



DEVELOPING  
FRONTLINE  
LEADERS TO  
**DRIVE TEAM** ↗  
**PERFORMANCE**





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# INTRODUCTION

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Which part of the workforce has the biggest impact on team performance?

You might think it's the senior leaders who set the strategy, or the individual contributors bringing it to life. But when it comes to employee engagement and performance, it's the frontline leaders who truly make the difference.

Frontline leaders are the ones who turn strategy into action, guide teams through change, and navigate the day-to-day challenges that directly affect performance.

Yet, despite their importance, frontline leaders are being overlooked.

Forty-one percent of professionals surveyed for [Korn Ferry's Workforce 2025 report](#) said that managers have been cut back at their organizations.

This shift has real consequences—**37% of employees say the lack of managers leaves them feeling directionless.**

In this eBook, we explore why frontline leaders are vital to driving team success and how organizations can build and maintain a strong pipeline of effective people leaders.



# THE CRITICAL ROLE OF FRONTLINE LEADERS

Frontline leaders are the link between an organization's strategy and day-to-day execution.

They directly manage employees, oversee their day-to-day work, and play a key role in making sure tasks are completed, goals are met, and teams stay motivated and focused.

They're also responsible for developing talent and ensuring their teams align with the company's vision.



of workers are more likely to stay in a job if they have a manager they trust.

[Korn Ferry Workforce 2025](#)



## Here's a rundown of what effective frontline leaders do:



### **BUILD SKILLS**

Actively coaching, mentoring, and providing on-the-job training to help employees perform and grow.

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### **LEAD CHANGE**

Helping teams navigate transitions and adapt to new strategies.

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### **GIVE FEEDBACK**

Offering regular, constructive feedback to drive team performance and development.

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### **PROBLEM-SOLVE**

Addressing challenges quickly and empowering teams to find solutions.

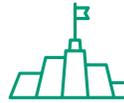
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### **MANAGE PERFORMANCE**

Setting clear goals and ensuring accountability within their team.

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### **ALIGN WITH BUSINESS GOALS**

Ensuring individual and team efforts contribute to organizational success.

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### **DRIVE ENGAGEMENT**

Creating an inclusive, motivating work environment that fosters collaboration.



### **DEVELOP FUTURE LEADERS**

Identifying high-potential employees and preparing them for leadership roles.

# HOW EMERGING LEADERS DRIVE BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

Emerging leaders are critical to driving transformation for two key reasons:

## 1. BROAD INFLUENCE

Frontline leaders manage around 80% of an **organization's workforce**. They don't just influence performance—they shape it.

The way they lead and their ability to inspire their teams can make or break productivity and morale. A great frontline leader can be the difference between an engaged employee and one who's just getting through the day.

Korn Ferry's Workforce 2025 data shows that employees are more engaged when their manager empowers them, provides the right resources, and offers real support.

But engagement drops when organizations cut back on managers or when managers themselves are overwhelmed.





Frontline leaders are integral to successful business transformation. Strategy alone isn't enough. Without effective execution by frontline managers, the strategy remains just an idea."

**Scott Erker, Korn Ferry**

## 2. UNIQUE POSITION

Frontline leaders serve as the crucial link between senior management and the wider workforce, ensuring top-level strategy is communicated and put into action.

Their role is pivotal in driving transformation, as they are often the first to implement change, such as the adoption of new technologies or ways of working.

Their ability to lead and adapt directly impacts an organization's ability to deliver on its objectives. In many ways, they hold the power to shape an organization's success or contribute to its struggles.

# WHAT MAKES A GOOD FRONTLINE LEADER

To build a strong pipeline of frontline leaders, it's essential to first understand what makes a great leader.

Many executives wrongly assume top performers naturally make great leaders, but there's more to it than that. Yes, you want leaders to be high-performing individual contributors, but simply promoting the best isn't enough.

You need individuals who show leadership qualities—traits, competencies, and a mindset that goes beyond the task at hand—not just strong technical ability.



You're not going to promote someone into a frontline manager role unless they're a very strong individual contributor. But that's where mistakes start to happen because people don't think about the rest of the equation."

***Scott Erker, Korn Ferry***

Here are a few key questions to consider when identifying future leaders:

- ▶ Who actively shares new ideas in team meetings?

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- ▶ Who can take charge of a cross-functional team and drive a complex project to completion?

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- ▶ Who's eager to take on new challenges and expresses interest in leadership?

**"These are indications that you've got somebody with potential,"** says Erker.

But noticing potential is just the beginning. What really sets someone apart is whether they have the key competencies that shape a frontline leader.

## COMPETENCIES OF SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE LEADERS

Key competencies help leaders drive real, lasting change, both for themselves and the teams they lead.

Our research, based on **millions of assessments** across industries, pinpointed eight key competencies that today's leaders need to tackle tomorrow's challenges.

The findings show that **successful people leaders** must:

- ▶ Instill trust and lead through honesty, integrity, and authenticity
- ▶ Be courageous and lean into difficult business issues
- ▶ Develop talent in ways that help their teams meet career and organizational goals
- ▶ Direct work efficiently and effectively
- ▶ Drive results consistently in a tough business climate
- ▶ Ensure accountability for themselves and their teams
- ▶ Collaborate and build partnerships across the organization
- ▶ Build effective teams that leverage diverse skills and perspectives

## HOW FRONTLINE LEADERS DRIVE TEAM SUCCESS

Frontline leaders do more than implement strategy. They inspire their teams and shape the culture of success around them.

When nurtured and supported, their impact is far-reaching, directly influencing team performance and driving a ripple effect of improvement.



