A popular slang term for managers in high-tech companies is “manglers” — a Dilbertlike reference to bosses who spend their time interfering with the real work.

Are you a manager who wants to avoid this fate? Then consider the advice of Colorado management pros who struggle with the three major challenges facing their companies: employee empowerment, managing nonstop change, and finding and keeping the best employees.

Marjorie Mauldin is president of the Executive Forum, a company that brings a yearly series of speakers and programs to Colorado managers. She says Colorado companies recognize they must change management techniques because employees often have more technical knowledge than supervisors. “The information base or knowledge base is no longer the domain of the boss,” she says. “Managers have to push down not only information but also responsibility.”

EMPLOYEE EMPOWERMENT

Authoritarianism is out, says Paul Archer, marketplace president of Ikon Office Solutions, Englewood, a provider of faxes, copies, documents management and networking services. He was in East Berlin during the fall of Communism, which showed him you can’t keep information from people with access to technology such as television, wireless radio and other sophisticated means of communication.

Today’s employees are “more mobile and can find 10 jobs,” he says, and a manager must understand and meet their needs.

“We are moving to times when employees have more power than the employer, and that changes the whole equation,” Archer says.

He’s also had to focus on change management, following Ikon’s recent consolidation with several sister companies. He had to meld different cultures and manage concerns about change and about which corporate culture will emerge on top. He tries instead to meld them into one new culture.

Archer also made sure managers could recognize when an employee was growing disenchanted. Managers were trained to look for behaviors such as sullenness, not communicating, performance problems or aggressiveness — signs an employee is overwhelmed with change.

Marilyn Taylor, vice president of human resources for New Century Energies, knows about managing change, since NCE was formed by a merger that included Public Service Company of Colorado. She says there’s no magic formula for expediting change and merged corporate cultures, but also notes that those who initiated change will react differently from those affected by it.

She says two things help: making sure managers clearly communicate the change beforehand, and they customize the message according to the listener’s frame of reference. Some, for example, prefer the information in the form of stories; others prefer data.

Taylor takes seriously hands-on management. For example, she is considering a proposal to allow certain NCE em-
MANAGING NONSTOP CHANGE

Health care is a rapidly changing industry. Ruth Benton is CEO of Health First Management Services, a Lakewood primary-care group practice of 64 physicians that is growing fast. She’s seen many aspects of health care after working in insurance, operating a hospital and now running a provider group.

She says the No. 1 rule in managing change is to communicate honestly — a rule she has seen many health-care organizations ignore. She says employees know immediately when you’re not telling the truth.

In managing doctors — accustomed to running their own practices — Benton has had to take a collaborative approach. She’s learned to appreciate and respect who they are and what they do. As a manager, she has found she can’t give doctors an idea but must “teach and coach” until they voice the idea as their own.

She favors collaboration because in rising through the ranks, she often found employees knew more than managers. At her insurance job, for example, she found that employees knew more about the technical rules than did their bosses.

John Givens, president and CEO of Source Management Inc., Denver, agrees with Benton that a consensus management style is imperative today. His company is an Inc. 500 company that provides consumables for faxers, lasers and copiers. He promotes consensus by having everyone express ideas, then having the group make the action decision. “In the masses lies wisdom,” he says. This consensus management takes longer to reach decisions, but Givens says taking shortcuts results in a decision or product that’s “less whole.”

Irrevocable decisions, he finds, take more time than revocable ones to determine by consensus.

He considers hiring to be the “irrevocable decision” because the time and money companies invest in recruiting, training and releasing employees is enormous.

FINDING AND KEEPING THE BEST EMPLOYEES

The most challenging recruitment problems are in the high-tech industry, with a shortage of trained people, and the restaurant industry, with its chronic need for many entry-level employees.

In high-tech, Hewlett Packard Lab Manager Tara Bunch, who directs a Greeley research-and-development lab for storage devices, has managed to double the size of the lab in one year, despite the competitive talent market. She says talented people are motivated by a successful product, and measure that success by how the product performs in the market.

Bunch has boosted retention by allowing employees to telecommute and use flexible work schedules. One telecommuter is a mechanical designer who needed to move his family closer to his parents, who needed extra care. Another is a mother of 3-year-old triplets who works four days a week. A third is an employee who followed a spouse to California and now works from there.

In the restaurant business, Mark Eagleton, senior manager and director for training and personnel at a Golden-based franchisee of 64 Arby’s and several other restaurants, is constantly looking for new ways to find good employees. He says the restaurant industry is the nation’s largest employer, supplanting the military in training entry-level employees.

