

RESEARCH

## Fixing the Broken Ladder for Future Women Leaders

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## Women Still Facing Career Obstacles

It may be 2023, but when it comes to women executives and their careers, some of the attitudes they face may be more reminiscent of 1883. According to McKinsey's Women in the Workplace 2022 report, the problem exists early on in women's careers. While 60% of men transition from entry level to first-level management, only 40% of women do the same. For every 100 men who are promoted from entry-level roles to manager positions, only 87 women are promoted and only 82 women of color are promoted, with only 1 in 20 C-suite executives being a woman of color.

In its own poll of executives, AMA has found that women do not feel supported in their careers. For example, compared with 67% of men surveyed, less than half of the women surveyed (49%) believed their companies provided enough training. When asked if they agree that their manager supports their career growth, while 72% of men said yes, only 57% of women agreed. And in looking at their career paths, 49% of women said they were unclear, compared with just 35% of the men surveyed.

Liz Landon, the chief people officer of Fishawack Health, a global healthcare commercialization organization, writes about some of the ways her company is addressing challenges women face in "Helping Today's Female Employees Become Tomorrow's CEOs." According to Landon, "Our leaders emphasize that it is not enough to simply give women the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Companies should develop personalized career pathways aimed at breaking down barriers from decades of disparity. Today, the most forward-thinking organizations have professional development programs in place to entice and retain recent graduates, support and sustain mid-career employees, and encourage experienced individuals to transition to leadership roles."

AMA is committed to providing the kind of training and support that companies can use to help women, including women of color, advance in ways comparable to their male counterparts. Our research-based, proven resources can help you build engagement today and be ready for the future.

Christiane Truelove  
Guest Editor, *AMA Quarterly*

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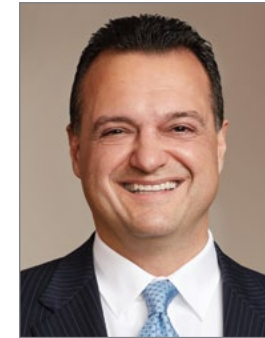
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## Improving Performance Through Professional Development

**2023** is a very special year at the American Management Association, as we proudly celebrate our 100th anniversary—a century-long, rich history of improving performance for millions through professional development. Along the way, AMA has helped transform the way people think, work and achieve their career goals.

AMA was founded in 1923 by visionary business leaders who thought it was time to form an organization through which managers would exchange information and discuss mutual challenges. That basic idea is still at the core of what AMA does, and we have evolved into a globally recognized leader in talent transformation, offering a vast array of resources to bring the benefits of learning to both organizations and individuals.

AMA has succeeded, in large part, because we have maintained a clear focus on our fundamental mission, as well as an ongoing commitment to making a positive social impact while helping individuals and businesses succeed.

In addition to AMA's core training and development curriculum, we have routinely conducted proprietary research and published actionable insights derived from that work. Such research has led to diversified thinking that many leveraged to implement best practices and create innovative next practices. This issue of *AMA Quarterly* serves as a prime example of our commitment to keeping our members well informed of timely, important issues that affect our world.

AMA will continue to develop new and innovative ways for the global workforce to thrive during unprecedented challenges and pursue efforts to serve society in meaningful ways. We are pleased to have you as part of our organization.

Manny Avramidis  
President and CEO  
American Management Association

# Fixing the Broken Ladder for Future Women Leaders

BY CHRISTIANE TRUELOVE

When climbing the corporate ladder, women are encountering many broken rungs. How can companies identify these broken rungs, and what can be done to fix them?

Though they represent more than 54% of the U.S. workforce, women hold just 35% of senior leadership positions, according to a study cited by career experts at Zippia.

On the positive side, women CEOs running Fortune 500 companies reached an all-time high of 44 women, according to a May 2022 article in *Fortune* magazine—but the article's authors note that this number represents just 8% of the total.

According to McKinsey's Women in the Workplace 2022 report, the problem exists early on in women's careers. While 60% of men transition from entry level to first-level management, only 40% of women do the same. For every 100 men who are promoted from entry-level roles to manager positions, only 87 women are promoted and only 82 women of color are promoted, with only 1 in 20 C-suite executives being a woman of color. And for every woman at the director level who is promoted to the next level, two women directors are choosing to leave their company.

"As a result, men significantly outnumber women at the manager level, and women can never catch up. There are simply too few women to promote to

senior leadership positions," McKinsey experts write. They also note that companies are struggling to hold onto the relatively few women leaders they have, and all of these dynamics are even more pronounced for women of color.

McKinsey found that women managers are more likely to experience microaggressions, with women leaders twice as likely as men leaders to be mistaken for someone more junior. Women leaders are also more likely to report that personal characteristics, such as their gender or being a parent, have played a role in them being denied or passed over for a raise, promotion, or chance to get ahead.

Although women leaders are doing more to support employee well-being and foster inclusion, experts state that this critical work is spreading them thin and going mostly unrewarded, with 40% of women leaders saying their DEI work isn't acknowledged at all in performance reviews.

Women of color face even more microaggressions and barriers to advancement. McKinsey reported that Latinas and Black women are less likely than women of other races and ethnicities to say their manager supports

their career development, and that they experience less psychological safety.

"If companies don't take action, they risk losing not only their current women leaders but also the next generation of women leaders," McKinsey experts note. "Young women are even more ambitious and place a higher premium on working in an equitable, supportive, and inclusive workplace. They're watching senior women leave for better opportunities, and they're prepared to do the same."

## LACK OF SUPPORTIVE FOOTING

These kinds of stresses create more broken rungs when it comes to engagement and support, a lack of which AMA's Women's Leadership Center believes is further holding women back. In late 2022, AMA conducted a nationwide survey on workplace engagement with more than 330 AMA members and seminar participants. The responses clearly show that men and women do not feel engaged or supported at the same level.

For example, compared with 67% of men surveyed, less than half of the women surveyed (49%) believed their companies provided enough training. When asked if they agree that their

manager supports their career growth, while 72% of men said yes, only 57% of women agreed. And in looking at their career paths, 49% of women said they were unclear, compared with just 35% of the men surveyed.

According to AMA, workplace engagement means employees:

- Fill a role where they showcase their strengths
- Find their work challenging yet interesting
- Feel their opinions are valid and their voice is heard
- Drive customer satisfaction that leads to achieving business outcomes
- Visualize growth opportunities within their current organization
- Earn recognition for their contributions to the team's success
- Have the tools and resources they need to succeed

"Imagine how the organization might benefit from training each of its entry-level associates consistently, all the while enlisting supportive managers who make growth opportunities clear to the entire team from the start," AMA experts say. "Training must go beyond the new professional to also reach managers responsible for the support and engagement at every step of the ladder."

By enhancing workplace engagement, companies can fix the broken rung and prepare a clear path for more women in the future.

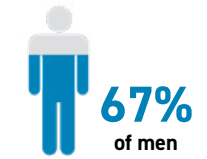
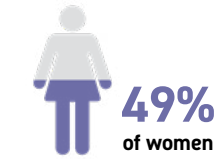
## WHEN THE SUPPORT ISN'T THERE

AMA experts maintain that without a multitiered learning and development strategy—one that trains both the employees and the managers training them—an organization opens itself up to unnecessary turnover and related hiring costs, among other challenges.

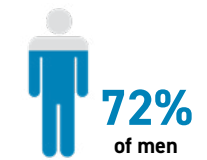
In its survey, AMA found that only 25% of women, compared with 47% of men, agreed that job promotions are administrated fairly. And 53% of women, in contrast to 34% of men, agreed that there is favoritism and everyone is not treated fairly.

Quantum Workplace, in "15 Employee Turnover Statistics to Shape Your Retention

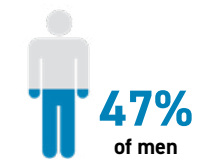
## According to the American Management Association's "Workplace Engagement: Fixing 'The Broken Rung' Requires Engagement at Every Level":



Agree that their organization provides enough training



Agree that their manager supports their career growth



Agree that job promotions are administrated fairly

Strategy," shared how 37% of employees left their organization due to a lack of career growth, and 27% of employees left because they felt undervalued or underappreciated for their work.

"When leaders provide career support and clear career paths, employees feel seen and heard, and they're far more likely to stay with the organization," AMA states.

## REPAIRING THE RUNGS

To bolster women's career paths and better support them in the organization, AMA suggests including women in the decision-making process throughout the employee lifecycle—specifically, they should be an integral part of recruiting, retaining, and professional development conversations. "When more women are added to decision-making scenarios, organizations improve processes, increase innovation and achieve greater organizational performance," AMA experts wrote in a recent white paper.

Additionally, female respondents told AMA that it's common to do work outside of the job description but not as common to speak up about it as a concern. "When employees engage in organizational cultures where they can speak up,

address concerns and suggest new ideas, they have greater organizational commitment and higher job satisfaction," AMA says.

