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Frustration Free  
*Technical* Management



*Proven Techniques to Thrive  
as a Manager*

JARIE BOLANDER

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*FRUSTRATION FREE TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT*

# **Frustration Free Technical Management**

**Proven Techniques to Thrive as a Manager**

**Jarie Bolander**

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*JARIE BOLANDER*

## Table of Contents

<b><u>Introduction: Frustrated? So Was I.....</u></b>	<b><u>1</u></b>
<b><u>Personal: Helping Yourself Succeed.....</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>
<u>Frustration #1: Doing Too Much.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Frustration #2: Impromptu Status Meetings And Updates.....</u>	<u>10</u>
<u>Frustration #3: Need More Data.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Frustration #4: The Constant “What’s Going On?”.....</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Frustration #5: Being Micromanaged.....</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>Frustration #6: Changing Requirements.....</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>Frustration #7: Can’t Get The Straight Story.....</u>	<u>22</u>
<u>Frustration #8: Email Overload.....</u>	<u>25</u>
<b><u>Organizational: Organizing For Success.....</u></b>	<b><u>29</u></b>
<u>Frustration #9: Analysis Paralysis.....</u>	<u>31</u>
<u>Frustration #10: Problems Take Forever To Solve.....</u>	<u>34</u>
<u>Frustration #11: Morale Is Low.....</u>	<u>39</u>
<u>Frustration #12: Feature Creep.....</u>	<u>41</u>
<u>Frustration #13: Making The Same Mistakes.....</u>	<u>47</u>
<u>Frustration #14: Cross Functional Meltdowns.....</u>	<u>49</u>
<u>Frustration #15: Re-solving Fixed Problems.....</u>	<u>52</u>
<u>Frustration #16: Projects Take Forever.....</u>	<u>57</u>
<u>Frustration #17: Too Busy For 1-1’s.....</u>	<u>62</u>
<b><u>Emotional: Developing Interpersonal Skills.....</u></b>	<b><u>65</u></b>
<u>Frustration #18: Overly Negative Interactions.....</u>	<u>67</u>
<u>Frustration #19: Information Hoarding.....</u>	<u>70</u>
<u>Frustration #20: Problem Employees.....</u>	<u>73</u>
<u>Frustration #21: Staff Motivation.....</u>	<u>76</u>
<u>Frustration #22: Brilliant Person But A Total Asshole.....</u>	<u>84</u>
<u>Frustration #23: Finger Pointing.....</u>	<u>89</u>
<u>Frustration #24: Downsizing.....</u>	<u>91</u>

JARIE BOLANDER

<u>Frustration #25: Group / Company Shutdown.....</u>	<u>96</u>
<u>Frustration #26: Clueless Senior Managers.....</u>	<u>98</u>
<u>Frustration #27: Contentious Discussions.....</u>	<u>101</u>
<u>Frustration #28: Work / Life Balance.....</u>	<u>104</u>
<b><u>Managerial: Helping Others Succeed.....</u></b>	<b><u>107</u></b>
<u>Frustration #29: Overwhelmed Recently Promoted Manager.....</u>	<u>109</u>
<u>Frustration #30: Assigned Tasks Take Forever.....</u>	<u>114</u>
<u>Frustration #31: Lack Of Resources.....</u>	<u>117</u>
<u>Frustration #32: Predicting Schedules Is Impossible.....</u>	<u>119</u>
<u>Frustration #33: Promotion Passover.....</u>	<u>125</u>
<u>Frustration #34: Politics Is A Waste Of Time.....</u>	<u>129</u>
<u>Frustration #35: Burn Out.....</u>	<u>132</u>
<u>Frustration #36: Reorganization.....</u>	<u>135</u>
<u>Frustration #37: Mergers and Acquisitions.....</u>	<u>137</u>
<u>Frustration #38: Consumed With Trivial Decisions.....</u>	<u>142</u>
<b><u>Sustaining: Remaining Frustration Free.....</u></b>	<b><u>145</u></b>
<u>Skill #1: The Platinum Rule We Don't Even Know.....</u>	<u>147</u>
<u>Skill #2: Spend Time With People.....</u>	<u>149</u>
<u>Skill #3: Look Out For Your Staff.....</u>	<u>151</u>
<u>Skill #4: Remember the Little Things.....</u>	<u>154</u>
<u>Skill #5: Respect the Dead.....</u>	<u>157</u>
<u>Skill #6: Focus on the Incremental Solution.....</u>	<u>160</u>
<u>Skill #7: Wait for Something to Happen.....</u>	<u>163</u>
<u>Skill #8: Wins the Battle, War and Peace.....</u>	<u>165</u>
<u>Skill #9: It Takes A Village Without The Idiots.....</u>	<u>168</u>
<u>Skill #10: Failure Is Always An Option.....</u>	<u>172</u>
<u>Skill #11: Practice, Practice, Practice.....</u>	<u>174</u>
<b><u>Afterword.....</u></b>	<b><u>177</u></b>

