



LESSONS FROM LEADERSHIP COACHING: WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW CAN HURT YOU



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INTRODUCTION



The phrase “natural born leader” gets thrown around a lot, but the truth is, effective leadership isn’t instinctive. Even the most talented leaders have to learn behaviors and mindsets that don’t come naturally.

Great leaders put aside their needs. They’re selfless. They don’t just pursue their own goals; they elevate others’. They adapt quickly, listen openly — especially to dissenting views — and own their faults with humility.

Those aren’t exactly things you can learn on the job, and most leaders only acquire and develop these abilities and skills through years of experience — often marked by trial and error.

Fortunately, leadership coaching provides a shortcut.

In leadership coaching, trained professionals help leaders reshape habits, shift mindsets, and expand their perspective. The result is often transformative.

HOW AND WHERE LEADERSHIP COACHING FITS IN A TIME-STRAPPED WORLD



According to Gartner, a shockingly high 85% of new managers receive **no formal management training** when they're first promoted.

Most are elevated into leadership roles because of their success as individual contributors, not necessarily because they've demonstrated leadership ability. While their accomplishments no doubt deserve recognition, this practice often leads to inconsistent leadership quality across an organization.

As this chapter explores, even seasoned leaders face challenges that stretch their capabilities. Leadership coaching offers a structured, effective way to build the mindsets and skills that today's leaders need—without waiting years for those lessons to be learned.

TOP 10 LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES & WHY IT'S NOT A BAD IDEA TO ASK FOR HELP

From shifting expectations for work-life balance to the rapid implementation of new technologies, today's business executives, directors, and managers face an especially high number of leadership challenges.

Some of the biggest they can expect to tackle include:

1 More disengaged employees

These days, far more people are **disengaged at work** than usual, according to Gallup.

Disengaged employees are less productive, less creative, and less responsive to leadership. Now that the ratio of disengaged employees has grown, leaders need to work even harder to connect with and motivate them.

2 Conflicting personality types

A great leader should be able to both collaborate effectively with other leaders and have the interpersonal skills to make every subordinate feel respected. Hardly anyone can accomplish this without training – inevitably, personality and leadership styles will clash, resulting in conflicts the leader must try to solve.

3 Communication difficulties

Gallup also found a wide gap between leaders' and employees' perceptions of how well managers communicate. Employees reported that their managers don't communicate often or provide frequent feedback, but managers say they do.

Neither group is lying. It's just that communication generally needs to be even more frequent and intentional than most leaders realize, and it's often challenging for them to find the ideal level of communication.

4 Hybrid work

Most companies allow at least some remote or hybrid work. Often, leaders have to manage teams that are spread out between the office and their individual homes – and who's where could change every day.

In these hybrid environments, leaders need to be even more proactive about connecting with their team members. When employees are in the office, leaders need to find opportunities for plenty of in-person interactions; when employees are remote, they need to remember to proactively include them.

5 Balancing day-to-day work with leadership

Most business leaders have work of their own to get through. But this work often gets sidetracked by endless meetings, unexpected crisis management, or the demands

of managing the people under them. These competing priorities often cause senior leaders to feel pulled in too many directions.

6 Time management

Time management is difficult for anyone, but especially for leaders. Not only do leaders have to balance daily operations, management, and distractions with deep work, they also must find time to think about and work toward their business's long-term vision. Carving out time for each of these things can feel like a complicated balancing act.

7 Learning to delegate

Successful time management depends on delegation, but that's a skill in itself. Delegate too little, and you're overwhelmed with work. But delegate too much, and there's a chance certain tasks won't get done right.

8 The need for heightened self-awareness

Leaders must think about aspects of their working styles that lower-level employees take for granted. They need to be fully aware of their tone of voice, their body language, and their instinctual reactions to conflict, for example.

This level of self-awareness becomes necessary overnight when someone's promoted into a leadership role, but it's a soft skill that takes time and coaching to cultivate.

9 Navigating organization-wide issues

Employees will often share their grievances with their managers, even when they know the manager isn't at fault. Managers then have to explain complicated situations to them or advocate for their needs to fellow leaders. Doing so with grace can be an immense challenge.

10 Adapting to new technologies

Technologies are always changing, and leaders must be flexible enough to embrace new ones that could help their team. At the same time, they're best positioned to advocate for their team if the organization is pushing technologies that aren't appropriate for them. The difficult part is knowing when to jump into adopting new technology and when to hold back.

When It's Time to Ask for Help

When leaders face these challenges, they should expect some level of support from the organization. But it would be too burdensome to expect the organization to address every challenge their leaders face. Help from an executive leadership coach or other [external expert](#) is often needed for all your leaders to maximize their potential.