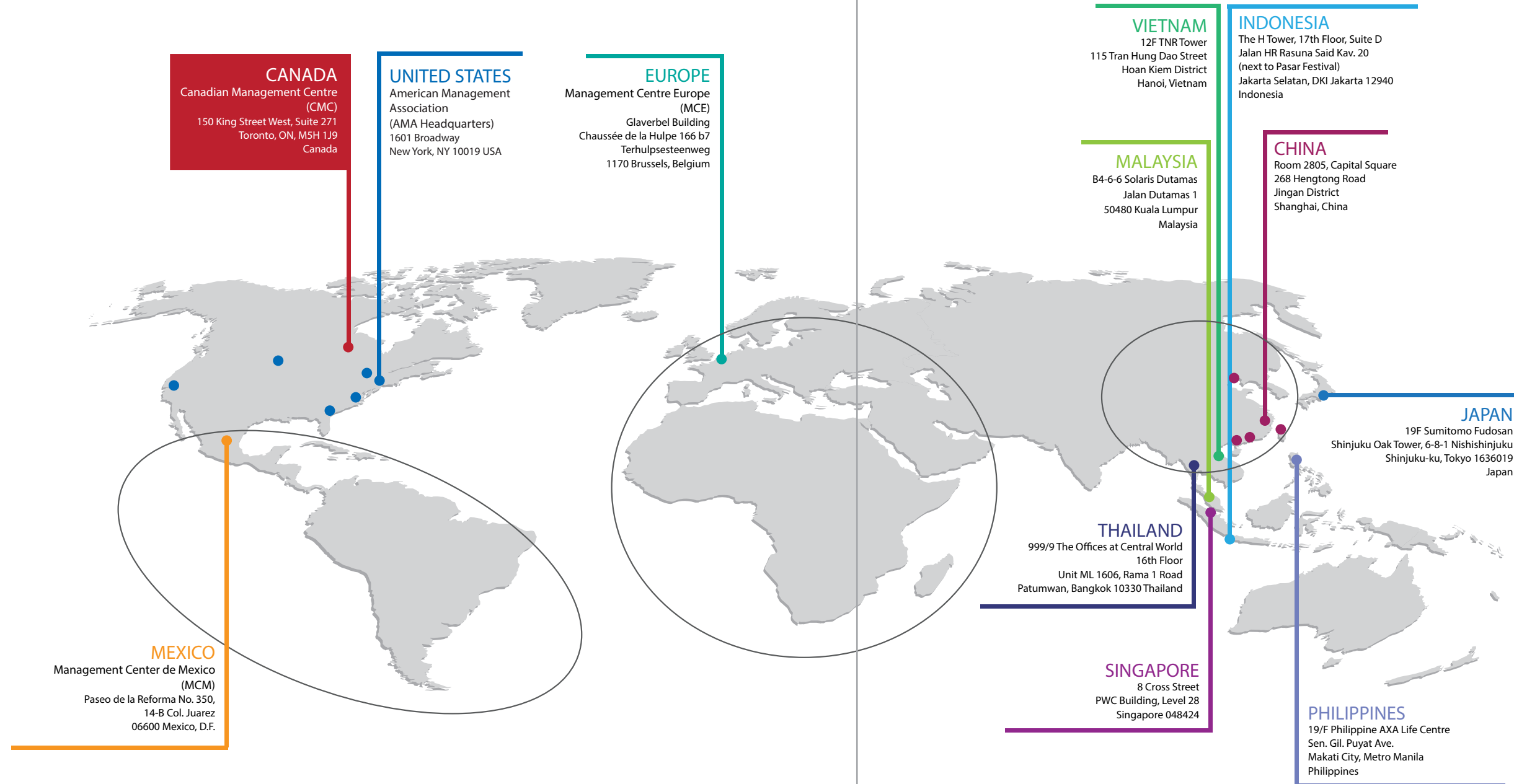
But if women are doing someone else's job—without ample training or recognition—they won't feel valued enough to participate in meaningful and courageous conversations that solve real problems and drive positive change.

In fact, more than one-third of these disengaged employees are actively applying to new jobs, compared with only 5% of engaged employees, according to Toby Marshall Egan and Zhaoli Song in "Are Facilitated Mentoring Programs Beneficial? A Randomized Experimental Field Study," which was published in 2008 in the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*.

By investing in training for employees at all levels, organizations can build and sustain engagement while also staying ready for the future. ☑

*CMC is a ready resource to help you to consider the links between employee experience and engagement, providing world-class curriculum, research-based solutions, proven client engagement and implementation, and customer-focused and outcome-driven results. Contact us today.*

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# Helping Today's Female Employees Become Tomorrow's CEOs

BY LIZ LANDON



Despite the declarations by some Fortune 500 companies that the number of female CEOs has significantly improved, the data tells a different story.

In 2008, 12 of the top 500 promoted their gender parity programs by announcing a female CEO.<sup>1</sup> Last year, that number rose to 44. Despite 14 years of progress, only 8.8% of these Fortune 500 companies in the United States are women-led. On the Fortune 500, only 1% are women of color.<sup>2</sup>

It's clear that women's ascension to CEO seats is moving at a snail's pace. In this article, I will touch on key reasons why the percentage of women in executive positions continues to lag. I'll also share some of the strategies and programs that our company, Fishawack Health (FH), has implemented to support female managers in making the jump to C-suite leadership.

## THE BARRIERS HOLDING WOMEN BACK

While most companies say they're committed to advancing women, they fail to recognize the systemic barriers, according to an extensive study by *Harvard Business Review*.<sup>3</sup> Today, women are still reporting harmful, destructive, and blatant sexism at work. Additionally, greater competition, isolation, and implicit bias have made women reluctant to choose certain professions, such as engineering.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the fact that women outnumber men in college and drop out less frequently than their counterparts, Kellogg School of Management predicted that half of women graduating from top MBA programs in 2017 would leave the full-time workforce within 10 years of graduation.<sup>5</sup>

The pandemic has only accelerated that pace. In 2021, more than 1 million women left the corporate world altogether. With that, the pool just became significantly smaller, and retention of women in senior roles is even more important.

The reasons for this lack of gender equity and parity in the workforce, while multifaceted, are the result of our corporate structures mirroring society. In this structure, some companies still advise women to suppress certain traits and attitudes if they are to "rise up" and meet the challenges of a demanding workplace.

There are still male mentors and sponsors who tell women to leave discussions of family and "mothering" at home. The "old

boys' club" mentality leads female workers to feel excluded from networking opportunities and makes it difficult to connect with other women.

In this environment, we learn not to take risks, to speak up, or to expect accolades for a job well done. Phrases like "fake it till you make it," "confidence gap," "impostor syndrome," and "be humble and don't fumble" are still in many employees' vocabularies. In these corporate settings, female workers are:

- Less likely to receive support when seeking high-level leadership positions
- Lacking the professional development skills required to excel
- Feeling isolated and frustrated

With no changes to corporate culture or policies, women will hold just 15% of executive positions by 2027, according to research executed by Accenture, Mercer, and the Network of Executive Women (now called NextUp).<sup>6</sup> The good news is that not all companies reinforce these cultural barriers.

## FORGING A PATH TO LEADERSHIP ASCENSION

Fishawack Health is a global commercialization company for the biopharmaceutical medical technology and wellness industries with 22 offices and 19 city hubs. With more than 1,500 healthcare experts, 65% of our employees are women. More than half of our senior leadership team are females, and FH is fortunate enough to have a female chairperson.

CEO Jon Koch and our executive leadership team believe that an inclusive, diverse organization can grow faster, keep employees longer, and perform better when there are women in senior leadership roles. Our leaders emphasize that it is not enough to simply give women the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Companies should develop personalized career pathways aimed at breaking down barriers from decades of disparity. Today, the most forward-thinking organizations have professional development programs in place to entice and retain recent graduates, support and sustain mid-career employees, and encourage experienced individuals to transition to leadership roles.

<sup>1</sup>CNN Money, "Women CEOs," 2008. <https://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2008/womenceos/>

<sup>2</sup>Women CEOs in America: Changing the Face of Business Leadership. Report supported by Women Business Collaborative with Ascend Pan-Asian Leaders, C200, and Catalyst (2022).

<sup>3</sup>Colleen Ammerman and Boris Groysberg, "How to Close the Gender Gap," *Harvard Business Review* (May/June 2021).

<sup>4</sup>Susan S. Silbey, "Why Do So Many Women Who Study Engineering Leave the Field?" *Harvard Business Review* (August 23, 2016).

<sup>5</sup>Sally Blount, "Getting More Women into the C-Suite Means Keeping Them in the Talent Pipeline," Kellogg Insight (March 10, 2017).

<sup>6</sup>The Female Leadership Crisis: Why Women Are Leaving (and What We Can Do About It). Research by Accenture, Mercer, and Network of Executive Women (now called NextUp) (2018).



## How Are We Doing?

The executive leadership team at FH believes in keeping an open channel to listen to and be aware of how employees feel about their experiences. As such, FH developed a twice-yearly survey called “Your Voice” as a regular pulse check to give members a consistent platform to share their voices. FH also introduced “Your Voice Box,” the always-on suggestion box employees can participate in anonymously.

Once a survey is complete, FH analyzes the data and develops insights to understand what co-workers deem important. We then mobilize our talent, HR, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and CXP teams to organize workshops and work with divisional and department leaders to create 90-day action plans. Results from “Your Voice” surveys are a testament to the hard work that FH has implemented in retaining talent and empowering its teams.

### FH’s 2022 results show:

**87%** feel personally valued by their manager

**83%** of women feel they can be their authentic selves at work

**83%** agree that people from all backgrounds have equal opportunities to succeed

**82%** feel they are part of a team, despite working in a hybrid environment

**73%** feel their manager shows a genuine interest in their career aspirations

**73%** say they find purpose in their daily work

One of my priorities, when I joined FH as chief people officer in September 2021, was to build an infrastructure that supports this vision of a diverse and inclusive environment and drives a people-focused culture. So how are we accomplishing these objectives?

### CREATING A FLEXIBLE, HYBRID ENVIRONMENT

While many in our industry begrudgingly accepted the remote workplace in the pandemic, we took it a step further by establishing a mobile-working philosophy based on the principle that employees should feel empowered to make the right decisions for themselves, their teams, and their clients in relation to how and where they work.

Clearly outlining our flexible hybrid working policies and mobile-working philosophy has been particularly important in breaking down gender barriers. For example, recent research by the Chartered Management Institute found that while remote working can help reduce barriers that prevent women from remaining and progressing at work, 76% feel uncomfortable asking their managers to work from home.<sup>7</sup> By being nimble and redesigning our use of workspaces, we have developed a working environment that can adapt to our team members’ needs. This fosters a greater sense of trust, ownership, and engagement, which enables individuals to do their best work without compromising their personal lives.

Working remotely does not mean employees no longer have a need to go to the office. In general, most co-workers crave connections, so FH established “Connection Days” to encourage meetups. In the process, we discovered that these self-directed encounters led to energizing our team members, strengthening their support of each other, and taking accountability to succeed together.

