A GUIDE FOR COACHING FIRST-TIME MANAGERS

skillsoft▸▸®

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Leading a first-time manager often requires a different approach than leading individual contributors or experienced managers. Their role is new territory for them and, naturally, they are excited and also a little nervous. After all, managing a team is a great opportunity and one that comes with considerable responsibility.

As a first step, it is incumbent on leaders to help first-time managers be mindful about the impact that their role has on employees. Good managers can have a profound effect. A statistic published by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) indicates that 76% of employees say their manager creates the culture at work. Conversely, according to a recent poll by Robert Half, nearly 50% of professionals surveyed have quit a job because of a bad manager.[1]

Many new managers find themselves ill-prepared and ill-equipped, having only been previously exposed to traditional command or control styles of leadership. But, today's digitally-transformed world has ushered in a new work paradigm. Organizations are breaking down silos, redistributing decision-making, and flattening the corporate hierarchy into connected networks. The business world is now smarter, faster, more agile, and more democratic. And the leader of the past is rapidly becoming obsolete, meaning the newest generation of managers need to do things differently than their predecessors.

Yet, most corporate leadership development programs haven't reflected this changing reality. According to research by the Brandon Hall Group, only ten percent of organizations have aligned leadership development programs with future business needs and the competencies required in the digital age.[2] Catalyzing productivity and innovation in this new, complex web of work means that creating leaders for the digital age requires a whole new approach, one that first-time managers will need to master to be effective.

[1] *"Half Of Workers Surveyed Have Quit Due To A Bad Boss." Robert Half, October 8, 2019.*
[2] *"Reinventing and Democratizing Leadership Development," Brandon Hall Group, 2018.*

There is a myriad of learned capabilities a new manager must develop. Typically, first-time managers struggle with responsibilities such as:

- **Developing people**
- **Creating accountability**
- **Driving execution**
- **Applying emotional intelligence**

Learning to execute on these tactical responsibilities is critical to the development of a new manager.

TRANSFORMING HOW WE DEVELOP THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

How we develop first-time managers to be the leaders of tomorrow is monumentally important to organizations that strive to be forward-thinking and agile. As organizations flatten and become more agile, they deploy more mission-driven teams where anyone can be a leader, making the traditional command or control style of leadership ineffective and obsolete. First-time managers can't lean on the authority of their title; instead, they need modern capabilities to help them lead an agile organization.

The people-oriented skills a new manager will need should have been introduced to them along the way via learning and development programs taken as an individual contributor. And, their prior managers should have been modeling some of the coaching skills they will need to be effective. Whether exposed to a good example or not, the new manager should recognize their need to grow and learn to be effective in their new role. The company should invest in them by providing the tools and learning they need to become effective first-time managers.

3 STRATEGIES FOR NEW MANAGERS

1. DEVELOP YOUR TALENT ON THEIR WAY TO THE TOP

Don't wait until employees become managers to develop them as leaders. Building your bench is crucial to strategic succession planning — and developing employees is critical to retaining them. It's also far easier to mold behaviors and mindsets than it is to change them. Reach a broader base and do it earlier in the process. Remember: high-potential employees are often already acting as informal leaders of teams. Give them the tools to be effective now, so they can more seamlessly step into formal leadership titles in the future.

2. TEACH COACHING

While many managers excel at organizing the work that needs to be done, they may not intuitively know how to develop their people. Coaching allows managers to help their employees reach their goals by establishing rapport, identifying performance gaps, and using questioning and listening techniques. It's becoming increasingly crucial to retaining top talent, creating a culture of innovation and growth, and realizing the value of a workforce.

3. INSTILL CRITICAL MINDSETS, ESPECIALLY A GROWTH AND LEARNING MINDSET

For leaders to learn new skills and recognize possibilities, they first need to embrace a growth mindset. Ineffective leaders often have fixed mindsets, acting on tried-and-true methods rather than taking risks. But competing in the modern age demands leaders who take risks and learn from mistakes, adapting, and iterating to achieve success. Effective leaders acknowledge that they don't have all the answers and are constantly in learning mode.