FUNDAMENTALS ABOUT A LEADERSHIP COACH: WHAT THEY DO AND WHO NEEDS ONE

You're probably wondering exactly what working with a leadership coach might look like. Here's a closer look at the role of a leadership coach and how one might benefit you.

What Do Leadership Coaches Do?

Leadership coaches are experts in the many challenges business leaders face, their root causes, and how to prevent them. They teach essential skills like decision-making, communication, and emotional intelligence.

Coaches may also help individuals cultivate a leadership mindset by teaching them how to overcome limiting beliefs and instead embrace a learning mentality characterized by resilience and adaptability.

Leadership coaches recognize that soft skills and a positive mindset are essential drivers of business success. They combine this understanding with pedagogical knowledge to teach strategies for mastering these skills and, as a result, maximizing individual potential.

Coaching vs Mentoring: What's the Difference?

On paper, the benefits of leadership coaching and mentorships are similar. However, the two take very different approaches, leading to subtle differences in what leaders take away. Many new leaders can benefit from both.

A mentor is someone who meets with younger professionals to give advice about overcoming professional challenges, often drawing on their own experiences. Mentoring relationships are typically informal, last for an unspecified length of time, and are based on unstructured conversations.

Leadership coaches, on the other hand, work with leaders for predetermined lengths of time and hold structured sessions based on curriculums developed by experts.

These sessions are driven by participants' goals and informed by proven strategies for leadership instruction. While mentors usually volunteer their time, coaches are trained professionals.

As a result, leaders who participate in coaching receive predictable benefits designed to apply to a wide range of leadership challenges. Mentoring relationships, on the other hand, are best for giving leaders opportunities to talk through specific challenges in detail.

Are Coaches Necessary for Teaching Leadership?

Organizations may choose to use a [leadership training curriculum](#) without hiring a leadership coach to teach it. This lets leaders access the material while saving organizations money.

However, this approach also removes the individualized attention leaders would enjoy with a coach. The interpersonal relationship between a coach and their clients often results in a richer, more interactive experience that gives leaders a deeper understanding of the material.

What's Involved in a Leadership Coaching Engagement?

Typically, the first thing leadership coaches will do is learn about their clients' organization as well as individual clients' goals and challenges. They may take notes on current approaches, where clients most want to improve, and if there are any leadership challenges that seem common across the organization.

Then, they'll choose the training solution or package that will work best for the organization, often making minor adjustments to tailor it to the individuals they'll be working with. These programs include curricula with agendas for each coaching session, complete with actionable goals.

Toward the end of a course, a leadership coach will likely reassess their clients' skills to measure their progress using proven, statistically valid assessments.

What Are the Benefits of a Leadership Coach?

After working with a leadership coach, expect your executives and managerial teams to demonstrate better communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence. They may also have improved creativity and critical thinking as well as a stronger vision of where they want to take their team and company.

Most importantly, a great coach will help clients develop a leadership mindset that contributes to more positive and productive attitudes, increased confidence, and other attitudes tied to improved professional performance.

HOW COACHING CAN SUPPORT TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP AND PROFOUND CHANGE

You've probably had all kinds of leaders throughout your professional career – authoritative ones, hands-off ones, and everything in between.

These various approaches are known as leadership styles, and each leader's style is typically informed by a combination of their personality, intrinsic beliefs, and decision-making skills.

Each leadership style has its pros and cons, but one, known as transformative leadership, is proven to be more effective than others.

Fortunately, no one is stuck in the leadership style they begin with. By learning about and strengthening their approach to leadership, anyone can evolve into a transformative leader.

5 of the Most Common Leadership Styles

Most leaders naturally adopt one of the following styles or some combination of them:

-  **Autocratic leadership**
A leadership style characterized by a take-charge attitude and direct, goal-oriented decision-making. Autocratic leadership can create an impersonal work environment, but there are some high-stakes environments where its efficiency is beneficial.
-  **Laissez-faire leadership**
A leadership style in which leaders let their subordinates make their own decisions most of the time. Employees may appreciate the greater autonomy, but unless team members are particularly competent, a laissez-faire leader risks enabling low productivity and confusion.
-  **Democratic leadership**
A style defined by giving every team member a voice through collaborative discussion. Democratic leadership helps everyone feel empowered, but it can also be inefficient or even chaotic.
-  **Holistic leadership**
An approach to leadership that manages the whole person, rather than just that person's work. This style has the benefit of boosting morale and minimizing burnout, but it deprioritizes business results.



Transactional leadership

A leadership style that provides rewards in return for performance, ignoring soft skills or personal needs. Transactional leadership helps teams reach their goals, but the impersonal, narrow focus can be demoralizing.

Each of these leadership styles has its own strengths and weaknesses, and all are appropriate in some situations. However, a transformative leadership style retains the best leadership qualities of these styles while minimizing their weaknesses.

What Is Transformative Leadership?