While technology such as Zoom, Teams, WhatsApp, and Google Meet enabled our teams to collaborate anywhere in the world, we also believe in the value of face-to-face encounters. To combine both, FH encourages a “camera-on” policy so each team member can “see” excitement and engagement and pick up on any concerns when working remotely.

### KEEPING WOMEN IN THE TALENT PIPELINE

Several studies have pointed out that young female graduates tend to avoid applying to challenging or intriguing entry-level positions because they feel they are not qualified enough.<sup>8</sup> Female graduates also hesitate to seek higher-paying positions because they fear the brunt of negative statements, such as not

<sup>7</sup>Heather Taylor, Rebecca Florisson, and Daisy Hooper, *Making Hybrid Inclusive—Key Priorities for Policymakers*, Chartered Management Institute (October 2021).

<sup>8</sup>Sally Blount, “Getting More Women into the C-Suite Means Keeping Them in the Talent Pipeline,” *Kellogg Insight* (March 10, 2017).

<sup>9</sup>Tara Sophia Mohr, “Why Women Don’t Apply for Jobs Unless They’re 100% Qualified,” *Harvard Business Review* (August 25, 2014).

<sup>10</sup>Blount, “Getting More Women into the C-Suite”

<sup>11</sup>Taylor et al., *Making Hybrid Inclusive*



“With 60% of female workers feeling excluded from meetings, it is vital that career experience programs be designed for remote and flexible working.”

being 100% qualified or not having the right number of years of experience.<sup>9</sup> When women move into their mid-careers, family and/or caregiving roles become a focal concern. Without encouragement, they are less likely to pursue supervisory jobs. Finally, those who have achieved seniority level may hesitate to take up more responsibility, meetings, travel, and teams to oversee. Women at this stage of their careers need motivation and support to take on the senior leadership mantle.<sup>10</sup>

Knowing that diverse talent is key to a thriving organization, our company tackled the challenges female workers (and all employees) encounter along their career journey by instituting a comprehensive, career pathway initiative.

Our **Career Experience (CXP) Pathway** is a series of structured and connected education programs that help our employees—from new hires to tenured colleagues—advance forward with a personalized and purpose-driven journey.

With almost half of female workers across various industries feeling they lack support and exposure as leaders and 60% feeling excluded from meetings, it is vital that career experience programs be designed for remote and flexible working.<sup>11</sup> Virtual programs drive inclusivity and equity by ensuring employees

can undergo professional development activities at the time, pace, and location that works best to reduce barriers, such as needing to attend the office for training and meetings.

Our CXP pathway has four segments that prioritize hybrid learning:

*Connect*, the learning and communication hub, is an innovative two-way communications platform designed to encourage and share tips, skills, and social learning with others in a global environment.

*High5* is FH’s online reward and recognition program, where team members can receive personalized shoutouts, tagged for embodying a corporate value. They can receive points, discounts, vouchers, and other rewards for a project well done.

*Fuel50* is our complete career development platform where employees can work with their managers to build their own personalized career journeys. The platform can track performance and career conversations on a quarterly basis so that team members can see how their skills improve.

*Coursera* is the online learning platform that all employees can access, offering content and courses from the world’s



“Elevating female leaders means recognizing they need customized professional development programs and specific services designed to overcome gender barriers.”



top universities and organizations. We've even tied Coursera courses to skills needed to advance, as spotlighted in Fuel50.

Additionally, FH also executed several products designed to train, nurture, and support high-potential talent throughout their career journeys.

**Our Graduate Program** is an 18-month program that offers recent collegians full-time positions with the potential for a permanent role. The initiative is an essential part of our talent pipeline strategy and hinges on hiring and nurturing diverse high potentials. The structured, rotational training program helps recent graduates identify a chosen area of specialty (such as medical writing, project management, marketing). They are given the knowledge, support, and training required to supercharge their careers within the healthcare setting.

**Comeback Programs** are initiatives designed to help employees return to the workforce after a career break from life events, such as maternity, mental health, or caring for aging parents. We have partnered with organizations that specialize in welcoming employees back into the workplace. FH also provides a comprehensive parental leave program for women and men, for those having a baby, using a surrogate to have a baby, adopting a child, and/or fostering to adopt a child.

**Women's Leadership Programs** motivate and inspire female leaders, offering them the opportunity to share their experiences and learn from one another. One such example is our partnership with UNTHINK. We selected 22 of our female leaders to participate in the program, which includes inspirational speakers, networking events, and learning modules to help our female leaders challenge set beliefs and current stereotypes to build their confidence.

We also support our managers in making the step up to corporate leaders, giving them broad experience, mentoring, and training to balance daily work demands while driving financial performance. These skills are critical in helping today's female employees become our leaders of tomorrow.

Often, our careers are influenced by key milestones in our lives, with major life events impacting well-being and the ability to take up leadership roles. Some of these events affect women

more than their male counterparts. During the past year, we have rolled out benefits and training programs to ensure we're reducing barriers for women during these moments:

**New Family Forming Benefits** help employees through their lifelong fertility journey, including financial, medical, and emotional support as they pursue parenthood and fertility care. The program is available globally for every employee.

**Menopause Support**, through our partnership with Over the Bloody Moon, assists our female workers going through menopause. This includes building a program that incorporates a webinar, workshop, handbook, and training sessions. We also recruited and trained "menopause mentors" to help colleagues navigate this life transition. The program not only is directly impacting our female colleagues, but also is supporting family members of those impacted by menopause.

### CUSTOMIZING FOR TOMORROW'S FEMALE LEADERS

Companies say they prioritize gender diversity and focus their efforts on building a robust pipeline of upwardly mobile women, yet data shows few women are taking up the leadership mantle. Corporate culture and policies often don't address the obstacles women face, such as unconscious bias, the lack of good female role models, and an inflexible working environment. However, with the right strategy, companies have an opportunity to reframe their employees' attitudes and workplace experiences. Elevating female leaders means recognizing they need customized professional development programs and specific services designed to overcome gender barriers. If we can surround our strongest senior women with the support they need, we could finally begin to fill tomorrow's CEO roles. [CQ](#)

*Liz Landon joined Fishawack Health in 2021 as its first chief people officer after serving as Heartland Alliance's chief human resources officer. Before that, she was VP of human resources at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and had a 25-year career with Accenture where she played numerous roles. Landon draws on her lived experiences of balancing a demanding career, while working part-time to raise her three children.*

# Leaders Need to Set the Stage for ACCOUNTABILITY

BY MITCHELL LEVY

Accountability is a critical component of any high-performance organization.



The ability to establish and maintain a culture of accountability within an organization is a crucial factor in driving success.

Unfortunately, too many leaders make the mistake of trying to set up an accountability system without first establishing themselves as credible. As a result, their efforts often fall flat because their employees don't fully follow them and don't fully take ownership of their actions.

Leaders who set the stage for accountability create a more efficient work environment. This type of environment also fosters greater commitment and increased employee happiness.

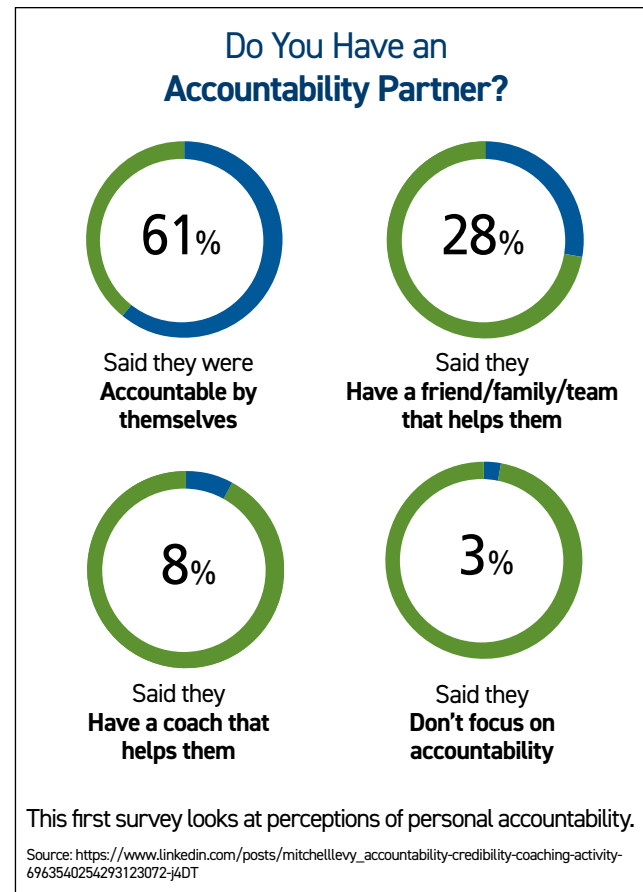
### MOST PEOPLE THINK THEY'RE ACCOUNTABLE, BUT THEY'RE NOT

On LinkedIn, I conducted two surveys that produced results that made me wonder. While 61% of the survey respondents said they were accountable by themselves, only 10% said that those they work with are accountable all the time.

In the first survey, 61% of respondents said that they're accountable by themselves. This means they don't rely on anybody else to keep them accountable. Meanwhile, 36% have an accountability partner that keeps them in check. The other 3% don't focus on accountability, which is mind-boggling.

Looking closely at the second survey, only 10% of survey respondents said their colleagues are always accountable for their actions. That is a meager number. It doesn't matter whether someone is a leader or an employee. The lack of accountability can seriously impact everyone's performance and the company's success.

When you look at these two surveys together, it's shocking to see that there's a huge disconnect between how people



perceive their accountability and their actual accountability. This is a problem!

Lack of accountability can lead to several problems for businesses, including but not limited to customer distrust, low client retention, and a bad business reputation. It can negatively

impact a company's bottom line as it can lead to lost revenues due to employee turnover and low employee morale.

It's essential that leaders set the stage for accountability. First, let's establish a common language by defining *accountability*.

### WHAT IS ACCOUNTABILITY?

Accountability is a measure of how well an organization, or individual, meets responsibilities. It is the ability to account for one's actions and accept responsibility for them.

