

WRK/360

Managers Matter

6 Ways To Prepare Managers
For The Next Phase of Work

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“ This isn't just the future of work, this is the next evolution of our culture ”

-Brent Hyder, Chief People Officer, Salesforce

In an effort to better understand how organizations are navigating this next phase of work, [WRK/360](#) collected insights from client engagements, conversations with experts and thought leaders, and various tools and resources from our HR partners and professional networks.

We concluded that leading through the next phase of work goes well beyond adjusting policies around where employees physically work.

It is clear that companies must also consider overall company culture and how their people can thrive in a new (likely hybrid) model.

As a leader, now is the time to evaluate how your company culture should adapt and evolve. It is critical to assess and potentially refine your mission, vision, and values. Most importantly, leaders must ensure that managers are on board and have the skills, resources, and motivation to effectively lead through this next phase of work.

WHY DO MANAGERS MATTER?

People leaders are the day-to-day champions of culture. Executive leadership set the tone and should lead by example, but people leaders are the vehicle for the successful delivery of company culture.

Managers quite simply can make or break the employee experience. When managing effectively, leaders can drive engagement, promote belonging, demonstrate transparency, create space for communication, and execute on corporate initiatives.

Managers matter today more than ever as organizations navigate continued uncertainty, but many managers are missing the mark.

Many managers we speak to want to provide more support and be better leaders, but they feel stuck without the right tools, training, and support to lead through ongoing change.

Skilled, empathetic managers drive culture and connection

2.3X

Higher Employee Engagement

2X

More Likely To Stay With The Company

2.3X

Better Understanding Of The Company's Strategy

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6 WAYS TO PREPARE MANAGERS FOR THE NEXT PHASE OF WORK

Leadership development is a complex process that doesn't happen overnight, but we've observed significant benefits in prioritizing the competencies, resources, and accountability for managers as part of any culture strategy. With that in mind, we've summarized a list of six practical ways to prepare managers to lead effectively through this next phase of work.

01 Model Trusted & Transparent Communication

04 Encourage Meaningful Connection Across Teams

02 Upskill Manager Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

05 Incentivize Empathetic Leadership

03 Promote & Support Everyday Flexibility

06 Provide Resources For Distributed Teams

01

MODEL TRUSTED & TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

Moving to remote, distributed, and hybrid ways of working means adapting to new ways of long-term synchronous and asynchronous communication. Senior leadership must lead from the top by modeling trusted and transparent communication and committing to regular updates.

Prioritize Internal Communication

Dedicate a team member to internal communication if one doesn't exist. Ensure that person (or team) develops a thorough communication strategy and uses project management expertise to achieve all milestones and follow through on the communication expectations you set for the organization.

Connect Frequently

Establish trust by creating space for managers to connect personally with their direct reports. Their workload and job description should reflect the reality that they will need to communicate more often in remote and hybrid environments.

Focus on How and Why

Emphasize the importance of connecting the dots for employees. Managers should set clear expectations on deadlines and deliverables but also on the *how* and *why* the work is important. If they can't answer that, it's time to reevaluate the priority!

Learn Preferences

People leaders should meet individually with team members to understand how they best communicate (1:1, in groups, under stress, etc.) Create guidelines for regular 1:1 connections and direct managers to own a portion of the agenda for business updates, career development, and connection.

Today's Top Leadership Skills:

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Adaptability
- Empathy
- Building Trust
- Resilience
- Creativity
- Problem Solving

People leaders have never simply just been taskmasters, but in today's environment, managers constantly juggle many different roles and priorities. Yes, their job requires them to manage and oversee delegation and execution, but skilled managers of today are also coaches, motivators, and culture champions. To address this, we recommend the following four steps to upskill manager EQ:

1. Acknowledge that it is understandable if your people leaders don't have 100% of the skills they need to thrive in today's workforce.
2. Identify the most important managerial skills for your organization that align with your business' mission, vision, and values.
3. Assess your leaders across those skills using manager feedback, focus groups, 360 feedback, or other survey tools.
4. Provide support and training to upskill managers in critical areas so they can ultimately engage their teams to do their best work and manage through ongoing disruption and change.