Transformative leadership—also called transformational leadership—is **defined** as a leadership style in which “leaders and followers help each other to advance to a higher level of morale and motivation.” It’s a leadership approach focused on motivating everyone to do their best work in pursuit of a shared goal.

A transformative leader is a charismatic one who helps an organization rally around a vision, inspiring employees’ intrinsic motivation to pursue personal and professional growth.

There are four main components of transformative leadership:



Individualized consideration

When a leader intentionally gets to know each team member, listens to their concerns, and encourages them to use their unique strengths.



Inspirational motivation

How a leader inspires their organization with a compelling vision built around a strong sense of purpose.



Idealized influence

The influence a leader exerts by acting as a role model with strong ethics and principles.



Intellectual stimulation

The leader’s dedication to creativity, curiosity, and innovation from all team members.

You can probably see why transformative leadership is highly valued. In fact, decades of research prove that **transformative leadership is extremely effective**, contributing to greater innovation, employee satisfaction, and long-term business performance.

It's also a difficult leadership style that few people can master on their own. With some coaching, though, almost anyone can [learn transformative leadership](#).

How to Use Coaching to Become a Transformative Leader

Transformative leadership is challenging because it requires the leader to hold a certain set of beliefs and character traits, be invested in their own personal growth, and share their passion for positive change with others.

Every leader has the potential to embody these qualities, but most of us are held back by problematic thought patterns and habits. That's where coaching comes in.

A qualified leadership coach can help you uncover what unhelpful beliefs are holding you back and keeping you stuck in ineffective leadership styles. Once you've learned to identify these beliefs, you can break the negative habits they contribute to—and build transformative habits that support employees instead.

GIVING EMPLOYEES THE TOP-TIER MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT THEY NEED

Employee mental health is worsening, according to [Lyra Health](#). It reports that in 2024, 89% of employees around the world experienced at least one mental health challenge—but fewer than half received any support.

Creating a work environment supportive of mental health starts with leadership, but many leaders struggle with this sensitive topic. To provide top-tier mental health support, organizations must first train leaders on how to respond to employees' mental health needs.

Why Mental Health Support Matters for High-Performing Teams

Mental health support is not just a nice-to-have; it's a must for any organization that wants to achieve its full potential. Research shows that [mental stress harms creativity](#) and innovation. Productivity suffers as well, with around 12 billion global work days [lost to anxiety and depression](#) every year.

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12B

global work days are lost to anxiety and depression every year

When an employee is dealing with poor mental health, the consequences often extend to the rest of their team. When one individual is unproductive, unfocused, or frequently absent due to poor mental health, the entire team suffers.

You can probably imagine how quickly these difficulties can spread throughout an organization. There's a reason companies with comprehensive mental health benefits have high ROI and increased productivity, according to Lyra Health. When employees are feeling their best, they do their best work.

Becoming an employer that provides top-tier mental health support starts with developing a more [accepting culture](#). To do that, an organization first needs to train accepting leaders.

How Leadership Coaching Contributes to Positive Mental Health

The [World Health Organization](#) lists leadership training as one of its core recommendations for protecting mental health at work. While most employees recognize that their managers can't solve all their mental health problems, they seek support in the form of emotionally intelligent listening and respect for their needs. These are skills all leaders can hone through leadership coaching.

Coaching can foster the mindsets and beliefs that create bridges between managers and team members who need top-tier mental health support. It can also teach leaders how to create a culture of psychological safety, meaning a culture where employees can comfortably speak up about their opinions or needs.

Finally, training can help leaders address workplace mental health concerns in a meaningful way, such as by developing policies that promote a good work-life balance or implementing effective wellness programs and employee assistance programs.

[Research suggests](#) that managers impact employees' mental health more than their doctors or therapists, and roughly the same amount as their spouses. With the help of good leadership coaching, this impact could be for the better.

WHAT LEADERSHIP COACHING CAN DO FOR ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH AND GROWTH

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The leadership of an organization permeates it like the air we breathe – if it’s good, it keeps us feeling healthy and positive. If it’s bad, it sours everything.

And like the air, it often goes unnoticed (until there’s a problem, that is). So much of what leaders do has huge, but hidden, impacts. How a leader talks to others, makes decisions, navigates change, and responds to employee concerns all have ripple effects on morale and motivation, even when most people aren’t there to see it.

In fact, it’s hard to overstate just how much of an impact a leader can have on the organization. And without leadership coaching, even the best-intentioned leaders unwittingly have negative impacts. With the support of a trained leadership coach, though, leaders can reduce their negative impacts and help keep the whole organization healthy.

THE POWER OF THE MINDSET COACH FOR CULTIVATING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

Why do we find it so hard to change our habits?

Why do we hit the snooze button instead of going for that run in the morning, or pick up our phone instead of reading that book we’ve been meaning to get around to? And why do we struggle to implement new plans at work?