Accountability is the foundation of good governance. It ensures that decision makers are answerable for their choices and that resources are used effectively and efficiently.

Leaders must empower accountability by creating a credible culture of transparency and ethical values. They should establish clear employee expectations and hold employees accountable to meet those expectations.

### WHY DO EMPLOYEES NEED ACCOUNTABILITY?

Accountability is one of the most important values in any organization. It is essential that all employees feel responsible for their actions and are held accountable for meeting deadlines, goals, and objectives.

Without accountability, employees have no incentive to work hard or meet expectations because there's no oversight to ensure they deliver what they promised.

One of the most important aspects of being an effective leader is ensuring that employees are held accountable and feel responsible for their actions. Teams perform better when they understand that their work is important and appreciated.

Leaders who are accountable and lead with credibility values instill accountability in their people.

### REINFORCE YOUR CREDIBILITY AS A LEADER

**"The leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."**

—John C. Maxwell, *Life Wisdom: Quotes from John Maxwell: Insights on Leadership*

A great leader possesses the ability not only to empower their team but also to take accountability for their actions. To do so, they need to be credible. Their employees must trust that the leader acts with integrity and follows through on commitments. When leaders lack credibility, it creates an environment of distrust and finger-pointing. Employee satisfaction dramatically suffers in that kind of environment.

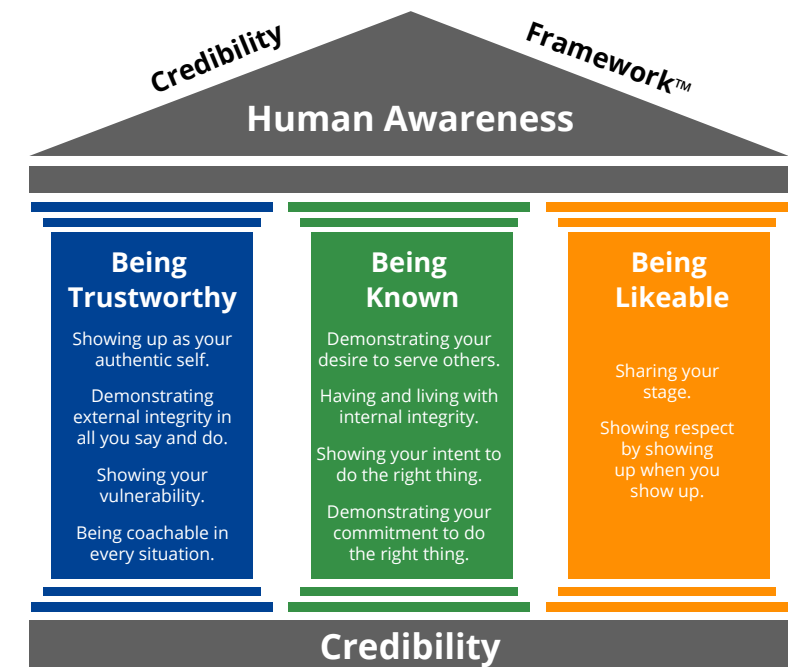
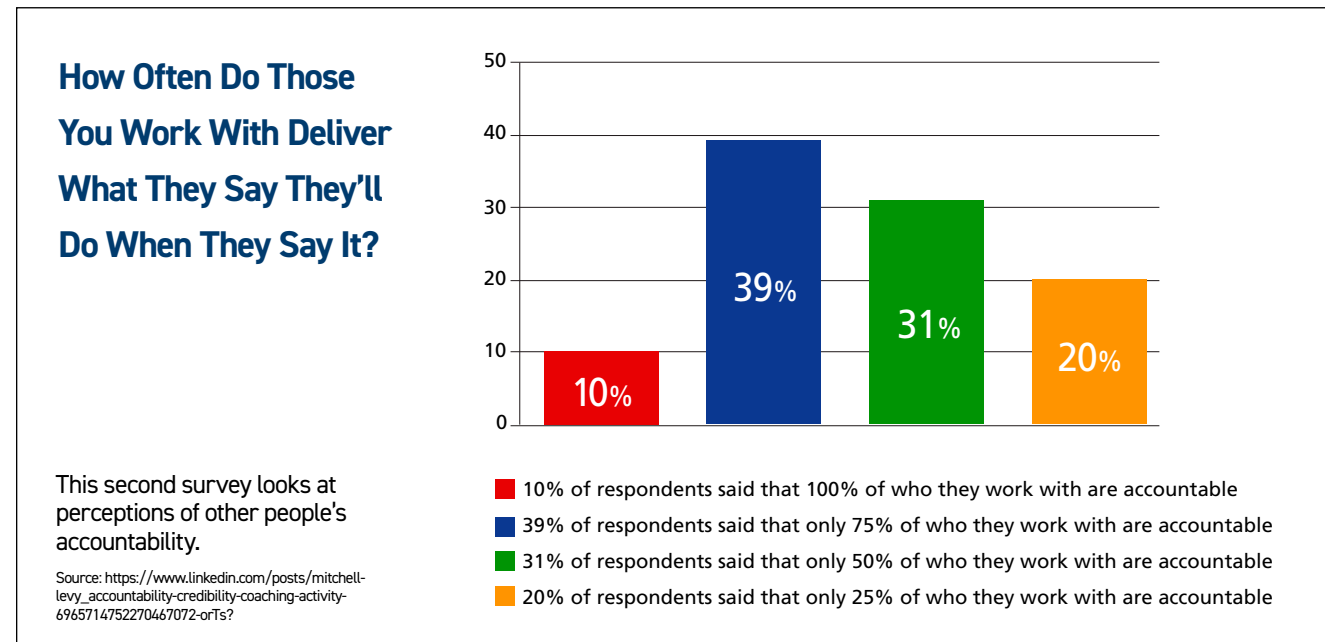
So, how can you become a credible leader?

The definition of credibility in the dictionary needs to be enhanced. The dictionary says that credibility is the quality that a person is trusted. In today's world, trust is not the only element that determines credibility.

After my organization interviewed more than 500 thought leaders on credibility, an enhanced definition emerged from the research. Credibility is the quality of **being trusted, being known, and being liked**.

Leaders must be trusted, known, and liked to be successful.

- *Being trusted* means that the leader is respected and believed in. If the leader is not trustworthy, then employees will not have confidence in them and will not fully follow them.



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- *Being known* means that people know what the leader stands for. Knowing who the leader truly is, including their core principles, makes it easier for employees to understand what the leader is like as a person.
- *Being liked* is precisely like it sounds. Leaders who are liked by their employees get better results, as the employees will be more willing to put in the extra effort.

In the workplace, leaders who are trusted, known, and liked by those they lead are more effective at guiding them toward their desired outcomes. Employees are happier and more willing to be led by leaders who they think are trustworthy, are known to be servant leaders and do the right thing, and are generally liked by others in the organization.

Let's dive into detail on how leaders can gain credibility.

### CREDIBLE LEADERS NEED TO BE TRUSTED

Being trustworthy is one of the essential qualities of a leader. It allows leaders to lead more effectively because employees can trust the leader to do what is best for them and for the organization as a whole.

As seen in the first Pillar of Credibility, "Being Trustworthy," a leader needs to be authentic, demonstrate external integrity, show vulnerability, and be coachable.



**Show up as your authentic self.** Authentic leaders are true and genuine in how they approach and mingle with their team and organization. It inspires employees to want to follow and support the leader.

**Demonstrate external integrity in all you say and do.** External integrity is what leaders show other people. Do they walk their talk? Do they do the things they said they would do? If a leader told a group of people they would follow up with a difficult employee or customer situation and then actually did it, the group will trust that leader in future situations. However, if they

don't do what they said they would do, employees will doubt that leader in future situations and, eventually, might stop trusting the leader completely.

**Show vulnerability.** Vulnerability is often seen as a weakness, but it is one of the greatest strengths a leader can possess. Leaders who admit they don't have all the answers show that they're humble and willing to learn from others. Being vulnerable also allows leaders to be open and honest with their team, creating a positive and productive working environment.

**Be coachable.** Great leaders are coachable and are always willing to learn from their mistakes. They realize that they cannot do everything on their own and that they need the help of others to be successful. This attitude sets an excellent example for employees, as it inspires them to want to learn and grow.

### CREDIBLE LEADERS NEED TO BE KNOWN

Leaders should understand that knowing of you is not knowing you! The employees they lead need to know how they operate and whether they are a person of their word. Being known as a credible leader helps to manage business and relationships better. When people know that a leader is reliable and has the experience to get things done, they are more apt to trust and confide in the leader.

As seen in the second Pillar of Credibility, "Being Known," a leader needs to demonstrate the desire to serve others, have and live with internal integrity, show their intent, and demonstrate their commitment to do the right thing.



**Demonstrate your desire to serve others.** Leaders help guide and direct their team in the right direction while also setting an example. Leaders must demonstrate their desire to "serve others" throughout the organization. By focusing on the needs of their employees, and their customers, leaders can motivate and inspire those around them.

**Have and live with internal integrity.** One of the critical qualities

of credible leaders is internal integrity. It allows them to gain the trust and respect of those they lead. Internal integrity is about doing the right thing, even when no one is watching. It's also about living up to one's principles and values, even when it would be easier to do otherwise.

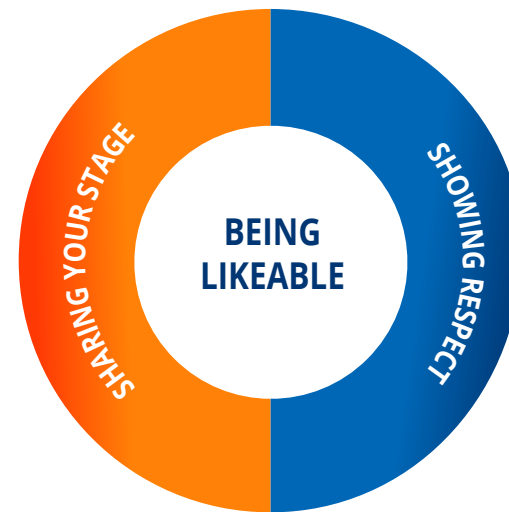
**Show your intent to do the right thing.** Communicating the intent to do the right thing is important in any leadership position. One's behavior as a leader has a direct impact on others in the workplace. This is why leaders should always show that they intend to do what is right and avoid engaging in behavior that compromises their integrity or undermines the trust that others have in them.

