

Life at Nuance

The Secrets to Being a Great Manager

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Whether you're a manager now or you aspire to be one someday, hear how a Nuance manager, Kristian, enables his team to innovate, embraces different points of view, ensures they feel safe, and encourages their development. He shares his advice, examples, and experiences - learn how he navigates change and get ideas to help you be a better manager.

[Amanda Carroll](#) joined Nuance in 2019 and works as the Senior Manager, Leadership and Management Development. She is passionate about adult learning, organizational leadership, and helping leaders

develop their skills and understand their impact on the employees and the company. She has her BA in Psychology and Spanish from University of New Hampshire, J.D. from Suffolk Law, and M.ED in Adult Learning from Northeastern University. She's currently a Doctoral candidate at Northeastern and hopes to complete her dissertation in Organizational Leadership Studies next year.

Harvard professor [Frances Frei defines leadership](#) as “making others better as a result of our presence, and then the most enduring part of it, the sustainability, is having that last into our absence.” At Nuance, our leaders lead by example, create curiosity, and drive impact and outcomes – and that’s just what Kristian, Manager, [Professional Services in our Enterprise Division](#), does each day, whether he’s helping his team through times of change or ensuring all voices are heard in team discussions. Amanda Carroll, Senior Principal Talent & Organizational Development Manager, asked Kristian to share his thoughts and advice – keep reading to hear how he successfully manages his team.

Think Big is one of our Nuance Values, which is very fitting for a Technology company! How do you enable your employees to innovate and be creative in their roles?

Innovation and creativity often come from a place of necessity, like when we do something for the first time or find ourselves challenged against the usual time, cost, and quality boundaries. When faced with such challenges, it helps if my team feels that they can come to me with their suggestions to talk through and explore it in more detail. As a manager, I am open to different points of view or suggestions that I wouldn’t necessarily make. I also encourage an environment that allows my team to take calculated risks and does not punish failure but recognizes the effort and the lessons learned. In Nuance, we embrace our ‘Think Big’ and ‘Fail fast, fail forward’ Values, and I really believe that they go together really well.

Another way I encourage innovation and creativity is by giving my team ‘side projects’ that allows them to take time away from the pressurized environment of their day job and provides space to breathe with an activity that is not bound by deadlines or process. Finally, I encourage my team to work with others with different backgrounds or approaches or to simply spend time talking through ideas, is also a good way inspire them think differently.

How do you build psychological safety in your team?

The word ‘build’ is key to this. That feeling of safety can come immediately with some people and with others, it can take time. I build safety in a variety of ways, but it always starts with creating a rapport with my team. Talking to them as individuals rather than them as ‘resources’ is critical as it allows me to discuss shared experiences and it can often lead to empathy. When somebody empathizes with you, it can start to build trust, which provides that basic psychological safety and must be continuously worked on and maintained. When a challenge or an issue arises on my team, I listen and provide direction where appropriate and I help the individual to find their own way through. I also encourage my team to attend ‘skip level meetings’ to give my team the benefit of meeting with senior leaders, to create another outlet for them to share their fears or concerns and get reassurance of the direction of the larger team.

How do you ensure all voices on your team are heard and that you embrace different perspectives?

Knowing the characteristics of my team in terms of styles and approaches really helps. As individuals, we all have differing levels of comfort when speaking up in front of others. The key to managing the group situation is to ensure that there is the feeling of a level playing field. Some people are more gregarious, so the challenge is to ensure that they have their moment but to also to create boundaries, so they know when their moment is coming to an end, and you need to move on. Equally, I ensure that those who are not so comfortable speaking recognize that this is a safe space, and their opinion is heard and valued. If they are still reluctant, I give them time to think about it and come back to it later in the meeting or in a subsequent meeting. Another strategy is to pick up points in my one-on-one meetings because individuals can be more reluctant in an open forum. As manager, it really helps to play devil’s advocate and challenge perspectives from other’s points of view, to avoid conflict and provide the psychological safety for my team.

Talk about the importance of employee development and how you support it? Share specific examples.

My employee’s development is hugely beneficial for them and the organization. As a manager, I encourage and support it, but the employee is responsible for it. One of the first challenges is for both of us to agree on what constitutes ‘development’ for that individual. It’s not the same for everyone and it’s not always through the traditional ‘promotion’ route. When I understand the individuals’ aspirations and how I can align them with business’s objectives, I am able to work with them on a career growth plan. The individual talks through their longer term aspirations which can then be aligned with the short-terms goals to help them get there. When promotion is the goal, it can be a challenge to explain that there isn’t a simple set of boxes that need to be ticked to be promoted. The individual may need a broader set of experiences or more in-depth practice in a particular area. When I identify these areas, I set goals so that when opportunity arrives, they are in the best possible place to be considered for promotion or progression.

As an example, I work in an interesting part of the business that, amongst other things, had previously provided two distinct technologies to our customers. It became clearer a few years ago we as a company

were not only well down the road of converging those technologies but also, our customers were expecting it. I took this opportunity to ensure that my team were cross skilled, so they were not considered just 'x' or 'y' specialists but as all around experienced and ready. This was challenging for the team but presented them with opportunities. Some moved from working on a technology where they had built up their reputation and now, they had to take a step back and learn from others around them. That initial step back was hard but over time, this was a big step forward. It was crucial that I kept reminding my team of the big picture, and that growth isn't always a straight vertical. A career spans many, many years, not just a few months.

Change is part of our everyday – how do you lead and support people through change?

A common cliché is 'embrace change,' and like all good clichés, there's truth in it. At Nuance, we work in a constantly changing environment, whether that's with the ongoing innovation of our products or services, or corporate level changes such as the way we assess and manage performance. In my role as a manager, it's important that I am there to listen to my team and understand their concerns. I will alleviate concerns when possible, and it's also critical that I don't promise an outcome that I have no control over. This means being honest, which goes back to the point around 'psychological safety' and achieving that through trust.

It's also important that I treat your team as individuals, as it's highly likely that everyone is at different emotional stages during change. Excitement can lead to nerves and fear, and alternatively, initial fear can lead to excitement. Being able to tailor my discussions with each team member helps them to understand that I hear their voice and will help them to feel like they can 'embrace the change' and be excited by the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead, rather than fear them.

What advice do you have for new managers or those who aspire to be a manager?

"My advice to new or aspiring managers is to **'be patient.'** Develop a rapport with your team, understand their individual characteristics, develop and be comfortable with your style of management, and then enjoy the satisfaction of seeing your team develop over a period of time."

We can sometimes see becoming a manager as the next step on the promotion ladder, but the reality is, it's a change in both career direction and mindset. Individual

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need to put others before me and so my satisfaction tends to come in the aftermath of the success of my team members.

So, my advice to new or aspiring managers is to 'be patient.' Develop a rapport with your team, understand their individual characteristics, develop and be comfortable with your style of management, and then enjoy the satisfaction of seeing your team develop over a period of time. It all takes time... and if you use that time wisely, you will get enjoy knowing that not only are you furthering your own career, but you've developed other people's careers as well, which is an unbelievable privilege.

Tags: [Team Nuance](#), [Leadership principles](#)

More Information

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