Learning employees’ needs and addressing them has helped Arby’s recruit and retain employees. It’s led to classes in English as a second language, helping employees obtain GEDs, providing college tuition, and
offering day-care help and programs, and flexible hours to meet the needs of working parents.

These efforts have helped the company create an employee turnover rate of 189 percent in an industry that averages 300 percent.

Eagleton says employers can’t wait for good employees, but must bring in and nurture those who are available. The problem, he says, is “not that there’s a shortage of skilled employees, but that there’s a shortage of skilled companies.” As managers and leaders, they must realize that they’re in the “people business.”

The most successful Colorado companies are learning that, regardless of what business they think they’re in, their real business is to train employees and help make them successful.

Colorado managers who also serve as teachers never will be regarded as manglers.

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COLORADO'S top managers

- **LIZ BAUER**, CSG Systems International, Englewood
  - "Definitely makes her staff feel like they own their job and can use their own creativity to solve problems and make the most of their job. She welcomes new ideas and submits the feasible ones to senior management, and credits the appropriate staff member."

- **BRUCE BENHAM**, RE/MAX International Inc, Greenwood Village

- **BRAD BENSON**, Denver Board of Realtors, Denver

- **PAT BOGGS**, AppleOne Employment and Training Services, Denver.
  - "She’s willing to make mistakes and take risks, which has brought her such successful results, she received a national award with AppleOne just last week."

- **BOB BRETTALL**, Publication Printers, Denver.


- **LAURA CARLISLE**, Kuni Lexus, Littleton
  - "Laura makes you feel that you are working ‘with’ her, not ‘for’ her. She is downright awesome!"

- **BOBBIE CARLETON**, Rocky Mountain PBS Channel Six, Denver.


- **BILL CHRISTOPHER**, Westminster city manager.

  - "Elaine consistently supports, as well as challenges, us to grow both professionally and personally."


- **MARK FOSTER**, Condit Exhibits, Denver.

- **JANET FRANK**, USF&G Insurance, Denver.

- **JOHN FURJANIC**, Citicorp Diners Club, Englewood.


- **DR. LEE GREEN**, Colorado Christian University, Lakewood.


- **Internet Communications Corp., Greenwood Village: TRACY ANDERSON, LYNDA BESS, BRIAN GRAINGER, TIM GRIFFIN, KEN MUSICK, MIKE O'CONNELL, JEFF RUSSELL, JOE SEGAL, TOM STEIN.**


- **KATHY KRINER**, The Hibbert Group, Denver.

  - "Ray is the type of motivator, leader, organizer, and service person that management books are written about."

- **STEVE LOCKWOOD**, Navidec Inc, Englewood.

- **ISI MCCARTHY**, Rose Medical Center, Denver.

- **BRIAN MOECK**, Loveland city manager.

- **LAURA O'CONNELL**, Vectra Bank, Denver.

- **DAVID OYLER**, Melody Homes, Westminster.

- **KATE PAUL**, Kaiser Permanente, Denver.

- **ANDREA PEARSON**, Navidec Inc, Englewood.

- Professional Travel Corp, Englewood: STEVE BOHN, JACK BYER, PAM FINNEGAN, JANE KRESS, SUSIE PICKERING, WENDE MARTIN-RISHER, SHAYNA SCHLICKMAN, SHANNON STEWART, SUZANNE STOGBILL, MELISSA TAYLOR, ANTOINETTE TOWNLEY, ALICE WHALEN, CAROLYN WELTON, JESSICA WHITE, NANCY WHITFORD, JUANITA WOODHARPER, RONNIE YOUNG, ROBYN ZIMMERMAN.

- **A. RALPH REED**, Barrett Resources, Denver.


- **FLYNN RIVENBANK**, KUSA-TV Channel 9, Denver.


- **GINA SALAZAR**, Interweave, Lafayette.

- **VINCENT SCHMITZ**, Citywide Banks, Aurora.
  - "He trusts people and gives them the freedom to do their job well without micromanaging."

- **JOHN SCHAFER**, Hyatt Regency, Denver.

- **DARRELL SCHULTE**, Colorado Business Bank, Littleton.

- **JOHN SMITH**, KCNC-TV Channel 4, Denver.

- **CHARLES STARK**, Antero Health Plans, Denver.

- **DR. LYNN TAUSIG**, National Jewish Medical and Research Center, Denver.

- **JEAN TROMBLEY**, Denver Victim Service Center.

  - "Gives credit where credit is due, supports his employees, generous. All-around great guy."

- **TERRY WHITE**, Centura Health, Littleton.

- **MAX WILEY**, Mayor’s Office of Economic Development, Denver.

- **DAVE ZOBL**, KQKS-107.5 FM, Denver.