**Demonstrate your commitment to do the right thing.** There is no doubt that leaders are responsible for setting the tone and direction of their organizations. They must be people of character who can put their interests aside to do what is best for the organization and its employees. For this reason, leaders need to demonstrate their commitment to do the right thing at all times.

### CREDIBLE LEADERS NEED TO BE LIKED

Being likeable may sound like an unnecessary effort to please people. That is not what's meant here. In today's post-COVID work environment, being likeable is vital in establishing credibility. Employees don't need to "love" their leader to work with them, but having likability as a leader can further enhance a leader-employee relationship and make work fun and easier for everyone.

As seen in the third Pillar of Credibility, "Being Likeable," a leader needs to share their stage and show respect by showing up when they show up.



**Share your stage.** We've been taught that we need to focus on promoting ourselves and not sharing the thoughts, actions, and ideas of others. Leaders who highlight their team and others' credibility bring credibility to themselves. I've coined a term for sharing your stage, "credust," which is the sparkle

that happens when one shares someone else's ideas, thoughts, or actions.

**Show respect by showing up when you show up.** Showing up when you show up means coming early, coming prepared, and coming with your heart. Leaders gain respect by demonstrating that they respect and value those they work with. When meeting with those they lead, they should come early, at least a couple of minutes before their scheduled meeting. Leaders need to have done their due diligence in preparing for the meeting.

Most important, leaders need to come with their hearts. This means showing that they're present and ready to be of service. By applying these skills in day-to-day operations, leaders can become more credible. When leaders are credible, they are more successful in setting the stage for accountability.

### CREDIBLE LEADERS INSPIRE ACCOUNTABILITY IN THEIR PEOPLE

There is no question that accountability and leadership are intrinsically linked. Accountability is a cornerstone of good leadership, as it enables leaders to ensure that their teams are meeting agreed-upon objectives.

Creating a culture of accountability and instilling it in your employees isn't easy. Many leaders struggle to get their employees to take ownership of their work and deliver high-quality results.

Credible leaders lead by example and make sure their team is following suit. The best leaders are the ones who inspire accountability in their people and set an example by being accountable themselves.

One of the best ways leaders can set the stage for accountability is by modeling the behavior they want their team to emulate. If you want your team to be highly collaborative, you should be an excellent collaborator. If you want your team to value open and honest communication, you should encourage this in all your interactions.

Leaders must lead by example. If they promote the importance of accountability but fail to hold themselves accountable, it will have a detrimental effect on the rest of the team. That's why leaders must be as accountable as possible at all times.

Creating an accountability culture is accomplished by leaders who lead by example, practicing what they preach. They demonstrate a high level of integrity and reliability through their words and actions.

Setting the stage for accountability is done by being a credible leader.

*Global credibility expert and executive coach Mitchell Levy works with CEOs and C-suite executives to increase their ROI with operational credibility. Levy is a two-time TEDx speaker and international bestselling author of more than 60 books. Connect to him at MitchellLevy.com or Mitchell.Levy@CredibilityNation.com*

# A PLAYBOOK FOR THE PEOPLE SIDE OF M&A

BY ERIKA DUNCAN AND AARON OLMAN



Companies do not typically embark on high-stakes deals as significant as mergers and acquisitions without considerable assessment of the inherent advantages, disadvantages, risks, and opportunities.

Organizations have incorporated increasing rigor into every phase of managing the deal—from identifying the target through to integration. Finance, legal, and business development leaders typically vet and analyze the target company from multiple angles. Increasingly, HR is asked to participate in the due diligence stage to gather and assess the skills and roles of the target's workforce. Still, we continue to see a high number of deals that fail to yield the desired results. The reasons for failure vary, but disproportionately the crux of the problem lies in underestimating the role of human capital.

All the finances may be in order and show great signs of future growth, but future success can be erased by a gap in understanding how you will leverage your greatest future-state asset (including the costs and risks)—the talent. The company does not sufficiently consider how it will leverage the future new profile of its talent when strategic people leaders are not at the table until a deal is finalized.

## INVOLVING PEOPLE LEADERS DURING DILIGENCE IS PARAMOUNT

Many organizations fail to recognize the importance of involving people leaders during the diligence phase or simply don't possess the requisite strategic people leaders and related skill sets internally to do so. What will the future structure of the company look like? This question (and the answer to it) is typically overlooked in the due diligence process, and when the time comes to integrate the new company, we wonder why it does not fit within the current structure.

If the overarching blueprint—the end-state design for how people will fit in the future new company—is not considered, this could halt any growth and potentially cause a decline if the expectations are not set out from the very beginning.

However, involving people leaders during due diligence

changes the conversation. This involvement is paramount to a holistic pre- and post-close M&A playbook.

## CULTURE IS AN OUTPUT

Leaders often speak of culture and look to HR to quarterback a successful cultural transition through a merger or acquisition. But culture is an output of daily decisions, leadership behavior, and the workplace climate and environment.

To help drive culture, HR leaders must be part of the conversation early enough in the process to wrestle with the key questions that must be considered to form the culture with intention. Recognizing strengths, weaknesses and, most important, opportunities maximizes the likelihood of success in culture assimilation and business outcomes post-deal. The alternative comes with a steep cost and sometimes irreparable harm.

## THE M&A PLAYBOOK IS IMPERATIVE

We must keep top of mind that while people are generally one of the highest costs to an organization, people are also undeniably an organization's most highly valued asset. It is no secret that the cost to acquire and/or retain quality talent is at an all-time high, which is why we continue to emphasize that human capital must be considered a strategic imperative.

By leaning into the space that drives talent, an organization can proactively assess and refine its human capital strategy. A detailed assessment of a potential acquisition target's human

capital strategy will identify issues in a timely way and allow your team(s) to plan, avoid pitfalls, and help maintain and maximize acquired value. Primary areas of focus include the risks and rewards around people, processes, and technology.

A detailed M&A playbook is instrumental in enabling a seamless employee experience, an intentional culture, a solid continuity plan, an engaged workforce, and a leadership team that retains its sense of ownership. The M&A playbook ingredients generally are the same, but that plan must be adjusted based on each deal, the timing of the deal, the stakeholders involved, and more.

In the following section—under the categories of people, process, and technology—we provide guidance on developing an M&A playbook, including desired “run to” and “run from” states, topics or questions for consideration, and tips.

## PEOPLE

### Run to:

- Solid, integrated leadership
- Engaging, inclusive culture
- Curious, willing, entrepreneurial leaders

### Run from:

- Bifurcation or lack of role clarity
- Toxic culture



- Self-focused culture
- Overemphasis on individualism
- Lack of clarity in behavioral expectations

**Considerations:**

- Are the total rewards (compensation and benefits) set up in levels with guiding principles for standardization and growth?
- What are the characteristics you expect of your leaders?
- What is the anticipated future leadership structure?
- What is the current-state culture assessment? How would you describe the desired future-state culture?
- What are the areas of talent redundancy? Areas of talent gaps?
- How can you ensure role clarity?

**TIP** Conduct a bench-strength talent analysis before the deal or (at latest) during integration in conjunction with key leaders. It is imperative to anticipate and outline the desired infrastructure of culture, titles, connectivity, integration versus affiliation and, most important, role clarity. Without this anticipatory step, there is a guaranteed issue with role clarity, culture and operational haze, and dissatisfaction with the changes and leaders.

**PROCESS**

**Run to:**

- Defined leadership system

- Clear communication cascade
- Standardization and optimization
- Documented desired state

**Run from:**

- Lack of (or inconsistent) KPIs
- No communication plans
- Leading by exception
- Lack of accountability and line of sight to desired state

**Considerations:**

- How are we synergizing all processes?
- Is the org design and infrastructure conducive to adaptability?
- What documentation will exist to define processes?
- What are the expected KPIs?
- How do teams communicate among themselves and with one another?
- How is accountability maintained?
- What is currently being optimized/automated? What can be/should continually evolve over the long term?
- What is the process for reviewing and disseminating change notices?
- Will the companies (and their respective support departments) be fully integrated?

**TIP**

Through M&A, the company must decide whether the two organizations will fully integrate or not at all. There are very few examples in which operating somewhere between the two can be successful. If the plan is to integrate, everything from HR and finance to operations needs to fully integrate, and have technological support to make the union successful. If the decision is not to integrate fully, the entities should be allowed to operate completely independently of each other. However, this option can bring its own challenges, as the company will likely want to roll up data and information to the senior leadership team.

Prior to M&A activity, build a title leveling structure that allows the company to align compensation, benefits, and decision-making ability while having the flexibility to accommodate a variety of titles. Title leveling is a robust framework that allows for flexibility and adaptation and supports recruitment, retention, and culture—while still standardizing—as a company grows. With this mechanism, leaders can encourage and reward “lateral” growth in a way that is not limited to promotions. Leaders need the ability to say “yes” to engage and retain top talent.

As an organization acquires smaller companies, typically the titles in the acquired company are higher than they would be as a part of the new company. It’s difficult and certainly demotivating to reduce titles, but as a company grows, everyone cannot be an EVP, SVP, or even VP level. However, multiple titles and roles can fit into each “level,” allowing for scalability, individuality, inclusivity, and perspective.

Building a flexible title leveling structure in the background can allow current titles to remain and avoid causing additional stress during the integration process. Over time, the goal may be to align titles as well, but not right out of the gate. The title leveling framework behind the scenes will still allow structure and consistency, giving the company the ability to scale quickly while avoiding ruffling any feathers and causing distress.