It all comes down to the habit-shaping mindsets that are so ingrained in us, we usually don't even recognize they're there.

To start recognizing them, we often need the perspective of an outside expert. That's where a mindset coach comes in.

This specialized type of leadership coach can help you recognize and break free of bad habits and negative beliefs, even if you've held them for so long that you don't even remember forming them. Mindset coaches are trained to help you identify and alter these subconscious mindsets — and in the process, assist you in reaching your full potential.

What Is Mindset Coaching?

Mindset coaching is an approach to leadership coaching that focuses on shifting our ingrained mindsets so they're more positive or productive.

What does that actually mean?

Your mindset influences what you think and what you do. Change your mindset, change your behavior.

For example, imagine someone who grew up with strict parents and teachers. As a child, they might have internalized the idea that authority figures are always out to get them, and this mindset wouldn't just disappear when they grew up. They'd carry it into adulthood, too.

Once this person gets into the professional world, this mindset might drive them to either avoid or appease their leaders. And if they're ever promoted to a managerial role, they'll probably replicate the strict habits they subconsciously associate with successful leadership.

Their experiences turned into a mindset, which then turned into beliefs, which then informed their habits.

A mindset coach would be able to help this person examine their mindset around authority and recognize that it's both untrue and unhelpful. Once they've accomplished that, the coach could help them replace their unproductive mindset with one that positions authority figures as supportive collaborators.

What Does a Mindset Coach Do?

Mindset coaches use a structured, intentional approach to help clients gain clarity about their thinking patterns and shift them in ways that support their goals.

At The Pacific Institute, this takes the form of a four-step process:

1 Clarify your priorities

A mindset coach will help you pinpoint the behaviors you want to change, align those with your plans for personal and professional development, and set relevant goals.

2 Understand what's been holding you back

The mindset coach will then teach you how to identify the thoughts, beliefs, and habits that are holding you back. You'll practice noticing the thought patterns and automatic responses that come up in situations related to your goals and challenging those responses.

3 Empower you with new strategies

Once you know what negative mindsets you hold, you can begin countering them with more productive ones.

4 Provide you with tools to continue growing

At the conclusion of your partnership, your coach will give you tools and strategies you can use to continue cultivating a healthy mindset over the long term.

What Are the Benefits of Working With a Mindset Coach?

When you control your own mindset, there's little that's out of reach. Business leaders can gain a host of benefits, from inspiring employee motivation to shifting the organization's culture.

Results of mindset coaching could include:



Improved self-awareness

Working with a mindset coach means gaining a deep understanding of how your mind works — and how to make it work for you.

This kind of self-awareness has proven to be one of the most important [factors in executive success](#).

Greater self-awareness helps you break free from negative thinking and adopt a growth-oriented outlook. It also enables leaders to recognize both their strengths and weaknesses, allowing them to leverage what they do well without feeling insecure about where they need to grow.



Increased decisiveness

Better self-awareness makes you both more open to others' ideas and more likely to know when to stick to your own.

Instead of feeling paralyzed by anxiety or low self-esteem, a leader who's worked with a mindset coach has the confidence to make strong decisions and stick to them.



Heightened positivity and motivation

Positivity is a [motivation tool](#) that drives teamwide success. [Without a negative mindset distracting you](#), you'll be better able to picture a positive future for yourself and your team — and you'll feel more empowered to make it reality.



Better communication skills

People who have undergone mindset coaching are often more comfortable being open and honest with others in a professional setting. Your improved positivity and honesty will naturally make you a more inspiring communicator.

As a leader, remember that you set the tone for how your team members work. When they see that you're confident in them and their ability to reach their goals, you'll see boosts in productivity and [a better overall culture](#).

ENHANCING STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING WITH EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COACHING

Did you know the average adult makes around [35,000 decisions a day](#)?

Most of these decisions are little ones: what to have for breakfast, what to buy for lunch, whether to wear that bright orange tie. But sometimes, you have to make decisions with significant impact—especially if you're a business executive.

As an executive, you're often expected to decide everything, from which software to buy to how to restructure the entire organization—usually on tight timelines. But even with all your experience and accomplishments, you're still human, and making tough decisions is still, well, tough.

Most barriers to good decision-making come from those deep-rooted mindsets and habits we talked about earlier. When you've learned to overcome them through leadership coaching, you'll find it much easier to make a good call on almost all those 35,000 decisions.

How Mindsets Harm Decision Making

From childhood, we all develop subconscious patterns of thought that help us make most decisions on autopilot—a crucial skill for getting through all the little choices we face every

day. But while this is incredibly useful for routine tasks, it can hinder us when facing complex, unfamiliar decisions, especially in leadership roles. Relying on subconscious thought patterns also prevents the kind of growth mindset and leadership skills necessary for making transformative business decisions.

