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Being a manager

My career began as an apprentice HGV technician with a general haulage company; I remained a technician in road transport engineering for 16 years. My first supervisory role came not long after I had served out my apprenticeship, and from there, I gained promotions through to becoming head of fleet [another high-flying technician is profiled on pp28-9].

I believe that there are two types of technicians. There are the fastidious ones, who have their own way of working. Good habits breed good engineers, and I was fortunate to work with some fantastic people during my formative years.

I also know engineers who had a rougher way of working! Their approach was definitely suspect. I was – and am – of the opinion that technicians need to be clinical when dealing with engineering components that work to very fine tolerances. If you work to poor standards and ignore cleanliness, you've got a problem.

Having a technical background helped me during my career progression. The funny thing is, good fleet managers don't always have to have a technical background; a sound management background with good leadership skills, can be just as effective in engineering. Also, not all good technicians will make good managers. Get it wrong by developing a culture of resistance, an embittered environment or by losing the confidence of the workforce, and they may find their own position at risk.

When I was promoted into my first supervisory role, I came to manage the friends and colleagues that I had been working beside, some of whom were 20 or 30 years older than me. I learned that I could continue to have a great working relationship with them, but I had to apply my management grit when needed.

My mantra is that my staff and I work as a team. Yes, I head up the team, but I also have lots of responsibility, legally and organisationally. And without the team's help, I can't accomplish what needs to be done.



Michael Sweetmore
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