03

PROMOTE & SUPPORT EVERYDAY FLEXIBILITY

“ The belief that flexibility isn't something that is earned or awarded, but rather something that is ingrained in the culture. ”

-Kimberly Jones, MD People Experience, PwC

Everyday flexibility is important for people leaders as they manage their own careers, and it is also a critical tool for them to support their teams.

Earned flexibility is negotiated, often as a one-off situation that is clouded in secrecy and can easily be taken away.

Everyday flexibility establishes an environment where everyone is expected to take breaks, to care for themselves, to unplug, and to care for their families and their communities.

Consider company-wide policies that provide managers with a framework for flexibility but also empower them to work with their employees and their entire teams to find solutions that accommodate changing circumstances and meet employees needs while sustaining productivity and success.

04

ENCOURAGE MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS ACROSS TEAMS

Fostering team collaboration must become intentional with more remote and distributed team members. Creating a sense of belonging, prioritizing inclusion in a hybrid environment, and encouraging meaningful connection are critical to a healthy culture, and employees can benefit if your managers do the following:

Implement & Improve 1:1 Meetings

- Invite a safe space for sharing challenges
- Co-own agendas
- Provide frequent coaching and feedback
- Offer skip-level meetings and cross-team collaboration

Encourage Celebration!

- Establish recognition tools that acknowledge great work
- Highlight employees who demonstrate company values
- Celebrate personal and professional milestones

Reimagine Team Building

- Create asynchronous and synchronous space for casual communication
- Host virtual office hours or Q&As
- Equalize participation (e.g., all join virtually)
- Utilize collaboration tools

05

MODEL & INCENTIVIZE EMPATHETIC LEADERSHIP

In the words of management guru Peter Drucker, "What gets measured, gets managed." Modeling behavior is an important and necessary first step, but it is also critical to measure adoption when building a company culture that demonstrates care.

First, senior leaders should model empathetic behaviors:

- Active listening
- Compassion
- Validating emotions
- Creating psychological safety
- Addressing burnout & mental health

Then, organizations should:

1. Capture the voice of the employee
2. Align productivity goals with company values (e.g., create space for breaks, taking time off, listening, learning and leadership development)
3. Utilize pulse surveys to measure progress and understand employee burnout
4. Tie a portion of compensation and recognition incentives to empathetic leadership behaviors and living company values

06

PROVIDE RESOURCES FOR DISTRIBUTED TEAMS

Go beyond productivity tools and invest in resources that address distributed & hybrid work pain points to drive engagement, recognition, team-building, and overall company culture.

The next phase of work is a transition. There isn't a specific end point we are all working towards that will complete the "future of work". The rate of change continues to accelerate not only where we work but how we work, how we lead, and how we embody company values and culture. People leaders and individuals need resources to help them adapt.

Start by listening and inquiring about what your employees need across all levels in this next phase. What's working? What's not?

Design resources to address these challenges across all levels. What do managers need to lead? What do individuals need to advocate for themselves or understand why changes are being made. How should teams engage or behave in a new way?

01 Managers

02 Individuals

03 Teams

While investment may be needed to drive long-term support, quick wins can be accomplished with direct calls-to-action, discussion guides, and examples of success.

Consider resources across a variety of "future of work" topics, including but not limited to:

- Setting Boundaries
- Building Relationships
- Communication Skills
- Career Development
- Meeting Resets
- Taking Time Off
- Onboarding
- Technology

LEARN MORE

Understanding leadership and culture transformation at your organization

Whether you've been transforming leaders for many years or are just beginning the journey, we would love to discuss how we can partner with your organization to upskill your leaders, ensure your employees' voices are heard, and enhance your workplace culture. If the experience of your employees throughout this next phase of work is a focus for you, our advisory services, workshops, and coaching programs can help you navigate ongoing transformation.

CONTACT

[Ali Caravella](#)

Managing Partner, WRK/360
ali@wrk360.com

[Mary Beth Ferrante](#)

Managing Partner, WRK/360
marybeth@wrk360.com