



# Investing in emerging and standout leaders

Leadership development strategies  
for a connected culture

# Leaders are the keepers of team morale, loyalty and retention

An organization's growth and future are as dependent on leadership development as its services. From CEO to department head to team leader, leadership impacts the entire organization. Leaders have the power to create or deflate team engagement daily.

**With managers responsible for 70% of the variance in employee engagement, accordingly to Gallup, the business case for leadership development is very real.**

## But leaders are struggling

While the world around us can feel out of control, great leaders offer stability and safety. They change how business feels. They also impact engagement, advocacy and loyalty—powerful feelings that drive employee and customer choice and behavior.

But research shows that two out of three leaders wish they didn't have to manage people. Fast-paced, continuous change (like high demand for flexible workflows and empathetic well-being support) pushes leaders to achieve more with less.

These are trends we've seen and experienced through the pandemic, the Great Resignation, "quiet quitting" and well after. Helping leaders so they can show up for their teams is vital.

### WHEN GALLUP COMPARED TOP QUARTILE TEAMS TO LOWER QUARTILE TEAMS, THE RESEARCH FOUND:

**23%**

higher profitability

**18%**

higher productivity

**81%**

lower absenteeism

**64%**

fewer safety incidents

**10%**

higher customer loyalty and engagement

## 5-step road map strategy



### STEP 1

Gain C-suite buy-in



### STEP 2

Establish performance goals



### STEP 3

Prepare for rollout



### STEP 4

Launch and sustain



### STEP 5

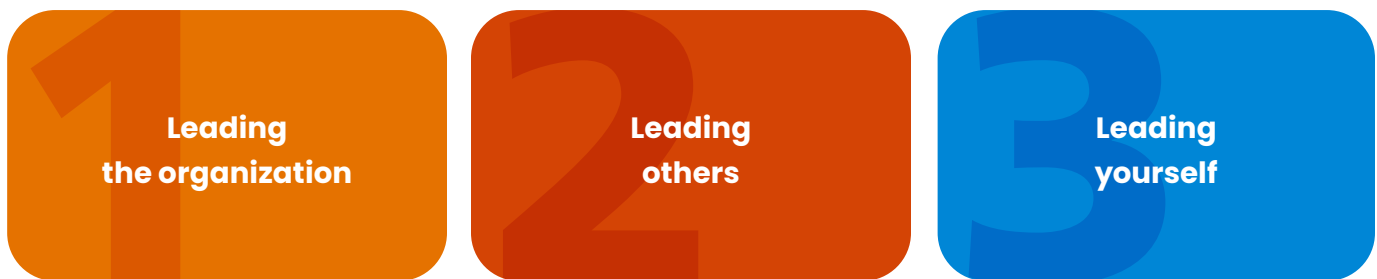
Measure and modify

## The case for creating buy-in

Good leaders don't sprout overnight. Most organizations likely have budding leaders who fall under the radar—or whose talents aren't actively nurtured by more senior leaders. Identifying these individuals (including managers and supervisors with potential for advancement) sends several positive messages. From “my employer holds themselves accountable to invest in me” to “staying is worth it, given I'll grow my relational, technical and behavioral skills.”

### Gather executives' take on must-have leadership skills

While you should come to an executive pitch with identified skills trainings, you can also flip it into a collaborative session. [The Society for Human Resource Management \(SHRM\)](#) categorizes leadership competencies into three groups, which helps “bucket” your focus areas.



### Get clarity on near-future changes and needs

Ask executives if there are upcoming market or industry needs that demand proactive skills training like a merger, or retirement or departure of key individuals. This includes whether they anticipate opening more positions to fill a need.



### COMMUNICATE THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM VALUE & TIME COMMITMENT

Show how the program aligns with organizational needs like career pathing and a leadership pipeline.

## Understand the impact leadership development has on other business areas

When done right, proactive leadership development impacts every other employee experience program. Too often, executives address leadership development too late—after there's been a problem or the problem grows so large, they can't ignore it any longer.