Consider the fear of failure. Our instinctual thought patterns often tell us to avoid decisions that might lead to failure, but this prevents us from taking healthy risks. In the long run, giving in to that fear of failure almost guarantees missing out on potential successes.

Change resistance is another common hurdle to innovative decision-making. Nearly everyone, to some extent, [rejects change](#) in favor of comfortable familiarity. But if an executive doesn't make strategic changes on a regular basis, the organization stagnates.

Each of these examples are natural human tendencies most people form at a young age. Countering them is not easy, but for executives, it's necessary.

A Growth Mindset and Leadership

The most positive mindset for executives is one that supports calculated risk-taking and quickly bouncing back when setbacks occur.

These traits are part of a "[growth mindset](#)"—a way of thinking built around the belief that everyone can learn and grow if they put in the work.

By developing a growth mindset, leaders can make decisions that aren't colored by fear or instinct. Instead, their decisions are built on the understanding that, given the right amount of effort and a sound strategy, anything is possible.

It's easy to understand why a [growth mindset and leadership](#) are a successful combination, but much harder to reach a growth mindset yourself. After all, many of the hurdles holding us back are the result of completely natural, long-standing patterns of thinking. Expert [executive leadership coaching](#) is needed to master these instincts.

What Executive Leadership Coaching Can Do

Decision-making skills that executive leadership coaching teaches you include:

- ✓ Mental agility and adaptability
- ✓ Openness to innovative ideas
- ✓ Clarity under pressure
- ✓ The ability to mentally reframe difficult problems as potential opportunities
- ✓ Long-term thinking and planning

Each of these skills is part of a growth mindset, and they're all traits that help you make the kind of positive, informed, and strategic decisions that help an organization grow.

FIRST STEPS TO BUILDING BETTER EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Imagine your job was to pull a lever all day, 50 times an hour. How engaged would you be?

Now, imagine your boss at the lever-pulling factory regularly reminds you how important that lever is for the company's mission and thanks you for being so diligent about pulling it. This might not be enough to get you excited about your work, but it would certainly make it more palatable.

The boss in this hypothetical is using simple but effective employee engagement strategies to help their lever-pullers feel respected and appreciated. When employees feel like they're appreciated, they're more likely to appreciate their employer in return, resulting in more positive feelings toward their work.

This is employee engagement, and it starts with the words and actions of leadership.

What Is Employee Engagement, and Why Does It Matter?

Gallup's definition of employee engagement is "the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace." Employees with high engagement are more likely to enjoy their jobs and feel motivated to do them well.

This translates to several positive business outcomes. According to Gallup, high employee engagement correlates with a 78% drop in absenteeism, a 23% boost in profitability, an 18% increase in productivity, and a 51% drop in turnover.

Unfortunately, Gallup also found that only 31% of U.S. adults feel engaged at work.



Most organizations are aware that they need to improve employee engagement, but few understand how. The most common approaches to cultivating employee engagement are small perks (think pizza parties and pool tables), but these little things don't address the factors that really make an employee feel valued and motivated.

The most effective employee engagement strategies, according to Gallup's findings, are:

- ✓ Fostering a sense of purpose
- ✓ Providing opportunities to pursue professional development goals
- ✓ Placing focus on employees' strengths
- ✓ Offering ongoing conversations with leaders
- ✓ Being a caring manager

Leadership's Role in Employee Engagement

Here's another [eye-opening statistic](#): Managers' actions account for 70% of the differences between engaged and unengaged teams.

If you're surprised, take another look at the five drivers listed above. Can any of them be achieved without the actions of leadership?

An employee's sense of purpose is partially dependent on the nature of the work, but it's even more dependent on whether the leader communicates the value of the work well.

Opportunities for professional development are only available if leadership makes them available, as are opportunities for employees to be recognized for their strengths.

You could apply similar logic to every other factor on the list. It turns out that the most effective employee engagement strategies are top-down tactics founded on strong communication, mutual respect, and emotionally intelligent leadership. These skills, like all skills, need to be learned and practiced.

[Leadership coaching](#) provides an opportunity to learn them. In fact, one [industry survey](#) found that leadership coaching increased employee engagement and satisfaction for 67% of respondents.

These more engaged employees work harder, and their more positive attitude often ripples out to their fellow employees in different departments. In this way, leaders who commit to employee engagement strategies end up helping the entire organization become healthier.

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CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN LEADERS & EMPLOYEES

According to a survey from [Axios HQ](#), only 27% of business leaders think their staff are fully aligned with the organization's goals. That sounds low, doesn't it?

Well, it gets even lower: Only 9% of employees responding to the same survey agreed.

It seems that cultural alignment is so rare, leaders and employees can't even align on whether they're aligned.