## **Introduction: Frustrated? So Was I**

But not anymore.

By applying simple techniques you too can become frustration free just like me. The trick is to figure out what frustrates you and eliminate it. Simple. You have done the first step already. You have the desire to be frustration free. That is a great first start. The act of recognizing your frustrations will naturally lead to resolutions. Good work! Let's begin by briefly reviewing the main sources of technical management frustration. In general, the frustrations technical managers deal with gravitate towards:

1. **Poorly Trained Managers:** Most technical managers don't really have the necessary training to properly manage. They usually get thrust into the role because of their superior technical ability and their ability to get things done. Just because you have superior technical ability and you get things done does not make you a good manager. A good manager makes his staff productive. Creating a good manager takes training – just like creating an engineer.
2. **Pace of Technological Change:** Technology changes so rapidly that it's hard to keep up. Most technical managers, deep down, want to be technically relevant. They struggle to keep up. This struggle can put management skills on the back burner. On top of that, managing the pace of change requires constant training of staff.
3. **Myopic Focus on Getting Technical Tasks Done:** Technical work is not the only type of work yet most technical managers only focus on getting technical tasks



done. There is a lot more to managing a team than just ensuring the work gets done. No thought is put into how the organization can improve moral or how additional requirements may effect the solution. It's just grind away at the task list.

4. **Unpredictable Development Schedules:** Innovation is hard to schedule. This makes predicating when products will be completed nearly impossible. The ensuing tension wears on the staff and creates some of the most frustrating interactions managers have to deal with.

Freedom from frustration comes from tackling them one at a time. Systematically working your way towards the solution will allow you to reduce your frustrations immediately. To facilitate this, I came up with a simple memory method to focus on the different skill areas that frustrations cluster around. Once you improve these skill areas, then sustaining a frustration free management career is a snap.

### **The Solution: POEMS**

This book is laid out according to the POEMS method. POEMS stands for Personal, Organizational, Emotional, Managerial and Sustaining. The first four sections represent the main categories that frustrations fall into. The last teaches skills to maintain your frustration free existence. With POEMS, frustration free technical management can be achieved. Each part has a list of common frustrations that can be eliminated by using the techniques presented. The last category, sustaining, contains methods that will allow you to remain frustration free. A brief part synopsis of the POEMS method is presented below:

- **Part 1: Personal:** Eliminating your frustrations starts right now. This section gives practical tools that you can apply today. No need to get permission from corporate or your boss. These techniques are all up to you. You can control what you do. That is the first set to being

*FRUSTRATION FREE TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT*

frustration free – helping yourself.

- **Part 2: Organizational:** Once you have straightened out your own house, it's time to take a look around and figure out what organizational structures generate frustration. This step will require a little more help from other people. Don't worry about it. Once you have demonstrated that your life is in order, it's much easier to get others to change.
- **Part 3: Emotional:** Organizational changes can only get you so far. Humans are emotional beings who don't always act rationally. Frustrations grow exponentially when tempers flare. Luckily, there are ways to deal with these difficult emotional situations. It's not easy. It's not quick but it's effective when done right.
- **Part 4: Managerial:** The whole goal of management is to make your staff successful while attaining the goals of the company. It's not about you or your career. Managerial skills will allow you to excel by helping others succeed. Your career is important but your main job is making your staff and company successful. Everything else should fall into place.
- **Part 5: Sustaining:** Remaining frustration free is simple. Now that you understand your frustrations and have successfully dealt with them, the sustaining skills allow to you maintain your new frustration free existence. These techniques eliminate the frustrations before they start. By continuously applying these skills, you and your team will be frustration free and more productive.

