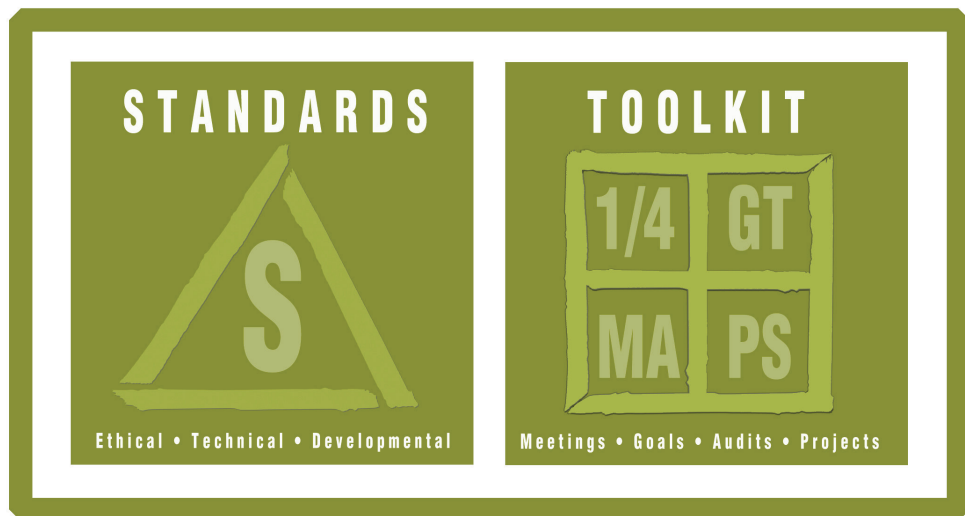


PART I

Overview & Orientation

STANDARDS-BASED MANAGEMENT



ATOMS & ORCHESTRAS



*The Case for
Standards-Based
Management*

*How to Be a
Better Boss*

Derrick Van Mell

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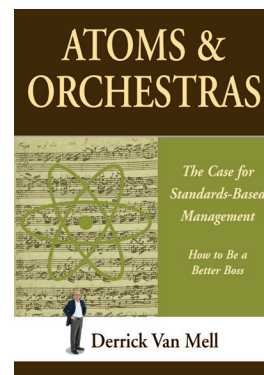
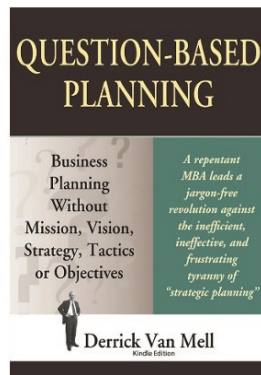
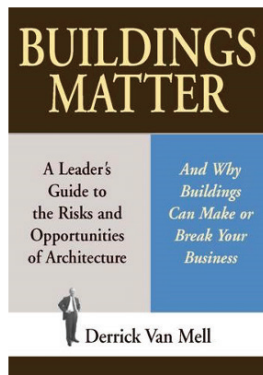
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About the Author

Before founding the Center for Management Terms & Practices in 2017, Derrick Van Mell was a management consultant for 25 years and worked with hundreds of managers and board members in all types and sizes of organizations. His specialty was planning major capital projects. Derrick has a BA in Economics, an MBA, and an MA in English. He's the author of dozens of published articles and the books *Buildings Matter* and *Question-Based Planning*. Derrick has spoken throughout the US and in Europe and Asia. His passion is helping people work together on something that makes the world a better place.



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parts of this book.



1 • A Cause and a Calling

If you're a manager, how would it feel to be trusted and admired by every employee and executive? If you're an executive—a manager of managers—what if you could delegate goals and projects with perfect confidence? How would your organization benefit by your giving it a reputation for having great managers?

This book is for managers with several years of experience who have chosen—or are considering—management as their career path or calling. These are people who care about their teams and simply put, want to be better bosses and are willing to work at it. This book will help them as they grow throughout their careers.