Closing this gap requires a cultural transformation—one that's all about better communication, transparency, and a shared mission.

To achieve this level of transformation, leaders need to rethink how they're showing up for employees and how well they're able to connect with them.

What Is Cultural Alignment, and Why Does it Matter?

Cultural alignment happens when everyone at an organization—from executives to junior hires—agrees on the organization's culture.

It requires a couple key ingredients. The first is a clear mission and vision. The second is action from leadership that demonstrates their commitment to that mission and vision.

When these factors are present, everyone is working toward the same goals, making the organization more productive. Cultural alignment improves employee morale and motivation, too. And it increases engagement by giving employees a sense of purpose.

But when employees don't feel aligned with the organization's culture, their investment in their work drops. Performance suffers, turnover increases, and employees may get burnt out more often.

Where Cultural Misalignment Comes From

Surprisingly, one of the primary culprits behind cultural misalignment is miscommunication.



For example, imagine an organization that announces a commitment to racial equity but has a mostly white C-suite. To an employee, this looks like hypocrisy and is evidence of cultural misalignment.

However, the hypothetical leadership team that developed this commitment meant it in an aspirational sense, and they've already developed a detailed plan for promoting more people of color to executive roles over the next five years. Because they know about this plan, they see the commitment as perfectly reasonable and aligned with the organization's values.

But if leadership doesn't communicate this plan or listen to employees' feedback, neither side will ever know the other's perspective. Misalignment, and all the cultural issues that come with it, will continue.

Communication breakdowns like this are unfortunately common, and they're among the most persistent challenges damaging cultural alignment.

Unclear expectations are another factor that causes cultural misalignment. If leadership champions patient customer service but also sets high expectations for the number of tickets customer service agents close every day, employees will feel confused about what the real priority is—patience or speed? This contradiction muddies their perception of what the organization's culture really is, leading to cynicism or frustration.

It's understandable that busy leaders sometimes forget to communicate their perspectives, clarify their expectations, and provide context for their culture-related decisions. But when these things fall to the wayside, cultural alignment falls along with it.

Bridging the Employee Communication Gap

Even when they know about cultural misalignment, many executive teams are slow to act, distracted by the importance of day-to-day business.

But culture plays a bigger role in business success than many realize. According to [Gartner](#), strong cultural alignment can increase revenue by 9% and boost employee performance by 22%.

So, there's no question that doing the work and investing the resources to culturally unite your team is a smart business decision. The only question is how to do it.

If you want far-reaching and impactful [cultural transformation](#), one of the first steps is to improve how leaders approach employee communication. Most organizations primarily

communicate in a top-down manner, but organizations that successfully align their cultures set up opportunities for frequent two-way communication between leaders and employees, such as town halls, meet-and-greets with executives, and opportunities for anonymous written feedback.

That said, a long-term cultural transformation can't happen without also improving leaders' **soft skills**. Better two-way communication and overall cultural alignment will become easier when leaders are trained in active listening, empathy, and self-awareness.

Honing these traits takes time and support from outside experts, but it's something all leaders can accomplish. Here, again, leadership coaching can make a significant impact by teaching leaders the communication skills and self-awareness they need to connect with employees.

IMPROVING CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN DEVELOPMENT WITH LEADERSHIP COACHING

If you put yourself in your employees' shoes, it's easy to understand why they might bristle when change happens.

When a company undergoes major shifts, employees may feel nervous about what their role will be under the new paradigm.

They might be asked to alter or scrap processes that they've worked hard to perfect, or abandon relationships with colleagues that they've spent years honing. In some circumstances, they may be worried about losing their jobs.

At the same time, employees often need to quickly adapt to a new culture, master new tools and processes, and form relationships with new teammates—all while trying not to disrupt day-to-day business.

That's a lot for anyone to handle. When so much chaos and uncertainty grips an organization, the only way employees can get through it is with the assurance of strong leadership.

The Problem with Change

No matter how hard employees try to maintain normal operations during a change, research shows that in most cases, day-to-day business gets disrupted—sometimes to the point where the company suffers. **L.E.K. Consulting** analyzed 2,500 mergers and acquisitions, one of the most common types of organizational change, across 25 years. It found that, on average, shareholder returns dropped 10% in the years immediately following an M&A.

Why does this happen? It'd probably take a book to list all the reasons, but a lot of it comes down to leadership's behaviors and attitudes.

For example, [Prosci](#) identifies poor communication between leaders and employees as a primary reason a change management plan fails. Another is change resistance, something that originates among employees but can only be fixed with confident yet empathetic leadership.

More concrete issues, like poor project management or a badly designed strategy, also influence the success of change initiatives. But even these practical factors are impacted by the strength of a leadership team.

How to Improve Employee Morale During Change

What, exactly, does good leadership during change look like?