When team members strongly agree that they trust the leadership of their organization they are **4x more likely to be engaged.**

—GALLUP

### Applause-worthy outcomes

#### Clear paths for career growth

Known and emerging leaders can upskill and set higher career goals, like developing skills, expanding ambitions and improving productivity. Seeing coworkers advance also motivates peers to pursue similar career growth.

#### Improved processes and products

Developing leaders provides individuals with a better understanding of the organization and industry, along with enhanced skills on how to motivate teams. This improves processes and efficiencies, which leads to improved products and services.

#### Established succession plan

Having leaders who went through (and continue in) leadership development programs reduces interruptions in employee productivity when leadership roles shift. It also ensures that incoming leaders maintain a high level of leadership competency.

#### Increased adaptability

Companies with leadership development programs adapt to change faster, like evolving economic conditions, culture landscapes, and government requirements and regulations.

## Make leaders better leaders

Beyond experienced leaders, like managers and supervisors, notice emerging leaders. Let both audiences know you see and support their potential. Speak openly to their time investment in leadership development training to remove any confusion team members have. You want employees to know you're working on their behalf even when the training feels more informal.

### Critical leadership skills

- > **Coaching peers:** Help team members perform their responsibilities more efficiently while nurturing their productivity and skills.
- > **Improving communication:** Be able to explain complex concepts so everyone understands the message, letting employees do their job.
- > **Promoting accountability:** Ensure everyone feels a sense of ownership and responsibility in their work while also being productive.
- > **Setting goals:** Help teams and individuals set and achieve relevant, specific goals.

Beyond **how** leadership training supports organization goals, **let why be your guiding light**. If you want to retain employees, keep them engaged and ensure they're growing with the organization.

## Deepen emotional intelligence

Knowing one's core motivators and leadership style is critical to leading and inspiring a team, from navigating how to create emotional safety during tough conversations to developing a pattern of trust. These are things a team can't always articulate but certainly observe.

### Self-awareness elements

- > **Showing empathy:** Using empathy to create understanding, even during disagreements, is a highly effective way to impact better leadership, improved change management and effective cultural transformation.
- > **Building trust and enabling teams:** Shifting one's thoughts from "managing" employees to "enabling" employees is an important evolution in leadership. It gives employees more autonomy, leading to more trust.
- > **Leading by example:** Being a role model for continuous learning, adaptability and the desired culture inspires team members to do the same.

## Create personalized learning paths to keep content relevant

Employees should receive leadership development training when it's relevant to their role, not simply when it works for organizers or mentors. Instead, assign content in alignment with employees' workflows (ideally, less busy periods) that allow for intentional practice. Reinforcing culture at critical moments in the development journey also naturally builds a connected culture.

### Refine trainings based on employees' past engagement

If there's data to pull, use it! Understanding which types of content and delivery methods resonated most with employees will help you avoid wasting time on topics they're familiar with or trainings that overwhelm them. From there, *refine, refine, refine*. Personalized learning always makes learning more effective.

### TRAINING STYLE MATTERS

People forget roughly 50% of new information within an hour.

—ART KOHN, COGNITIVE SCIENTIST EXPERT

## Set the right training environment

Don't underestimate the power of providing a comfortable space to learn and engage. With how dispersed your teams likely are, expand beyond in-person trainings.

### Vary delivery format

#### Internal leadership development

- > Training and coaching
- > Train-as-you-go method
- > Job shadowing
- > Formal or informal mentorship
- > Individual or group training

#### Third-party leadership development

- > External educational courses, certifications and classes
- > Networking events
- > Seminars and workshops



### BALANCE SELF-DRIVEN & INSTRUCTOR-LED COURSES

Not all experiences resonate equally. Find the right mix to satisfy team members who prefer autonomy and responsibility over sitting in a classroom.

## Follow the 70-20-10 rule

Team members learn mainly from doing and collaborating. It's why the 70-20-10 rule is heavily skewed toward on-the-job training. Practicing skills like problem-solving, innovation and reflection gives employees the space to own their growth while still spending 30 percent of their time receiving feedback and participating in trainings.