## Here's how frontline leaders steer team success:



### CLEAR COMMUNICATION

Effective managers offer clear guidance and constructive feedback, keeping their teams aligned and focused.



### CAREER GROWTH

Trained managers identify and cultivate talent, helping team members advance.



### HIGHER MOTIVATION

Supported leaders inspire their teams to push toward their best performance. **Korn Ferry data** shows that employees are more motivated when they have a manager who is supportive and helpful.



### POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Managers who feel supported create an environment that encourages the same for their teams.



### STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS

Empowered managers build trust and loyalty, strengthening their team's cohesion.



### LOWER TURNOVER

Strong leadership increases job satisfaction, reducing churn and associated costs.

Indeed, in our Korn Ferry Workforce 2025 survey, respondents agree that a trusted manager is a top reason they not only stay at their organization, but why they remain excited and engaged with their work.

Investing in frontline leadership goes beyond enhancing day-to-day operations. It cultivates a high-performance culture that boosts long-term success.

Any company that wants growth needs to care about workforce engagement levels. Our research for the World's Most Admired Companies found that organizations with the highest motivation and engagement saw twice the revenue growth of their worst-performing peers."

**Maria Amato, Korn Ferry**

## MEASURING THE IMPACT OF PEOPLE LEADERS

Measuring the success of frontline leaders isn't just about tracking numbers. It's about seeing how their leadership directly fuels team success and drives productivity.

When it comes to doing this, a structured framework can help.

**Here are six key steps to take:**

01

### DEFINE WHAT "GREAT" LOOKS LIKE

Set clear expectations with a **Success Profile** that outlines key responsibilities, essential skills, and leadership behaviors. This provides a benchmark for performance and development.

02

### SET CLEAR KPIS

Identify key performance indicators that align with individual, team, and company goals. Use both quantitative and qualitative measures, such as employee engagement and productivity, to track progress and success.

03

### USE 360-DEGREE FEEDBACK

Collect insights from peers, direct reports, and managers to assess leadership impact and identify strengths and areas for growth.

04

### LEVERAGE TEAM SURVEYS

Regularly check in with teams to measure engagement and satisfaction. Sharing these insights with frontline managers helps them understand areas for improvement.

05

### TRACK IMPACT ON TALENT AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Monitor core KPIs over time and assess how frontline leadership development efforts influence both employee success and business outcomes. Adjust training and support accordingly.

06

### PROVIDE FEEDBACK TO THE INDIVIDUAL

Regular, constructive feedback is crucial for new leaders to grow and refine their skills.

Measuring success isn't a one-time event. It should begin before a new leader transitions into their role and continue throughout their leadership journey.



# HOW TO GROW YOUR EMERGING LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

Having a clear leadership development strategy is crucial for creating a pipeline of skilled leaders who are ready to drive organizational success.

Follow this **four-step** process to create a robust and effective leadership development plan:

01

**Define what “great” leadership looks like—**

Establish clear leadership qualities and expectations that align with your company’s goals.

03

**Design tailored training programs—**

Craft development programs that cater to the specific needs and growth areas of your emerging leaders.

02

**Identify skills gaps—**

Evaluate potential leaders by assessing their skill sets and pinpointing areas for development.

04

**Implement coaching**

**programs—**Provide continuous support through coaching to help leaders refine their skills and navigate challenges.



**WANT TO DIVE DEEPER INTO THESE STEPS?**

Read our latest article

**“How to Develop Individual Contributors into Emerging Leaders.”**

# 5 WAYS TO EMPOWER YOUR PEOPLE LEADERS

Empowering frontline leaders goes beyond their personal well-being. It's about creating a ripple effect that strengthens the entire team.



## HERE ARE FIVE PROVEN WAYS TO NURTURE YOUR FRONTLINE LEADERS:

01

### **PAIR THEM WITH A MENTOR**

Offer guidance from someone with experience to help them grow and navigate challenges.

02

### **ENCOURAGE AUTONOMY**

Give them ownership over projects and processes to boost their confidence and decision-making skills.

03

### **RECOGNIZE THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS**

Regularly praise their successes to maintain morale and reinforce positive behaviors.

04

### **PROVIDE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK**

Offer actionable, clear feedback so they can continuously improve and feel supported in their growth.

05

### **INVEST IN THEIR DEVELOPMENT**

Provide opportunities for training and development to ensure they continue to grow and evolve as leaders.



## AI'S ROLE IN TRAINING FRONTLINE MANAGERS

AI is revolutionizing how we train frontline managers, making the learning process more efficient and personalized.

**Here's a deeper look at how AI tools are enhancing frontline leadership development:**

### ▶ PERSONALIZED LEARNING

Delivering customized training experiences that adapt to an individual's preferred learning style, ensuring training is relevant and impactful.

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### ▶ ENGAGEMENT

AI-driven tools like chatbots and virtual coaches are making training more interactive. They can provide real-time answers to questions, while simulations can help managers practice skills in real-life scenarios.

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### ▶ COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Drastically reduces training costs by making it quicker and easier to create and update training materials.

# MAXIMIZE SUCCESS WITH A LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

Learning and development opportunities are a key reason why 78% of employees say they will choose to join a new company, and that rises to 79% for **first-level managers**.

A clear strategy to develop frontline leaders isn't just about performance. It's also a powerful way to attract and retain top talent in your organization.

For tips on choosing the right leadership development solution to grow emerging leaders of tomorrow

[DOWNLOAD OUR GUIDE](#)





Korn Ferry is a global organizational consulting firm. We work with our clients to design optimal organization structures, roles, and responsibilities. We help them hire the right people and advise them on how to reward and motivate their workforce while developing professionals as they navigate and advance their careers.

**Business advisors.**

**Career makers.**