**TECHNOLOGY**

**Run to:**

- Integrated technology
- HRIS hierarchy
- Best-in-suite/class

**Run from:**

- No technology roadmap
- Lack of integration
- Paper and spreadsheets

**Considerations:**

- What is the technology roadmap?
- What is the process for integrating tools?



- What is the HRIS hierarchy?
- Which finance system will be used?
- What are the existing internal communications tools for each company (such as Slack, MS Teams, etc.)? Which tools will be used going forward, and what is the transition plan for adoption of these tools?
- What will happen with the respective intranets? Will/how will they be consolidated?
- What is the plan for integrating the respective applicant tracking systems (ATS) and learning management systems (LMS)? What will be done to ensure nothing falls through the cracks in regard to hiring, onboarding, and professional development activities that are ongoing through integration? [CG](#)

**TIP**

Through the entire process, ensure that anything that is employee-facing (or candidate-facing) is seamless. For the employees, the less disruption to day-to-day tools and technology, the better. Also, focus on the way tools support the candidate experience for those in the middle of onboarding.

*Erika Duncan and Aaron Olman are co-founders and human capital advisors for People on Point. Duncan is an experienced corporate human resource officer with a demonstrated history of working in the hospital and health care industry, and is skilled in HR strategy, organizational design, M&A/integration, HR technology and analytics, and operational leadership. Olman is an expert in HR systems, HR analytics, compensation design, and operational efficiency. With 10 years in progressive HR leadership for health care, home health, and other industries, he brings insight, expertise, and value to workforce planning and due diligence and has the unique ability to analyze people, data, and dashboards.*



# As a Manager, How Do You Address QUIET QUITTING?

BY JENNA BAYUK

Quiet quitting is the fast-growing trend of doing the bare minimum at work.

With quiet quitting, you do what you need to do to fulfill your role description but nothing more. This trend is not only a sign that employees are mentally checking out but also a strong indicator that the work culture at their job is unhealthy. As a manager, how should you address quiet quitting and begin reengaging your team?

## QUIET QUITTING, AND WHY IT MATTERS

The trend of quiet quitting is not a new one, but it has gained in popularity over the past year. According to a Gallup survey in June 2022 of workers aged 18 and older, more than half of U.S. workers have clocked out and are psychologically disconnected from their jobs.

If you're a quiet quitter, you'll show up for work and carry out the tasks that you need to, but you won't go beyond your outlined duties. There will be no taking on extra tasks or pulling together to support the team on certain projects, no volunteering to plan activities outside of work, or no responding to emails outside of work hours.

While there is nothing wrong with doing the work you're paid for, at least on the surface, the reasons for doing the absolute minimum are why quiet quitting is bad—bad for business and bad for the individual.

As a rule, people like to feel included and want to be part of something. And this includes wanting to be part of a team at work. Most employees want to be more than simply their job title. They want to have a purpose and strive for a bigger goal, play a part in the business, and feel valued. Without this, employees will switch off.

When employees don't feel listened to or believe that their work matters, they'll feel unhappy and dissatisfied and want to go through the motions of their role rather than work hard to help achieve the company's goals. This is damaging for the quiet quitters and the business culture alike because it prevents the growth of the individual and the company.

## HOW TO TACKLE QUIET QUITTING

Quiet quitting is a sign of poor management, and the first step in tackling this phenomenon is for managers to become strong leaders who can engage with the team and understand the needs of their employees. The CEO of the business should provide proper leadership training, as company culture comes from the top. Training inspires and empowers managers to care about their teams, and this will have a trickle-down effect on the team itself. Managers will likewise want to inspire the team, empower them, and ensure they care about the business and the role each one plays in achieving the organization's goals.

Leaders must be clear about the vision and goals of the team, so that everyone knows where they stand and why their role is important to the wider objective. There should be plans in place to support and enable people to grow.

Here are three ways to address quiet quitting:

**Reengage quiet quitters.** Employees must be listened to if they are going to care about their job, and managers must ensure they always listen. Without listening, the leadership doesn't know how their team feels or what motivates them. By taking the time to talk to employees and really hear their opinions and thoughts, you can work with each team member to put a plan in place together.

Inclusion is key. If an employee isn't involved in the plan of action created by you as the manager, he or she is far less likely to engage with it. Agree to realistic goals that both provide the right work-life balance and allow the employee to strive for promotion.

Without a reason to work hard, people will stop trying and will just do the key things they have to do, excluding anything extracurricular to their role. It's vital that you, as a manager, provide the reason for employees to work hard and want to engage with the business.

**Hire in the right way.** To find the right person for a job and prevent quiet quitting in the first place, you must be clear about the demands of the role from the outset, what exactly is involved, and the possible progression paths.

Throughout the interview process, ask questions to try to establish how much candidates want the job and whether they are the right fit for the demands of the role. It's important to ask about previous jobs they've had and what they felt they contributed to those companies, as well as what made them want to apply for this job. By gaining insight into their personality and experience, you'll have a better understanding of whether or not they'll fit with your team.

Once you have hired a new staff member, make sure the onboarding experience is a good one. In addition to the core training, introduce the employee to the rest of the team and wider business, communicating throughout just how their job fits in with the business strategy and what the expectations and opportunities are for that employee. When you settle new staffers into their roles well, they are more likely to feel valued from the start and incentivized to work hard and be a team player.

Be clear on goals and give feedback on a regular basis so that everyone knows where they stand. By making time for feedback, you also create opportunities for employees to give their own feedback. If they're unhappy about anything, then you'll be able to fix it before it becomes a bigger issue.

Creating a culture of openness is beneficial for all since employees need to feel comfortable discussing any mental health issues they may have. Through communication with your team daily, you will be able to detect any possible problems or areas where staff may need extra support.

If communication is poor, you won't know when employees are feeling stressed, unhappy, or unheard, and you won't be able to



“The good news is that an effective manager knows how to get the best from the team, motivate and inspire employees to work hard, and collaborate with colleagues.”

take the necessary actions to remedy the problem. It is when work stops being appealing, rather than something employees want to be part of, that quiet quitting takes over.

**Support mental health and well-being.** There is no denying that the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis have taken their toll on many of us. We are under financial pressure with rising bills to pay and increasing levels of job insecurity to boot. If, on top of this, we don't feel good about work but instead just show up and do the bare minimum—which can lead to feelings of pointlessness or worthlessness—then our mental health will suffer as a result.


According to Forbes, 52% of workers experience burnout. Burnout is when you feel utterly exhausted, both physically and emotionally. Employees who experience burnout will be unable to fulfill their work duties and either need time off or decide to quit altogether. This is not a good outcome for the individual or the business, as it risks losing real talent.

The key is to provide support for employees' emotional well-being so that there are alternatives to simply quitting work. People need to feel free to express how they feel and tell their manager if they're stressed or unable to cope well at the moment. Without a culture of openness, employees may choose to walk away rather than stay and try to find a way through it.

To work beyond the boundaries of their job requirements, employees not only need to be involved and feel valued but also need reassurance that they'll be listened to if they have an issue

or something they want to discuss with their manager. This open culture must come from the top, and leadership must be clear in their communication. Employees must know that they will be supported and that this support is always available if needed.

If your team talks to you, you can continue to collaborate and work together. You can make extra plans to support an employee who needs time off because of exhaustion, or you can find a way to reduce the stress an employee is feeling because you know what's causing it. By talking, you can be proactive and keep your team engaged.

The worrying trend of quiet quitting must be addressed by managers. The good news is that an effective manager knows how to get the best from the team, motivate and inspire employees to work hard, and collaborate with colleagues. Most quiet quitters have been neglected and left to disconnect from the business. By reengaging with them, you should be able to make them feel they are listened to, valued, and a pivotal contributor to the overall business goal, and give them the necessary incentive to go above and beyond in their job. 

*Jenna Bayuk is the founder of Kinship Collective, an organization that supports busy entrepreneurs in achieving their business goals and objectives while overcoming obstacles that have prevented them from executing their vision. Kinship partners with entrepreneurs in three key areas—people, operations, and community—and employs a methodical and pragmatic approach to solve issues in these areas and support clients with both short- and long-term solutions.*



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# Climbing the Heights of Communication

BY SAAHIL MEHTA

## What happens when communication goes wrong?



Poor communication can cause you to lose time, relationships, well-being, or a lot of money. According to consultant David Grossman in his 2011 Holmes Report article “The Cost of Poor Communications,” the total estimated cost of employee misunderstanding was \$37 billion in companies with 100,000 employees in a survey of 400 U.S. and U.K. corporations. This cost included actions or errors of omission by employees who had misunderstood or were misinformed about company policies, business processes, job function or a combination of the three. Misunderstanding cost each company an average of \$62.4 million per year.

What if it cost you your life? Mountaineers like myself take communication very seriously. We are at the mercy of the forces of nature, and poor communication can cause a serious injury if not death. Back in December 2010, my wife and I were climbing to the top of Kala Patthar in Nepal at 5,545 meters above sea level. Because it was off-season, we met the same small group of people every day, allowing us to get acquainted with one another. One afternoon, one of the climbers was not in sight, so I asked my lead guide about his whereabouts only to find out that he had passed away due to altitude sickness. I was shocked. How did this happen? Questions started running around in my head. What if the guide had communicated better by checking in with the climber more regularly? What if the climber had communicated better about his physiology? What if...? The point is, the reasons could be endless, but the loss of life could have been avoided through better communication.

What if we could communicate in our day-to-day lives like we do on mountains, as if our life depended on it? We could save a lot of pain and scale our summits of success faster.

### WAYS OF COMMUNICATING

In today's world, we communicate through multiple mediums,

such as text, voice, and visual (facial expressions and hand gestures), and both in person and virtually. In addition, we communicate across the country, if not globally, with people of different ages who have different languages as their mother tongue. The key question then becomes, how can we be sure a message was properly communicated?

To answer this question, we need to break communication down into three components, two of which are in the control of the communicator (intention and behavior) and one of which is in the control of the receiver (comprehension).