The personal rewards are immense. We've all had bad bosses, but I hope you've had a boss that helped you fulfill your potential and provided you with meaningful work in a trusting and collaborative culture. Having been a great manager is a career well spent.

Our cause is to help managers create safe, inclusive, and rewarding work for everyone.

Adopting the standard terms, tools, and practices gives managers a common language, which improves communication and builds a culture of trust and collaboration. Using standards creates transparency in setting priorities and making decisions. Transparency fosters inclusion and a feeling of ownership. Sharing a language is also essential to forging relationships up, down, and cross-functionally. Everyone wants to “be on the same page.” Standards-Based Management is that page.

In this book, you'll also see the measurable benefits of applying management's ethical, technical, and developmental standards to a kit of four one-page tools.

Applying these standards through The General Management Toolkit creates a framework that substantially improves meetings, margins, and morale. Standards-Based Management blends science into the art of management.



You can read the chapters in this book in almost any order, but the first section is about the framework of general management’s ethical, technical, and developmental **standards**. All the chapters end with ideas for individual and group activities and three good discussion questions.

Before closing with ideas for testing and implementing Standards-Based Management, Chapter 8 is about **the promise and rewards of service**. I hope you’ll take up this challenge and opportunity.

Management ability is the best way to find and capitalize on growth opportunities for each employee and, through them, the organization.

Next chapter: We’ll prove that standards can change the world.



Great Managers are Question Heroes

I was in a meeting helping a tech billionaire plan her next building. The topic was lighting, and the architect, engineer, lighting consultant, contractor, and I were engaged in the usual “dodgeball meeting,” blasting each other with our ideas and dodging everybody else’s. The client was tilted back in her chair next to me, saying nothing, scribbling in a small notebook.

After fifteen minutes, she leaned in to put her notebook in front of everyone. “I just want to understand the questions we’re trying to answer. What about these three?” We peered at her questions and said, no, no, that’s not right. She said “OK” and tilted back in her chair. She scratched out her list, and we went back to dodgeball. Fifteen more minutes go by and she leans in again: “How about these three questions?” We all said, “Yeah! That’s right. That’s what we’re trying to answer!” and the meeting ended then and there. Off we went, full of confidence.

Two days later I’m walking down the street and then stopped like someone had hit me in the head with a two-by-four. I’d realized we never literally answered the questions, but we all knew just what to do.

A big theme of this book is how to be a question hero, the manager everyone counts on to ask just the right question at just the right time.

2 - Atoms and Orchestras: Two Standards That Changed the World

To prove the value of standards, let's time-travel to February 17, 1869, when Russian chemist Dimitri Mendeleev had the most valuable idea anyone has ever had: the periodic table of elements. Without this structured standard, we wouldn't have iPhones, Tylenol, jet fuel, shrink wrap, fusion, or Netflix.

Atoms: The Periodic Table

The periodic table gave scientists and engineers a common language so they could collaborate on making blockbuster molecules. But Mendeleev hadn't just cataloged the atoms: he'd peered into the inner workings of the physical universe and, through his understanding, built a foundation under the science of chemistry.

Starting in the upper left with Hydrogen, it first organizes the elements by row based on their atomic number (the number of protons). This sets their key physical characteristics. The

1	2											18					
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18		
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36
37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54
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127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144

Stunning in its simplicity.

table’s columns are “groups,” atoms sharing the same number of electrons, which determines how they bond with other atoms—how they become stuff. The table is also color-coded by state of matter: solid, liquid, or gas. What if a business’s organization chart was as clear and consistent?

Mendeleyev’s organizing insight has been proven out: with no changes to its design, the Table has expanded from 63 elements in 1869 to 118 today.

What if all the elements of management—finance, human resources, operations, marketing, and so on—were as thoughtfully structured on one page? But we’re getting ahead of ourselves...