Ultimately, it boils down to proactive employee engagement and empathy toward their concerns. Leaders who lead well during change tend to:

- ✓ **Overcommunicate** about what a change will entail and why it's occurring
- ✓ **Listen to employees' concerns** respectfully and do what they can to address them
- ✓ **Reinforce and model the change** to normalize its adoption
- ✓ **Collaborate with employees** to give them ownership of the change process

When you're trying to get through a change management plan on a tight timeline, some of these actions can feel like a nuisance or even a hindrance. But they're as necessary as they are difficult. To make it less difficult, you can always bring in a leadership coach to help.

The Role of Leadership Coaching

[Researchers](#) have found that during a major change like an M&A, leadership coaching has the potential to reduce emotional strain and increase collaboration.

These benefits tend to [spread throughout the entire organization](#), improving morale, strengthening trust, and ultimately, getting employees to buy into your change management plan.

PARTNERING WITH THE BEST LEADERSHIP COACHING CONSULTANTS FOR YOU

3



So, you've taken a long hard look at your company's needs and decided it's time to invest in leadership coaching. If that's the case, congratulations—you've taken the first step toward building a [happier, more productive workforce](#).

Now, it's time for the next big decision: Which leadership coaching consultant will you work with?

Use this chapter to narrow down your list of providers and decide on the criteria that will ultimately help you find the best match.

IDENTIFYING YOUR **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT COACHING NEEDS & EXPECTATIONS**

Your first move is to figure out what your ideal coaching experience looks like so you can, by extension, decide what qualities your ideal coach has. Use the following steps to zero in on exactly what you need so you can begin your coaching search with confidence.

STEP 1

Get Clear on Your Goals

One of the most important steps is to make sure you (and everyone involved in this decision) are perfectly clear about everything you want leadership development coaching to accomplish.

To do this, identify the [greatest leadership challenges](#) you're dealing with—the ones that made you start thinking about leadership coaching in the first place—and translate those into goals.

For example, if you need to retain more employees, your goal is probably to develop a leadership team that makes employees feel more respected and engaged. If you want to guide your organization through a merger, you likely want to teach leaders how to lead through a change.

It's also helpful to ask yourself if there's anything you can get out of leadership coaching that you didn't already think of. Maybe your primary goal for leadership development coaching is to improve employee productivity, but while you're at it, it can't hurt to also spend some time preparing the managers of today to be the executives of tomorrow.

STEP 2

Define the Metrics That'll Measure Success

If setting goals is about deciding the ideal outcomes of coaching, setting metrics is about giving those outcomes an ideal numerical value.

A general goal may be to build a healthier relationship between employees and their departmental leaders. Metrics related to this goal could include more positive employee feedback for department heads and better productivity for those teams.

The clearer you are about your desired metrics from the start, the easier it'll be to achieve them.

STEP 3

Decide Who Should Be Involved

It would be great if a coach could work with every leader in your organization, but that's rarely possible.

So, will you prioritize training executives so they can [lead the entire organization to a better culture](#)? Managers, so they can get employee productivity numbers up? Or leaders in one specific department that's having unique challenges with retention?

Knowing who will receive leadership development coaching helps you narrow down what you want. It also helps you refine your list of potential providers, since many coaches specialize in specific levels of leadership.

STEP 4

Determine Your Budget

Great leadership development coaching is priceless, but that doesn't change the fact that your organization only has so much room in its budget.

Leadership coaches typically offer tiered pricing models that differ according to the length of the coaching engagement, the number of participants, how long their sessions are, and so on. You'll of course want the coaching mix that gives you the most value for your dollar. An [ROI calculator](#) can help pick the investment that will give you the best return.

STEP 5

Establish a Timeline

You'll need to be realistic about how much time your leaders can devote to leadership development coaching. Sometimes, an external deadline sets your timeline—if you're preparing leaders for a merger, the training should obviously be complete before it happens.

In other cases, there may be no external deadline, and you'll have to decide what the ideal balance is between getting thorough leadership development coaching and not taking up too much of your leaders' time.

STEP 6

Create a List of Questions to Ask Potential Coaches

By now, you should have a clear idea of exactly what you want from leadership development coaching—both in terms of the overarching goals you want to achieve and of the logistics that will work best for you.

You're ready to start researching different leadership coaches and scheduling consultations with them. During these consultations, there are a few questions you should be sure to ask to guide you to the right choice.

10 QUESTIONS TO ASK LEADERSHIP COACHING SERVICES BEFORE MAKING A CHOICE

Sure, you could look at a leadership coaching service's website to get the basics—what they do, who they serve, how their courses are structured. But nothing beats a real-time conversation for learning all the details that will determine whether a partnership will work out.

Here are some questions to ask every leadership coaching services provider you're considering.