*JARIE BOLANDER*

Now that you have a good understanding of the POEMS method, it's time to jump in and get to work. The first four parts has a list of common frustrations along with a methods to solve them. As you read through each section, you will start to see how applying these techniques will eliminate your present and future frustrations. The last section then presents skills that will sustain your frustration free existence. Applying all of these techniques will allow you to become frustration free!

*FRUSTRATION FREE TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT*

## **Personal: Helping Yourself Succeed**

*JARIE BOLANDER*

## **Frustration #5: Being Micromanaged**

### **Symptoms**

- *Constant asking about status*
- *Dictated details about how to do a job*
- *Need approval for trivial things*
- *You get work calls while on vacation*
- *Nothing is ever good enough*

### **Solution #5: Managing Your Boss**

By far, the most important work relationship you have is with your boss. They literally hold the key to your advancement. Fostering a good relationship with your boss requires that you understand and ensure that whatever you do, reflects favorably on them and the company. Nothing will harpoon your career quicker than repeatedly making your boss look bad. This is career suicide. This does not mean you sugar coat bad news or keep information from them but before any good or bad news goes public, always make sure they know about it first. You never want to surprise your boss in front of anyone. This makes both you and your boss look bad. The most important tool in boss management is the one-on-one. One-on-ones allow you to communicate status in a way that you control.

### **Always Be Supportive**

Any interactions involving your boss and their peers, should be handled in a supporting way instead of pointing out flaws or issues. The best time to bring up issues is in private before the meeting. That way, you are both in sync with what the issues are and how to handle them. Again, it is best not to surprise anyone with good or bad news in a

## *FRUSTRATION FREE TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT*

public forum. It shows a lack of respect as well as focuses the meeting on the shock of new data instead of why everyone was brought together in the first place. These surprises are what push your boss to micromanage your world.

### **Be Diligent**

Difficulties can arise if you and your boss don't get along. If this is the case, you still have a responsibility to do what they tell you unless it is so unethical that it will threaten life, limb or property. Managing a difficult boss will be taxing. The best way to get through it is to still have regular one-on-one's. If they are unreceptive to that or always cancel on you, you should still create a status/agenda and email it to them. Just because they may not value the interactions or think it is a waste of time, does not mean you should not do it. Consistently summarizing your status will help you to become a better manager while it will show that you are getting stuff done. Also, you may want to try and get to know your difficult boss on a personal level. You might learn something about why they are difficult.

### **It's About Trust**

Your micromanager boss, for whatever reason, does not trust you. This mistrust can be a number of things. From their paranoia or lack of confidence, to their own inexperience in management. Making sure that they know what you are doing, that you will support their efforts and that you are diligent in reporting good and bad news, will improve the situation. They may still try to micromanage you but now you can effectively mitigate their concerns.

### **Additional Solutions**

- Solution #2: Weekly Status Reports
- Solution #4: Have One-on-One's

## **Frustration #6: Changing Requirements**

### **Symptoms**

- *Regular emails with new feature ideas*
- *Feature discussions like “Just do this, it should be easy”*
- *Statements like “The customer really wants this feature.”*
- *No requirements are written down*

### **Solution #6: Don't Track the Needle**

Pilots have a saying. Don't track the needle. This means when you see all of the instruments bouncing all around, don't try and fly every single movement. Know the trends and adjust accordingly. The same applies for new features, issues and data. Tracking the needle is the same as “no single data point makes a trend”. It is important to react to things happening around you but not to react to every single new trend, feature or requirement. Doing that will just tire you out.