Adopting new mindsets and skills requires continuous learning and reinforcement through modeled behavior — and this sustained effort is essential to effective leadership today.

WHY COACHING FIRST-TIME MANAGERS IS KEY

Coaching is the most crucial of all modern leadership competencies. Adding the element of coaching into a leadership program itself measurably improves outcomes. A study by McKinsey found that successful leadership development programs were five to six times as likely to involve senior leaders acting as mentors and coaches.[3]

When leaders behave like coaches, hierarchy, command, and control give way to collaboration and creativity. It stimulates inquiry, experimentation, dialogue, and helps individuals overcome the barriers they're facing as well as any defensive routines they have developed. By adopting coaching leadership styles and adding coaching into their leadership program, organizations can provide their first-time leaders with the resources to be successful.

There is no better way for a first-time manager to see the positive impact of coaching than to be on the receiving end of good coaching practices. Such coaching helps to provide tentative first-time managers with the motivation and inspiration to innovate, which is important because an organization needs first-time managers with the vigor to strive for success — because when they are successful, so is the organization. At the same time, it illustrates what good looks like for first-time managers.

[3] "What's missing in Leadership Development?" McKinsey, August 2017 Quarterly.

Coaching is beneficial because it emphasizes the importance of collaboration and two-way communication between managers and employees. Furthermore, coaching encourages the first-time manager to take ownership and responsibility for their own development. Coaching isn't hand-holding; instead, it's about fostering an environment where the first-time manager isn't afraid of making mistakes — i.e., learning valuable lessons.

Lastly, coaching gives the first-time manager the confidence to delegate and trust their reports. By delegating at early stages of their leadership, first-time managers build rapport with their direct reports. Leaders must trust staff members to do their jobs without close supervision, making the ability to delegate essential.

THE COACH'S PERSPECTIVE:

- Views people as integral to success
- Emphasizes two-way communication between managers and reports
- Encourages people to take ownership of their development
- Trusts people to do their job and be autonomous

INITIATING A COACHING RELATIONSHIP WITH A FIRST-TIME MANAGER

Coaching a first-time manager is most impactful when conducted with purpose and context. Coaches should take the time upfront to consider the scope and desired purpose of each coaching interaction they have with the person they are coaching. Doing so helps address any questions that may arise about why the coaching is necessary and ensure the coaching session stays on point.

FOUR TYPICAL COACHING CIRCUMSTANCES:

DEVELOPMENT

Coaching for development involves developing the first-time manager's capabilities, knowledge, and behaviors to be more effective in their current role. There may be performance issues as well, but the focus is on developing the first-time manager's potential.

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Performance issues can be problematic, especially when someone knows what their expectations are, yet still fails to perform. In some cases, performance suffers because of a lack of competencies or knowledge. Should this be the circumstance, coaching may shift to a development role as the first-time manager's performance improves.

CAREER

This is for those employees who don't feel challenged or who may be ready to move to a different position. Though this circumstance is more for experienced managers, it is important to know a first-time manager's career aspirations and help coach them in areas that move them in that direction.

CHANGE

This is for employees in transition or when a change affects employee roles. In the ever-changing digital age, the utilization of this circumstance is frequent because it is where many first-time managers need immediate guidance.

EMBODYING THE QUALITIES OF EFFECTIVE COACHES

Taking the time to coach a first-time manager promotes a culture of supportive and motivating leadership. When a first-time manager is coached, they will see the benefits of coaching and the value of coaching someone else. Thus, an effective coach should illustrate to the first-time manager what it means to be a good coach. First-time managers get an idea of the qualities they must develop to become an effective coach to others.

Make sure you embody the following qualities of an effective coach, including:

- Have a firm grasp of your self-awareness and appreciation for self-discovery, as well as a desire to help others change and grow.

- Put yourself second by communicating that the needs of the person being coached are most important and find accomplishment in their success.

- Draw from your past experiences as a leader, engage in active listening, ask thoughtful questions, delegate with confidence, and give continuous feedback to the person you are coaching.

As a result, first-time managers will begin to recognize that coaching is different from other roles they may have had and put in the work to emulate the coaching they have received.