Innovation sparks innovation. Ben Stein wrote in 2019 for the National Institute of Standards and Technology that “If you like engineering, the periodic table is the ultimate canvas for innovation.” Marie Curie won the Nobel Prize again in 1911 for discovering polonium and radium, used for cancer therapy. It was her second Nobel.

Before turning to management, let’s talk about another global standard: musical notation.

Orchestras: Musical Notation



In 1813, Beethoven composed a fifteen-minute symphony celebrating Wellington’s victory at the Battle of Vittoria. It was praised as one of his best works. Arranged for

an orchestra of fifty, the standard notation let his musicians perform together even though they spoke different languages, played different instruments, and hadn’t heard the music before. This standard notation allows global collaborations we now take for granted.

The first form of musical notation dates from before 1400 BCE, one of the oldest systems of human thought. But the notation used by Beethoven was created in about 1000 CE by Guido of Arezzo, a Benedictine monk, to standardize and harmonize church music. More than a millennium later, the same standard system records almost all world music. It’s flexible and scalable; it’s written and read by street musicians as well as by the Vienna Philharmonic.

Like the periodic table, musical notation created a foundation that enables communication, collaboration, and innovation.

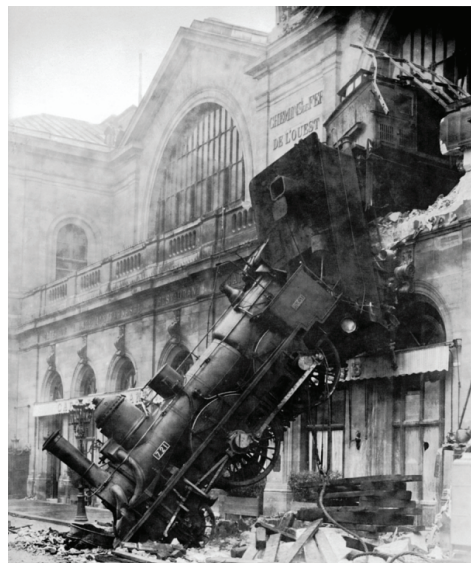
Next, we'll take up the central question of this book: What if managers had their own foundational system of standards?



3 - The Value of Management Standards: Morale and Margins

The World Bank reported in 2020 there were 2.7 billion people working in organizations of some kind. In other words, 2.7 billion people have a boss or are a boss. How many of them would you say are enduring faulty communications, numbing meetings, and disengaged co-workers every day?

The lack of ethical, technical, and developmental standards for management has been the root cause of these common and costly problems. As we'll see, standard management terms, tools, and practices now equip bosses for communicating clearly and delegating with confidence. But the benefits aren't just qualitative: using standards is profitable. A 1% improvement in management ability can boost margins by 10%.



Not well managed

The Case for Standards-Based Management

It's necessary to spell out the case for Standards-Based Management because some people don't believe that the terms, tools, and practices of management can be tamed and standardized. The four underlying ideas are:

1. Management is a legitimate profession with enormous financial and social value.
2. Management does not have to be chaotic; it can be sensible and straightforward.
3. Like law, engineering, and medicine, management can be learned systematically.
4. Management is a calling, a chance to help others reach their full potential.

To be clear, these standards aren't like the technical standards a plumber would use, but are standards of behavior. You're dealing with people, after all.

Management chaos is not inevitable. Without foundational standards as in chemistry and music, management is undisciplined and chaotic, and bosses get parodied in "The Office" TV shows and "Dilbert" cartoons. Lacking standards, too many people with a manager's title think the skills they need can be learned by sitting through a few workshops, videos, and a bunch of meetings. They're kidding themselves.

Delegation and Trust are the Tests of Management Strength

Margins, employee retention, customer satisfaction, and growth are the ultimate indicators of good management, but they're lagging indicators. Someone who wants to look ahead, like an experienced board member, will wonder, "Does everyone have a clear and compelling sense of direction? How do people treat each other? Is there a culture of ethical behavior, trust, and respect?" A sign of low trust and, therefore, weak delegation is a super-abundance of reporting and supervisory layers.