**70%**  
**ON-THE-JOB  
LEARNING**

with challenging  
assignments and  
opportunities



**20%**  
**MENTORING**

where other  
leaders share  
their expertise



**10%**  
**TRAINING**

that challenges  
their skill level



### CREATE TOOLKITS TO SUSTAIN LEARNING

Ever heard the saying, "Use it or lose it"? It's the same for learning reinforcement. Help team members embed new knowledge with toolkits that use prompts and activations to role model leadership behaviors.

## Use practical application to better retain information

Embrace continuous learning over standalone learning. Standalone workshops might wedge nicely into packed schedules, but they often inspire less behavior change than embedded, ongoing learning—like experiential learning built on real-world scenarios.

### Leadership simulations

It's a risk-free way for leaders to apply newfound skills. Simulated situations like organizational crises, strategy building or financial performance reviews give leaders the opportunity to experiment in a controlled environment before having to do it when the pressure's on. Simulations are particularly effective when leaders have to navigate the human side of leadership, keeping teams on board and motivated as they navigate the twists and turns of continuous change.

### Cross-functional experiences

Exposing leaders to parts of the business beyond their immediate role helps them grasp why certain decisions are made that impact everything from business performance to team culture. The outcome? Better informed decision-making even during complex challenges.

### Tools and processes

For every behavior you ask leaders to adopt, there are tools that support the specific behavior change. Whether it's a coaching framework, communication packet or continuous improvement toolkit, tools and processes woven into the fabric of the organization make sure the leadership behaviors you want to see are truly embedded.

## Provide ongoing mentoring and coaching

The best coaches are current leaders—people who get the organization, know leader expectations and have reason to care. And while it may go without saying, it's their expertise that best guides how to curate content, whether it's for in-person, online or hybrid trainings. They're also the best resources for budding leaders to practice relational (soft) skills with.

### Continuous learning and feedback

Coaches are the difference-makers when they provide relevant insights on employee goals and remain accessible for future mentoring, especially when compared to copy-and-paste learning and development programs. Their role guides the natural learning loop.



## Ask for feedback and put it to work

Watch as your program goes live. Do team members feel their time was worth it? Take note of even small feedback like if instructors were well-prepared, and big feedback like if the content applied to team members' day-to-day responsibilities.

## Get data insights to the right leaders

Empower front-line leaders, especially during the first six months, with the knowledge of how their teams perform, and where or who they may need to nudge into action. Deliver this successfully via bite-sized insights or automated communications.

## USE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS TO CELEBRATE THE LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

You likely measure employee sentiment and customer engagement, but do you target leaders on the positive behaviors that drive those positive feelings in others?

Beyond financial measures, attaching performance reviews to the how as well as the what is imperative in supporting a culture of ongoing leadership accountability and development. It's not only celebrating what leaders achieve, but also recognizing how they get there.

## Keep organizational goals relevant

So the leadership development program is in place. What's next? If you don't want it to fizzle, it has to align with organizational outcomes like employee retention or higher engagement. This alignment ensures you properly focus your efforts on the right development areas and clearly communicate to the employees you're trying to serve.

## Stay committed to leadership development

Revisit goals on a set schedule that aligns with your company size, maturity and products/services. A schedule keeps you from waiting too long to measure progress, ask participants for feedback and apply what you've tracked.

## RALLY SUPPORT ESPECIALLY DURING HARD TIMES

Budget allocated to leadership development often gets cut first when challenging times hit. In reality, it's the most critical time to invest in the skills that help the organization overcome downturns and navigate change.

## Now apply steps 1–5

Celebrate what's working, spotlight engagement gaps and work toward a truly connected culture. The leadership development road map is your self-paced guide on how to evolve your program, when to involve key audiences in decision-making and feedback, and what actions to take during each of the five steps.

[Download the road map →](#)

## Build a connected culture

Think of employee engagement as a connected experience. Our broader ebook, *Ultimate guide to aligning employee experience programs*, includes the information you just read on leadership development, as well as step-by-step program road maps for organizational culture and branding, employee recognition, and learning and development.

Whether your organization is interested in broad strategy shifts or small-scale program adjustments, our employee engagement team is also a resource. We'll assess your current environment and discuss areas for potential improvement.

[Download the ultimate guide →](#)



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