**Intention.** You may have the intention of communicating a particular message, but your behavior would suggest otherwise. A great example of this is when you've just concluded a frustrating conversation with person A that angered you, and you communicate with person B before calming down. For person B, the words used and the tone of voice do not match. In this case, there is a mismatch that causes confusion for the receiver.

One tip to avoid this: Check in with yourself before you start communicating with someone else. Ask what state of mind you are entering the situation with. Is it a state of mind that is serving you, or not?

**Comprehension.** Now let's look at the scenario in which your intention and behavior match, but for whatever reason, the receiver has not comprehended what you are saying. You may even argue that the receiver never really comprehends 100% of what you wish to communicate. This could be the result of several factors that include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Your communication is clear but too brief.
- There is a language barrier.
- There is a lack of understanding.

- They are not listening.
- They don't care.

One tip to avoid this: Ask people to relay back to you what they understood. This may work well with those who are junior to you or at the same level, but those who are more senior could prove to be a challenge. One great follow-up is to send a written summary of your discussion to the other person, giving him or her an opportunity to make corrections if required. This is so important to avoid the “I did not say that” conversations.

**Intention, behavior, and comprehension.** Because the use of texting seems to be growing at a rapid pace, the challenge can become even worse, as there can be multiple meanings to a communication. Take this seven-word sentence:

I never said he stole my money.

Depending on which word you emphasize, this sentence has seven different meanings. So which was intended, and which was comprehended? Without understanding the behavior, it becomes even more challenging to ensure that the intention and comprehension match. With more communication happening through messaging, chats, emails, and so forth, this is a recipe for greater pain for both the company and its people if it is not managed properly.

One tip is to reread your communication before sending it and ask yourself how else it could be understood. Highlight the necessary words in your own way to increase the probability of the receiver understanding it the way you meant it.

Now that you have more clarity on the communication protocol, let me share three tips:

- If you are unclear, ask questions. Doing the wrong thing is far worse than gaining clarity.

- Be aware of your state of mind before entering a conversation, and ask yourself if it is serving you.
- To make your writing more clear, ask yourself how a communication might be misinterpreted.

I'll leave you with another mountain-climbing experience that caused a tremendous amount of anxiety for several folks, all due to miscommunication. While climbing Chopicalqui in Peru, our group had no cell phone signal and had to resort to quick calls using a satellite phone. Every evening, our lead guide would send a message to our coordinator in Lima to let them know what point we had reached on the mountain and to confirm we were all OK. After that call, the coordinator would communicate on a family group chat with our spouses and parents.

On our way down, after summiting the 6,354-meter peak, some members were so tired they asked for a helicopter to take them down. As the group leader, I reiterated that a helicopter would only be considered in the case of an emergency, especially at our high altitude, where the air was so thin the mission could be more deadly. Since there was no emergency, no helicopter would be coming.

This was communicated to the coordinator, who only told the families about the request for a helicopter. Because a helicopter is called in only for an emergency, each member of the climbers' families had a sleepless and anxious night, wondering if it was their spouse or child experiencing trouble. It was a full 18 hours later, after we were able to pick up a phone signal and speak to our family members, that everyone calmed down.

If you treat all communication as you would on the mountain, where your life depends on it, you will deliver clearer messages and avoid misinterpretation. [CC](#)

*Saahil Mehta is an author, speaker, and mountaineer.*

# How executives can more effectively include **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

BY JILL HOUGHTON



## Leaders have an opportunity to do more to be inclusive of people with disabilities—their employees, customers, and the public.

Convincing leaders usually starts with the business case. The good news is there's a strong one.

When Disability:IN, a global organization driving disability inclusion and equality in business, co-created the Disability Equality Index with the American Association of People with Disabilities in 2014, we saw it as a benchmarking tool for our corporate partners to see how they stacked up against their peers. Over the years, the DEI has become the world's most comprehensive tool for companies looking to strengthen their disability inclusion journeys.

Accenture, one of our partners, used DEI survey data to show that companies that are champions of disability inclusion earn as much as 28% higher revenue, double their net incomes, and post 30% higher profit margins.

### **ONE OUT OF FOUR PEOPLE HAS A DISABILITY**

Sixty-one million Americans have disabilities—and anyone can join this group at any time. As a segment, they represent the

third-largest market after the Latine and Black communities. The discretionary income for working-age persons with disabilities is \$490 billion. One out of four employees has some form of a disability, with the majority of those disabilities being invisible, or non-apparent, such as dyslexia or autism.

The corporate case for disability inclusion goes far beyond what the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 set out to do, which was to provide equal access to opportunities through transportation, telecommunications, or employment. But the ADA can't legislate attitudes. People with disabilities still face systemic bias and discrimination about their ability to perform their jobs and are twice as likely to be unemployed versus their non-disabled peers.

Many companies ask us where to begin their corporate disability inclusion journeys. We're happy to share best practices across the enterprise, all the way up to the CEO's office. And while there is no easy or universal answer, DEI data has shown us that the following practices drive the most impact, beyond hiring:

contracting with disability-owned business enterprises, creating accessible tools and technology, and demonstrating to investors how the company is inclusive to people with disabilities.

### **TAKE THE LEADERSHIP BATON...**

Leaders have an opportunity to tell their own story and bring their lived experiences into the workplace to benefit others. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella co-wrote the 2017 book *Hit Refresh* and talked about the impact his son Zain, who has since passed on from cerebral palsy, had on him as a leader, teaching him about empathy and the power Microsoft has to create products that are accessible for everyone. We worked with Microsoft and Steve Gleason, the former NFL football player who has Lou Gehrig's disease, to develop eye gaze technology for Microsoft's Surface Pro tablet.

### **...OR BE AN ALLY**

If you don't have a personal story to share, consider being an ally by leveraging your influence to promote accessibility and inclusion. Start by learning about the different types of disabilities and learning from people who have them. The disability community includes people who are affected physically, intellectually, mentally, developmentally, cognitively, sensorily, or a combination of more than one factor. You can empower workers to talk about barriers they're facing at work and in life and help eliminate them.

### **RECOGNIZE THE POWER OF MENTORSHIP**

Jeff Wissel, Disability:IN's chief accessibility officer, was a longtime certified financial planner at a major financial services company before coming to us. He has a degenerative eye disease and spent most of his time at that company hiding his disability, thinking it was a weakness. Seven years ago, he found a mentor there who had a similar disability and helped him embrace his low vision as his greatest strength.

Wissel says, "The power of embracing vulnerability is life-changing. When you find your inner voice, you realize you were spending a lot of mental energy trying to hide something and not bringing your authentic self to work. And as a leader, that's not what you want out of your employee base. You want productive employees who bring diversity of thought so you can create better products and services to match your customer base."

### **INNOVATE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES**

Starbucks came to us because it wanted to reimagine the customer experience for people with disabilities. For deaf and hard of hearing customers, Starbucks added speech-to-text technology that provides a live visual display of speech for partners and customers to reference when placing or picking up an order. The company also added order readiness notifications through a customer order status board that visually provides an update and confirms when an order is ready.





Since 2021, Starbucks has offered free Aira service, which connects people who are blind or have low vision to trained, professional visual interpreters who provide instant access to visual information about the customer's surroundings through a smartphone app. Starbucks also offers multiple menu formats, including large-print and Braille, in all U.S. and Canada stores. Globally, the company operates 11 signing stores that provide a space for the Deaf and hard of hearing community to connect through sign language and celebrate Deaf culture.

The Walt Disney Company recently added dolls using wheelchairs to the "It's a Small World" ride at Disneyland,

as part of an ongoing effort by Disney to look for inclusion opportunities. The dolls are participating alongside their non-disabled peers instead of being depicted as limited or incapable because of a disability. Disney's move helps people with disabilities feel seen and represented.

We worked with Marriott to develop the "Room for All" concept. Marriott's goal was to create an inclusive hotel room that went beyond ADA code requirements, making hotel stays more enjoyable. The company wanted to develop a room that looked and felt good, since travel can be difficult for people with disabilities.

Housed in Marriott's Innovation Lab in its Bethesda, Md., headquarters, Room for All explores ideas for accessible and cross-disability features such as voice-activated technology controlling room temperatures or lights and room layouts that ensure mobility space for guests who use wheelchairs. Through the hotel chain's advocacy, the global standard for bed heights was lowered to be more inclusive to people of short stature or who have difficulty getting into a high bed.

### VIEW DISABILITY INCLUSION AS AN ESG TOOL

CEOs and investors are intensifying their focus on the "S" of ESG (environmental, social, and governance investing) activities, according to the latest Edelman Trust Barometer report. Leading companies want to accelerate a culture of inclusion across race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities so they can lead sustainable and resilient businesses. And their leaders are taking action—from diversifying board composition to expanding targeted talent acquisition. Providing

"Since 2021, Starbucks has offered free Aira service, which connects people who are blind or have low vision to trained, professional visual interpreters who provide instant access to visual information about the customer's surroundings through a smartphone app."



meaningful employment for the vastly underemployed group of people with disabilities epitomizes social purpose and benefits the bottom line.

### MAKE IT EASIER TO SELF-DISCLOSE

What gets measured, matters. If people with disabilities aren't publicly represented in the workforce, it's harder for management to see this group as worthy of time and investment. Workers need to feel safe and comfortable to voluntarily disclose their disability. In the latest DEI, of the companies surveyed that answered the self-disclosure question (around 200), fewer than 5% of employees disclose a disability.

One easy way to improve your efforts is to make sure the diversity and inclusion statement on your website specifically includes disability. This will also help drive qualified disabled talent to your workplace. There are recruiting firms and job boards specific to folks with disabilities. You can expand your community engagement by sponsoring events and activations for disabled communities and educating your customers and others about disability.