DEMONSTRATING WHAT COACHING IS NOT

In some cases, a first-time manager may not have had the benefit of a good coach in the past. So, as part of the coaching process, you'll also want to demonstrate what is NOT included in the coaching process. This can be a little harder to do.

One approach to help with this is to point out coaching instances where you've chosen to embody the tenets of good coaching and explain to them that an alternative action would not have been good coaching and why. Or, you can point out that your coaching conversation did not include certain things. Certainly, the coaching relationship will, over time, offer you ample opportunities to make sure you explain that coaching does not include the following:

COACHING IS NOT MANAGING

Even though managerial abilities help to become a coach, being a manager and being a coach are not the same. Managing is about making sure people and processes are operating according to the organization's agenda. If the first-time manager you are coaching is one of your reports, it is crucial to separate each coaching intervention from standard, day-to-day meetings that focus on the organization's goals.

COACHING IS NOT PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management typically involves setting an individual's performance goals based on the organization's goals. Coaching, however, is about the first-time manager and their individual development.

COACHING IS NOT TRAINING AND DIRECTING

Training and directing are about teaching others what they need to do to reach organizational goals. Coaching is about nurturing an environment of self-discovery and promoting a space where the first-time manager has the confidence to be autonomous.

COACHING IS NOT MENTORING

Although coaching and mentoring are easy to confuse, they are indeed different. Mentoring is when someone who has experience in the same or similar role imparts knowledge and insight to someone seeking advice and counsel. Alternatively, coaching is cross-functional, and a coach doesn't necessarily have to have first-hand experience in the first-time manager's role.

COACHING IS NOT COUNSELING

While managers often counsel people to help ease workplace difficulties, this is not a function of coaching. Counseling helps employees come to terms with a situation. Coaching is about letting the first-time manager set their goals and allowing the coach to guide their understanding of the capabilities and behaviors necessary to achieve those goals.

To be successful in the digital age, all organizations must approach leadership development holistically, and foster a culture of continuous learning so first-time managers can reach their full potential.

When a first-time manager begins their leadership journey, their determination hinges on accomplishments along the way. Coaching provides new managers with a human-centric development path that addresses their individual needs. And, as a coach, you can feel good about your contribution to their future success as well as the company's.

SKILLSOFT ASPIRE JOURNEYS

All Skillsoft Aspire Journeys For Leadership help learners be successful at critical stages in their leadership career. They deliver curated learning paths focused on the leadership capabilities most critical to success. These self-service paths give learners confidence and save administrators time.

Included in Skillsoft Leadership Development Program powered by MIT Sloan Management Review, these journeys cultivate leaders at all levels of the organization by ensuring consistency and high performance.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT CORE JOURNEY

A single, seamless journey through the 10 competencies that evidence-based research shows are most critical. Topics include:

- *Emotionally Intelligent Leadership*
- *Leading by Coaching*
- *Agility in Leadership*

LEADERS IN TRANSITION JOURNEYS

Three journeys are dedicated to the successful transition from one phase of leadership to another:

- *First-Time Manager*
- *Mid-Level Manager*
- *Leader of Leaders*

DIGITAL MINDSET JOURNEYS

Five journeys develop the behavioral AND technical competencies leaders need to propel an organization's cultural shift towards becoming a modern, digital organization including:

- *Digital-Visionary Mindset Journey*
- *Innovation Mindset Journey*

ABOUT SKILLSOFT

Skillsoft delivers online learning, training, and talent solutions to help organizations unleash their edge. Leveraging immersive, engaging content, Skillsoft enables organizations to unlock the potential in their best assets – their people – and build teams with the skills they need for success. Empowering 36 million learners and counting, Skillsoft democratizes learning through an intelligent learning experience and a customized, learner-centric approach to skills development with resources for Leadership, Technology and Development, and Compliance.

Skillsoft and SumTotal are partners to thousands of leading global organizations, including many Fortune 500 companies. The company features three award-winning systems that support learning, performance and success: Skillsoft learning content, the Percipio intelligent learning experience platform, and the SumTotal suite for Talent Development, which offers measurable impact across the entire employee lifecycle.

Learn more at **www.skillsoft.com**.

skillsoft