Questions about Credentials and Experience

To start, you'll want to verify that the leadership coaching provider has the skills and level of experience you need. Find out by asking:

1 How long have you been in business, and how many organizations have you worked with?

Experience matters in leadership coaching—it's not a skillset that can be learned quickly. Make sure the provider has been in the business for a while and has helped multiple organizations like yours.

2 Do you have any customer feedback?

A good coaching services provider will have a trail of happy customers ready to vouch for them. Ask to see testimonials and **case studies**, and make sure they have plenty of both.

3 Who are your coaches, and what training do they have or receive?

The coaching industry is unfortunately **not formally regulated**, so anyone can brand themselves a leadership coach, regardless of whether they've been trained as one. A disreputable provider might take advantage of this by sending low-skilled coaches to your organization. A reputable one will only hire highly trained experts.

Questions About Program Logistics

It's also important to make sure the coaching partnership will fit your schedule and all your other logistical needs by asking:

1 How is the curriculum structured?

Get information about the program's timeline, who will be involved, if participants will need to do anything between sessions, and so on.

2 How customizable is the curriculum?

No two leaders need the exact same thing from leadership coaching services, and great coaches recognize that. While they should have a clear plan for what they will cover during the course, they should also be willing to tailor each session to fit the needs and interests of the participants.

3 How responsive are you outside coaching sessions?

While you can't expect coaches to be at your beck and call, they should be reasonably responsive if needs or questions arise.

Questions About the Coach's Approach

Now it's time to dig deeper into how the leadership coaching services provider approaches their work and what schools of thought they adhere to.

1 What forms of behavioral science is your approach founded on?

You don't want a curriculum built solely on vibes. Good leadership coaching services are founded on science and proven methodology. If a prospective leadership coach can't name and explain that science, they're not worth your time.

2 What are the ultimate goals of your coaching curriculum?

The intended outcomes of the provider's coaching curriculum should align with the goals you've set. If your main goal is to develop transformative leaders, you might not benefit from a coach who focuses primarily on increasing team productivity, no matter how skilled they might be.

Also ask whether the coach focuses on simple behavior change or long-term [mindset coaching](#). Many coaches only work on the former, but the latter is what gets lasting results.

Questions About Measuring Success

Finally, you want to make sure your coach can measure the success of their coaching program. Ask them:

1 What ROI and leadership improvements should I expect?

Trustworthy leadership coaching services know what results clients will most likely see after taking their courses, both in terms of how leaders will change and what return on investment (ROI) the business should expect to see.

2 How are progress and success measured?

Prospective coaches should be able to name the specific metrics they track, such as higher employee retention or improved 360 reviews.

STOP MAKING THE SAME MISTAKES WITH THE HELP OF LEADERSHIP COACHING



Many executives, when asked about leadership coaching, would insist that their organization has far too much going on to make time for the extra training. So they stumble on, making the same mistakes over and over and letting their business flounder as a result.

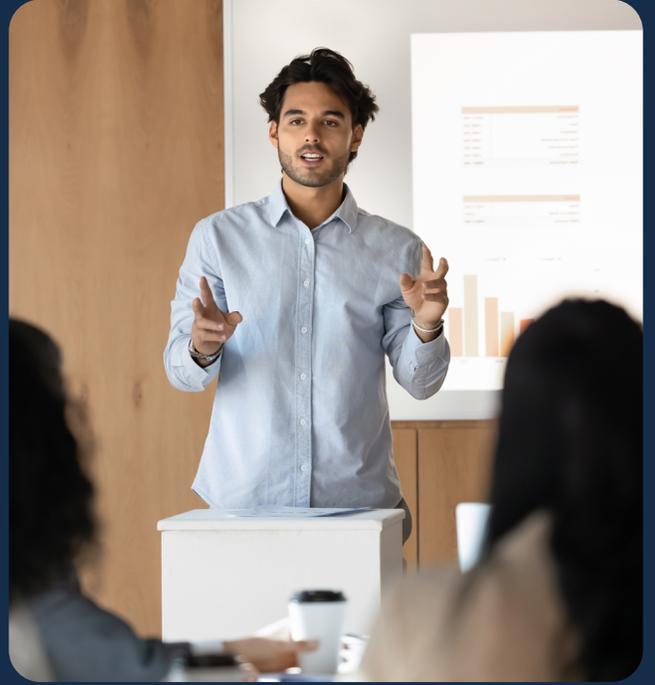
The truth is, no organization has too much going on for leadership coaching. That's because leadership coaching actually frees up time by making everything—from productivity to change management to employee engagement—a little bit easier to manage.

Leadership coaching equips leaders to tackle the most nuanced issues facing modern organizations, from mental health to mergers. It gives them the tools they need to create the culture they want. And it helps leaders develop the confidence and self-awareness to tackle any novel challenges that come their way.

BOOK A CONSULTATION

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