### HAVE A GENEROUS ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY

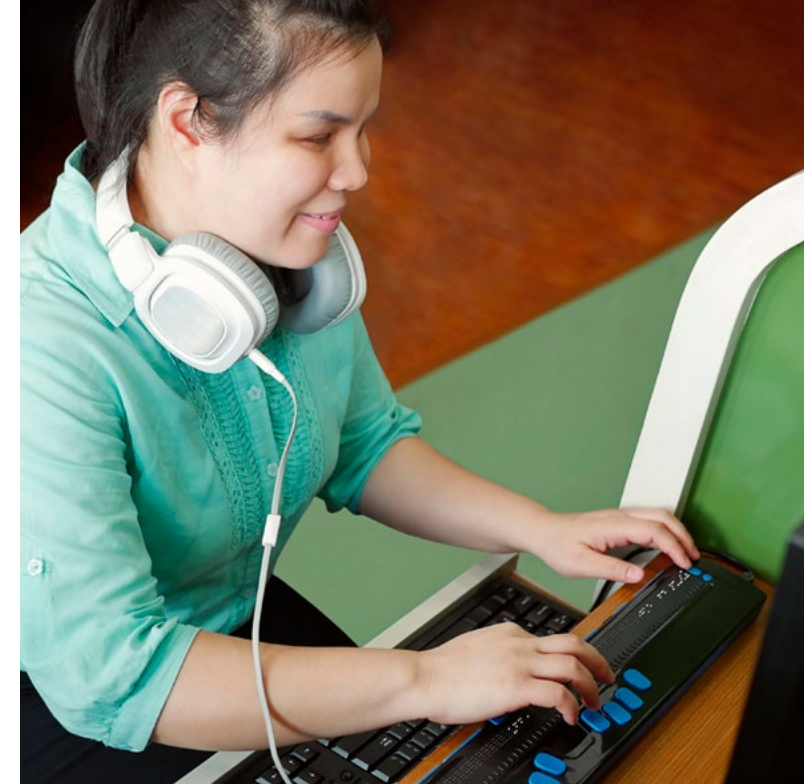
A good accommodations process can help a person with a disability find and buy accommodations so they can perform their job without having to jump through hoops or figure out how to pay for it. Companies should share this policy with new hires, and train managers about what it means, with the understanding that someone might not want to share personal information about why they need assistive technology or an ergonomic chair. You can also set up enterprise-wide funds to pay for employee accommodations. The average accommodation costs no more than \$500. They are often free. The DEI found that 55% of 415 surveyed employers have a centralized accommodation fund or similar fund, up from 34% in 2019.

### BUILD ACCESSIBILITY INTO EVERYTHING

From real estate and facilities, to websites and mobile apps, to the ways in which you communicate with employees, accessibility is at the intersection of everything. When you commit to building an accessible environment, you're creating a stronger culture of belonging for your employees, delighting your customers, and enhancing your public perception.

Many individuals with disabilities use assistive technology on a daily basis to shop online, manage their finances, and enjoy social media. For their assistive technologies—such as screen readers, magnifiers, eye gaze technology, or switch devices—to work properly, they are dependent on the underlying code being implemented correctly.

One of the best ways a company can use technology to meet the needs of customers with disabilities is to incorporate inclusive design into their core design principles. This involves



"Many individuals with disabilities use assistive technology on a daily basis to shop online, manage their finances, and enjoy social media."

ensuring that the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 AA, or WCAG, are incorporated from the idea phase through design, implementation, and testing.

### DISABILITY ISN'T A BAD WORD

Disability is a natural part of life. And if it's something that you haven't experienced yet, you likely will as you age. We say disability with pride, and it's why we lead our organization's name with the word disability. Disability is a strength.

People with disabilities conquer hurdles every day that other folks might never consider. They navigate a world that isn't necessarily built for them, and they do so by applying a combination of creativity, agility, resilience, perseverance, and willingness to experiment. If you help this group succeed, you will soon see, in so many ways, how well it pays to be disability inclusive. [👏](#)

*Jill Houghton is president and CEO of Disability:IN. More than 400 companies partner with Disability:IN to build inclusion and equity into their organizations. Learn more at [disabilityin.org](https://disabilityin.org)*

# The Art of TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

BY MOSTAFA SAYYADI

While there are countless organizations that claim to transform cultural norms, transformational change itself is rare and unique.

Effective transformation requires transformational executive leaders who have special qualities and use culture as a tool to facilitate change not only in others but also in themselves. Transformational executive leaders have a clear roadmap for the future, and they are capable of inspiring both themselves and their workforce. The findings in this article come from my interviews with the CEOs of seven large organizations in Australia and the United States.

The main criticism about leadership in business literature is that organizations of all sorts (corporations, government agencies, and nonprofits) tend to be over-managed (and, in some cases, over-administrated) and under-led. To address this deficit, the books on leadership today run the gamut of advice, with quotes ranging from Shakespeare to Geronimo. This is not to say that these authors, leaders, and thinkers do not have anything good to say about leadership. It is just that the plethora of leadership literature has sent mixed signals to leaders. The only thing we know is that managers may be doing things right, but leaders are doing the right things.

Many executives are familiar with leadership styles developed by scholars. But leadership studies have remained relatively

silent on how to integrate the styles and concepts from diverse disciplinary domains, and they often do not provide ways of understanding the theoretical and applicable concepts of true leadership. These studies have failed to disclose how to fill the gaps between performance and success. In many instances, there is no direct connection between leadership styles and models. The exception is the model called "transformational leadership."

First written about by James MacGregor Burns, transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems. In its ideal form, it can create valuable and positive change in followers, with the end goal of developing followers into leaders.

There are critics of this leadership model, but do not let that stop you from implementing it and learning how to master it. For example, many scholars critique the examples of leadership styles used in the literature for having no relevance to today's changing business environment. However, these authors posit that transformational leadership leads to results in organizations, influences employees' individual interests to align with institutional interests, and inspires followers

"A transformational culture facilitates an ongoing engagement with employees, encouraging them to explore and be more creative."

to create new ideas and innovations for effective business outcomes.

## THE MARKS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

But when organizations claim to be transformational, are they transforming? Out of the 34 large organizations I initially selected for the survey, I was able to study 12 of them. I then identified seven successful organizations in transformation, conducted interviews with their CEOs, looked at their characteristics, and made a list of what made them transformational leaders.

What I found in my initial survey is that successful organizations that claim they are, or are becoming, transformational may be more capable than others based on several indicators. Compared with their competitors, they have a knack for expanding their market share and an amazing ability to adapt to new conditions caused by changes in society and local and global norms. And they tend to have a higher market value compared with other organizations.

## THE SKILLS OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS

What are the characteristics of highly impactful, transformational executive leaders?

My interviews with these CEOs indicate that the first important factor is the strength they have acquired through their previous experiences, especially those who have worked in start-ups or consulting organizations such as BCG and McKinsey.

Consulting organizations have a higher understanding of what works and what does not, and this higher understanding plays a very important role in the effectiveness of transformational executive leadership. The analytical experiences these executives gained as management consultants increased their creativity. A clear example of this type of leader is Steve Jobs, whose previous experiences in start-ups and even his recruitment consulting role supported his becoming a transformational executive leader.

The second important characteristic is that these leaders see transformation as a tool to optimize their current business and create new innovations to renew its strength. They do not look at transformation as abandoning their current business and creating a new one. Tesla is an example of a successful company that is at the forefront of transformation. Its transformational executive leader, Elon Musk, is constantly optimizing the current business as a manufacturer of electric cars. He has also moved the engine of innovation by entering the space arena

and leading the future of the internet. Musk is developing a new Tesla restaurant in Los Angeles along with developing an electric truck.

Another example is Richard Branson's activities with Virgin Group Ltd., which continues to innovate air travel even as it enters the space field. The goal of the move is to inject new innovations and ensure the long-term survival of the company.

My interviews with the CEOs also show that culture is a key tool to facilitate transformation. The company replaces the conservative culture with a culture of risk-taking and continuous improvement and creates a learning organization that incorporates full participation in decision-making across the business. In this way, a transformational culture facilitates an ongoing engagement with employees, encouraging them to explore and be more creative at work. Transformational leaders introduce new slogans into the culture, along with new events and symbols of change, to signal that the company is entering a new era. They will introduce programs such as merit awards to encourage innovation and help support a risk-taking and creative workforce.

Another characteristic of transformational executive leaders is that they are storytellers. They attempt to build corporate culture through storytelling, drawing on teaching points and history to convey examples of a new reality of the future for employees and help them design a clear plan to focus on individual talents. These leaders believe that a good story that showcases various examples of innovation may increase the level of risk-taking in an organization.

Finally, transformational executive leaders have a clear and precise roadmap to achieve the new reality they want to manifest. They proactively create, with high flexibility, possible scenarios that the company may face in the future.

Transformational leadership is a major factor for executive success in today's changing business environment. Organizations will increasingly need transformational executive leaders to be more effective. Transformational leaders have unique characteristics that give them an amazing ability to create a new future and realize it. I suggest that executives develop these characteristics, which will help them become transformational for themselves and their organizations as they develop the art of transformational leadership. [📖](#)

*Mostafa Sayyadi works with senior business leaders to effectively develop innovation in companies, and helps companies succeed by improving the effectiveness of their leaders. He is a book author and a long-time contributor to business publications.*



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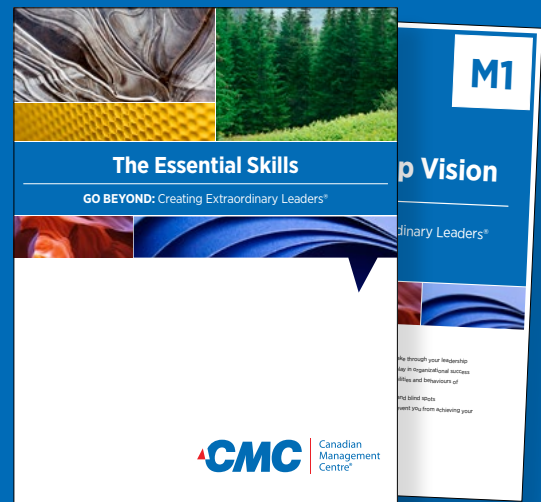
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