### **Wait For It**

Early in my career, I had the classic experience of tracking the needle. I was a design engineer for a small startup. The founder and CTO would come by every Thursday to talk about our progress. Every week, he would come up with some wacky idea that he wanted me to work on. Every week I would bust my hump to work on his latest and greatest idea only for him to change his mind the next week. Every week, the same thing would happen. After a couple of months of this, I learned that what I should do is just do nothing until I heard an idea at least three or four times. Simple but powerful. Once I heard it over and over,



## *FRUSTRATION FREE TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT*

then I would go work on it. This greatly improved my life as well as my productivity. This taught me that not every idea is a good idea. Sometimes they have to bake a while before they are fully formed.

### **Nail The Needle Down**

In the case where ignoring requests might not be an option, you should get the request in writing or have them update some sort of document. Doing this makes the requester commit to doing some work. Sometimes, that is all it takes to dissuade them from making you work on whatever it is. This also shows that you will not be pushed around and that if it's important enough, then it should be written down.

### **Additional Solutions**

- Solution #12: Have A Process, Any Process

## **Frustration #7: Can't Get The Straight Story**

### **Symptoms**

- *The story changes depending on who you talk to*
- *"I don't know" keeps popping up*
- *Status meetings are not well attended*

### **Solution #7: Work on Listening**

In his best selling book, "How to Win Friends and Influence People", Dale Carnegie outlines the best way to become a great conversationalist is to listen. Why this works so well is that it shows that you are interested in what the other person have to say. That interest has a profound effect on the other person. They will remember your interaction in a positive way because you were interested in their life. So simple, yet so powerful. Listening also allows you to collect data. Lots and lots of data. This data will reveal the mood of a group and the trajectory they are on. Just listening allows you to be in the moment – not trying to think of the next thing to say. When thinking too much about what you want to say, you are not listening – you are absorbed in your own thoughts. Listening is an important skill because your main job as a manager is to monitor your surroundings. Your main monitor is what people tell you.

### **Work On Being Quiet**

If you have a hard time listening, tend to cut in too much, or if you dominate conversations, you need to stop that. Catch yourself by committing to stop and listen. Make it a point to remain quiet until at least half-way through a conversation. When you have the urge to comment on something, stop and only comment after someone else has. Try and limit your comments by mentally only saying every other one or better yet, don't comment at all. Not all comments are equal. Work

on forming quality comments not the quantity. Your interactions will go much smoother and people will open up to you more. Once they open up, you can learn a lot.

### **Being On Mute**

Conference calls make listening to other people almost impossible. I don't know how many times I hear "Repeat that please, I was on mute." Translations, I was working on something and totally ignored you. Proper conference call edict requires listening intently since you do not have the benefit of looking at someone's body language to obtain the subtle clues telling you when respond. I have been on so many conference calls where the person on the other end just starts talking right over someone else. They don't even listen enough to know that they are talking over someone else. When you get two of these people on the same call, it turns into a shouting match. This is a major reason statuses can get mixed up and appear to be inconsistent.

### **Fast Talk McGraw**

Conference call hogs are even worse in person. I think their desire to completely dominate a conversation stems from two things: either they like to hear themselves talk, or they fear that if they don't say what is on their mind at that precise moment, the thought will fall out of their head. It also seems to stem from an over eagerness to be accepted as someone of authority. This behavior also manifests itself in fast talkers; if you talk faster than everyone else, no one can get a word in. This behavior is the ultimate non-listener. Most people will secretly tell you that they wonder what the faster talker is hiding since no one can ask them any questions. They don't listen to anyone else. If you don't listen, then how can you figure out what is going on?

### **Be Assertive When Required**

Dealing with non-listeners requires being assertive. Interrupt what they are saying to state that you want to talk. This shock will usually snap

*JARIE BOLANDER*

## **Afterword**

See, being frustration free is not that hard. Congratulations. I knew you could do it.

Just remember to keep practicing and learning. Applying the solutions in this book will allow you to solve your frustrations and make your work life much easier. Continuing to remain frustration free is a matter of working on your management skills every day. Take the time. Set aside fifteen or twenty minutes each day to remain frustration free. Doing this will allow you to recognize the start of frustrating situations. Once you recognize them, eliminating them is a snap.

For additional thoughts on management, innovation and entrepreneurship, check out my blog at <http://www.thedailymba.com>. Thanks for reading.