row about nobody.

EXERCISE 1.1 — ONE ROW EACH

EVERYONE WHO REPORTS TO YOU · NO EXCEPTIONS

WHO	UNMISTAKABLY GOOD AT	NEEDS FROM ME AND IS NOT GETTING	WHAT I DO NOT YET KNOW

EXERCISE 1.2 — THE ONE YOU ARE AVOIDING

HAVE IT BEFORE SESSION TWO

Which conversation have you not had, and what are you actually afraid will happen?

Write the fear down, not the excuse. "No time" is an excuse; "they will resign" is a fear, and it is checkable.

WITH WHOM	BY WHEN	WHERE IT WILL HAPPEN

SESSION 02

The one-to-one worth having

TUESDAY 28 APRIL 09:30 – 12:30 BRING LAST MONTH'S INVITES

YOU WILL LEAVE THIS SESSION ABLE TO

- Run a twenty-five minute one-to-one that the other person sets half the agenda for
- Ask at least one question you do not already know the answer to
- Close with one action each, named and dated, instead of "let's pick this up"

WORKED EXAMPLE — TWENTY-FIVE MINUTES

WHY EACH PART SITS WHERE IT DOES

MINUTES	WHAT HAPPENS	WHY IT IS IN THAT ORDER
0 – 3	"How has the week been?" — then you stop talking	The only stretch they can steer without asking permission first
3 – 12	Their two items, sent to you the day before	If they never bring items, the meeting is yours, and they know it
12 – 20	Your one item, named in the invite	One. Three items is a status report wearing a conversation's clothes
20 – 24	A question you do not know the answer to	This is where you find out what is actually going on in the team
24 – 25	One action each, with a date, written down	Otherwise you have the same conversation again in a fortnight

FIVE QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

PICK ONE · DO NOT ASK ALL FIVE

- 1 "What would you change about how we work, if I said yes to anything?"
- 2 "What did you spend time on last week that you do not think mattered?"
- 3 "Who here is doing something you would like to be doing?"
- 4 "What have I asked for that turned out to be harder than I made it sound?"
- 5 "What decision are you waiting on me for right now?"

EXERCISE 2.1 — DESIGN YOURS

SEND IT TO ONE PERSON BEFORE FRIDAY

MINUTES	WHAT HAPPENS	WHY IT IS IN THAT ORDER

WHO YOU WILL TRY IT WITH

DATE OF THAT ONE-TO-ONE

SESSION 03

Feedback you can say out loud

TUESDAY 19 MAY 09:30 – 12:30 YOU WILL BE ASKED TO SAY IT IN THE ROOM

YOU WILL LEAVE THIS SESSION ABLE TO

- Give a piece of corrective feedback in ninety seconds without softening it into nothing
- Separate what you observed from the story you have built on top of it
- Ask for feedback in a way that returns something other than "you are doing great"

BEFORE — WHAT YOU ACTUALLY SAID

WORD FOR WORD, INCLUDING THE BITS YOU REGRET

Write down what you said last time this came up — or what you said instead, to avoid it.

THE FRAME

FOUR PARTS · ABOUT FORTY SECONDS EACH

PART	WHAT IT HAS TO DO	WORKED EXAMPLE — A DECK THAT WENT LATE
Observation	What you saw or heard, with nothing added and nobody characterised	"The Brightline deck went to the client at 17:40 on Friday. The deadline we agreed was Thursday noon."
Impact	What it cost, concretely, to a named person or a named client	"Alex spent Saturday morning on revisions, and the client opened it before either of us had checked it."
Story	Your interpretation — offered as yours, not as the fact of the matter	"The story I am telling myself is that you did not think the deadline was real."
Question	Hand it back, then stop talking and let the silence do its work	"What am I missing?"

AFTER — WRITE IT AGAIN

SAME SITUATION, FOUR PARTS, OUT LOUD AFTER LUNCH

SCORE YOURSELF

1 NOT YET · 4 ON A GOOD DAY · 7 RELIABLY

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I can name the behaviour without characterising the person	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I say the difficult sentence in the first two minutes, not the last	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I can sit through the silence after I have said it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I ask for feedback and get back something I can use	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

SESSION 04

Where your time goes

TUESDAY 2 JUNE 09:30 – 13:00 BRING THE PRINTED CALENDAR

YOU WILL LEAVE THIS SESSION ABLE TO

- Put a number on how your week actually splits, from evidence rather than memory
- Move one recurring commitment off your plate permanently, with a name against it
- Say no to something this month, in writing, to a person who expected a yes

EXERCISE 4.1 — TAKE THE FORTNIGHT APART

EVERY RECURRING ITEM GOES IN EXACTLY ONE BOX

ONLY I CAN DO IT · HAS TO HAPPEN THIS FORTNIGHT

Do it, and defend the time

Put it in the calendar today as a real block with a real name, not "focus".

SOMEONE ELSE COULD · HAS TO HAPPEN THIS FORTNIGHT

Hand it over this week

Use the record below. Handing over without a date is just hoping.

ONLY I CAN DO IT · CAN WAIT

Schedule it once, properly

If it slips twice, it was never in this box. Move it down and say so.

SOMEONE ELSE COULD · CAN WAIT

Stop, and tell someone you stopped

The hard half is the telling. Silence looks like it is still happening.

EXERCISE 4.2 — THE HAND-OFF RECORD

ONE LINE IS A DECISION · A PROMISE IS NOT

WHAT YOU ARE HANDING OVER	TO WHOM	BY WHEN	WHAT THEY NEED FROM YOU FIRST
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What will you say no to this month, and to whom?

Write the sentence you will actually send. If you cannot write it here, you will not send it there.

Bring the sentence to the July check-in whether or not you sent it. **Not sending it is also data**, and it is usually the most useful thing anyone brings.

CLOSE

Your ninety days

FROM 3 JUNE REVIEW 9 JULY THEN FOUNDATIONS II, IN SEPTEMBER

Nothing here is collected and nothing here is graded. The only test is whether somebody who reports to you would notice a difference by the middle of July — so write the three commitments as things **another person could see you doing**, not as intentions.

THREE COMMITMENTS

WRITTEN IN THE ROOM ON 2 JUNE

#	WHAT YOU WILL DO, IN WORDS SOMEONE ELSE COULD CHECK	BY WHEN	WHO WILL ASK YOU ABOUT IT
1			
2			
3			

THE DATES

PUT ALL FOUR IN YOUR CALENDAR BEFORE YOU LEAVE

DATE	WHAT HAPPENS	WHO OWNS IT
Thu 4 June	Send your coach the one thing you handed over, and what happened to it	You
Fri 19 June	Twenty minutes with your own manager on what changed and what you need next	You
Thu 9 July	Sixty-minute check-in with Dana Kohl, in person or on video	Dana Kohl
Mon 3 Aug	Applications open for Foundations II — Leading through other leaders	Programme office

READ THESE, AND ONLY THESE

FOUR THINGS, NOT A BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note MC-N-118, The first ninety days	Meridian internal, six pages — this programme with the exercises taken out
Radical Candor	Chapters 3 and 6 only. The rest you can skip without losing the argument
The Meridian one-to-one template	On the intranet, editable, currently used by forty of our managers
What Got You Here Won't Get You There	Read the chapter on whichever habit you recognised in session three

WHAT YOUR TEAM WILL HEAR

SAY IT BEFORE THE MIDDLE OF JUNE

Which of the three will your team hear about from you, in your own words, and when?

A commitment nobody has been told about is a private resolution. Write the sentence and the date you will say it.

AFTERWARDS

BOTH OF US WOULD RATHER HEAR FROM YOU EARLY

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