

INTRODUCING THE AI-READY LEADER

Six key responsibilities for leaders to deliver on AI's promise

Thought Leadership

Few technological leaps have developed as fast or with as much impact as generative AI. And since its emergence, GenAI has drawn mixed reactions—some view it as a threat, others question its value, and many welcome it with open arms. It's no surprise, then, that organizations today are at very different stages of adoption.

Despite its recent surge and divided reception, GenAI is already embedded in our lives. It's reshaping how we live, work, and think—and forcing companies to rethink the future of work, where leadership matters more than ever.

As AI evolves, leadership will determine whether organizations and individuals thrive. That means helping teams adopt new ways of working, redefine success, and navigate uncertainty. At Korn Ferry, we see leaders as the bridge between unrealized value and well-orchestrated impact—bringing together human and artificial intelligence to amplify what can be achieved.

We're taking a closer look at the leaders stepping up—who they are, what they're doing, and how they're bringing their organizations into the GenAI future.

DEFINING THE AI-READY LEADER

Leaders and organizations everywhere are trying to make sense of AI—what it can do, where to start, and how to make it work in real life.

Some are beginning their journey, while others are experimenting and learning as they go. Still, few feel they are moving as fast or being as transformative as they need to stay competitive. In fact, a recent Korn Ferry survey found that while 42% of CHROs are prioritizing AI investment, only 5% say their teams are well prepared to embrace it.

Successfully leading AI integration requires tackling two challenges: recognizing that it's every leader's responsibility—not just that of technical experts—and second, clarifying what “being prepared” truly means. Leaders need to do more than encourage safe AI experimentation; they need to reimagine processes, systems, and the work itself to create new growth, unlock opportunities, and minimize inefficiency. The goal is for organizations to leverage AI as a collaborator that elevates—rather than undermines or replaces—human potential.

Transformation of this magnitude starts with leaders who know what to prioritize and how to move forward. Korn Ferry has identified six key responsibilities that can enable leaders to deliver on the critical AI journey:



1. Sustain the Vision

AI-Ready Leaders anchor their teams firmly around a compelling vision that incorporates how AI will be leveraged to drive success. They maintain focus through challenges and AI's constant change and evolution, consistently pointing the way. When current efforts don't yield results, AI-Ready Leaders remain committed, recognizing that evolving AI capabilities will likely unlock future success.



2. Take Decisive Action

AI-Ready Leaders act with deliberate, but not reckless, urgency. They provide clarity in aligning teams and achieving shared goals in fast-moving AI-driven contexts. They balance the need to perfect, progress, pause, and stop.



3. Scale for Impact

AI-Ready Leaders prioritize efforts that create the largest impact and most meaningful outcomes. They move away from fragmented experiments and concentrate on the AI efforts that promise the most value. AI-Ready Leaders stay focused on results during uncertainty or when meeting resistance.



4. Don't Stop at Success

AI-Ready leaders avoid complacency in pursuit of value. What works today may quickly become obsolete. Instead, AI-Ready leaders learn through experimentation and foster a culture of continuous iteration, creativity, and alternative human-AI systems thinking.



5. Champion Learning... and Unlearning

AI-Ready Leaders spark a mindset of rapid learning and unlearning to foster success. They encourage AI fluency and curiosity, so teams confidently rethink long-held habits, redesign workflows and work processes, and continually refresh their skills for the roles of tomorrow.



6. Address Fears

AI-Ready Leaders confront challenges and address fears, especially around AI's impact on jobs and career paths. They address these with integrity and authenticity. AI-Ready Leaders are visible, proactive, and trustworthy in navigating these concerns.

These responsibilities are embedded in our AI-Ready Leader Success Profile, which is rooted in Korn Ferry's [Change Ready Leader](#) and [Digital Leader](#) solutions. These were developed through extensive research and tested through seasoned delivery.

We will establish the Success Profile for five levels:

1. Senior Executive
2. Business Unit Leader
3. Manager of Managers
4. Manager of Professional Staff
5. Senior Professional (Individual Contributor)

Our expert-curated AI-Ready Leader Success Profile, combined with psychometric-based self-assessments, will help clients pinpoint development priorities and close leadership gaps in navigating AI-related challenges.

HUMAN + AI: THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP

Today's leaders are expected to do more than perform on a changing playing field. To be AI-ready, they need to transform their organizations for a game with new players and new rules. That means taking smart risks, knowing what fails today might succeed tomorrow, and realizing that even the best ideas can become outdated before delivering a return.

Above all, leading in an AI-driven world is about leading people—guiding teams through ambiguity, creating clarity where little exists, and supporting employees who may fear for their jobs. People drive transformation, and leaders need to embrace the unique value humans bring while showing AI's true power lies in partnership, not in AI-led efficiency plays. Effective leaders help their teams stay engaged, move forward, and make a difference amidst the change.

That's why Korn Ferry is rearchitecting the workforce for the *Human + AI* era. An era where skills, structures, and systems evolve fast, and AI's value is realized only when matched with the right people, in the right roles, with the right capabilities.

Success in an AI future depends on understanding what drives human performance—and no one understands human performance better than Korn Ferry. We are one of the only firms to combine people science, an integrated technology platform, and decades of insight with one clear focus: unleashing human potential at scale.

This is the moment to move past fear and uncertainty and tap into what makes us all uniquely human. The sky is no longer the limit.

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