Board members are keenly sensitive to whether employees are genuinely engaged in the work, if they're inspired, empowered, and happy. They also watch for how well meetings are run: they look to see if the managers provide focus, facilitate honest discussion, take criticism, and are ready with reasoned and realistic alternatives. The board members can then lean back, confident the organization honors everyone's time and contributions.

But above all, board members want to see if tasks, projects, functions, and goals are crisply delegated. Managers who can't delegate aren't managers. They're bottlenecks.

Delegation occurs at two levels. The first is the hand-offs from delegators to delegates. Good managers provide clear direction and expectations, sufficient time and money,

and just the right degree of practical and moral support. The General Management Toolkit (page 36) makes it easy to delegate a project or process.



I got it!

The tools show on one page why the project or process supports the strategic plan, how it connects to everything else, what time and money are needed, and how success is evaluated. The tools are the batons in the handoff.

The General Management Index—management’s technical standard (page 25)—also supports delegation at the organizational level. It provides everyone with a common language of terms and practices. That improves communication, and that leads to confident, creative, and inspired collaboration. Employees crave that kind of work and trust.

Standards + Tools = Standards-Based Management

This book will show you how to apply the three management standards using the General Management Toolkit described in Chapter 7. Standards-Based Management supports confident and effective delegation, letting you get the most from everyone’s contributions.

- Ethical standard: The Pledge of Managerial Power (pages 19–20)
- Technical standard: The Index (page 24)
- Developmental standard: The Milwaukee Model (page 29)

These standards aren’t rigid or static. The review board at the Center for Management Terms & Practices is responsible for evolving the input from the world community of conscientious managers.

Defining Key Terms, Including “Manager”

Everyone knows at least generally what a teacher does, what a nurse does, what a lawyer does. But if you ask ten people, “What is a manager and what do they do?” you’ll get ten mumbled answers.

In Chapter 6, we’ll learn the standard description of the manager’s role. But in the meantime, here’s clarity we can start building on:

- Management: The science and profession of running an organization
- Manager: Someone who helps people work together
- Leader: Someone who inspires others to take a risk

- Generalist: A manager who works cross-functionally, often with profit and loss responsibility
- Supervisor: A synonym for manager. Supervision is part of the manager's job.

Managers and leaders are not different people. Except for Steve Jobs of Apple, virtually no organization has a manager who isn't a leader, at least to some degree. It's flattering to be called a leader, but you can't be a leader unless you can manage. This book proves that being a good manager should be deeply respected, which starts by finally making clear just what a manager does and knows and contributes. See Chapter 6 about the Milwaukee Model. In that chapter, we elaborate on leadership ability and how it fits with the manager's job.

Why Haven't There Been Standards for Management Before?

The International Standards Organization (ISO) hosts hundreds of standards for quality and sustainability, and the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) oversees thousands of standards for safety, software, and assembly. There are standards development organizations (SDOs) protecting every sector and industry—except for general management.

If standards are so valuable, and if every industry has them, why haven't there been standards for management itself?

First, there's money in jargon. Gurus rake in billions relabeling old ideas, promising breakthroughs to make management a snap. One wonders why Harvard Business School didn't set the standards for management when it opened in 1908—but there's academic reputation in jargon, too. Though there are still breakthroughs in general management, they're rare: there's little in these standards you wouldn't find in the businesses of ancient China, Venice, or Rome.

Second, competitive managers dislike sharing ideas that give them an edge. Sharing was difficult anyway when there was no standards body to vet and recognize their contributions.

But the tallest barrier to adopting standards is fear of accountability. When managers commit to a public standard, they fear failing publicly. But it's a false fear. Like chemists, musicians, and coders, managers are much more likely to succeed when they follow sensible and accepted standards—like the musicians in Beethoven's orchestra.

APPENDICES

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