

Open in app ↗



Search Medium



Published in Management Matters



Alesia Louise

Mar 7 · 5 min read · ✨ · 🎧 Listen



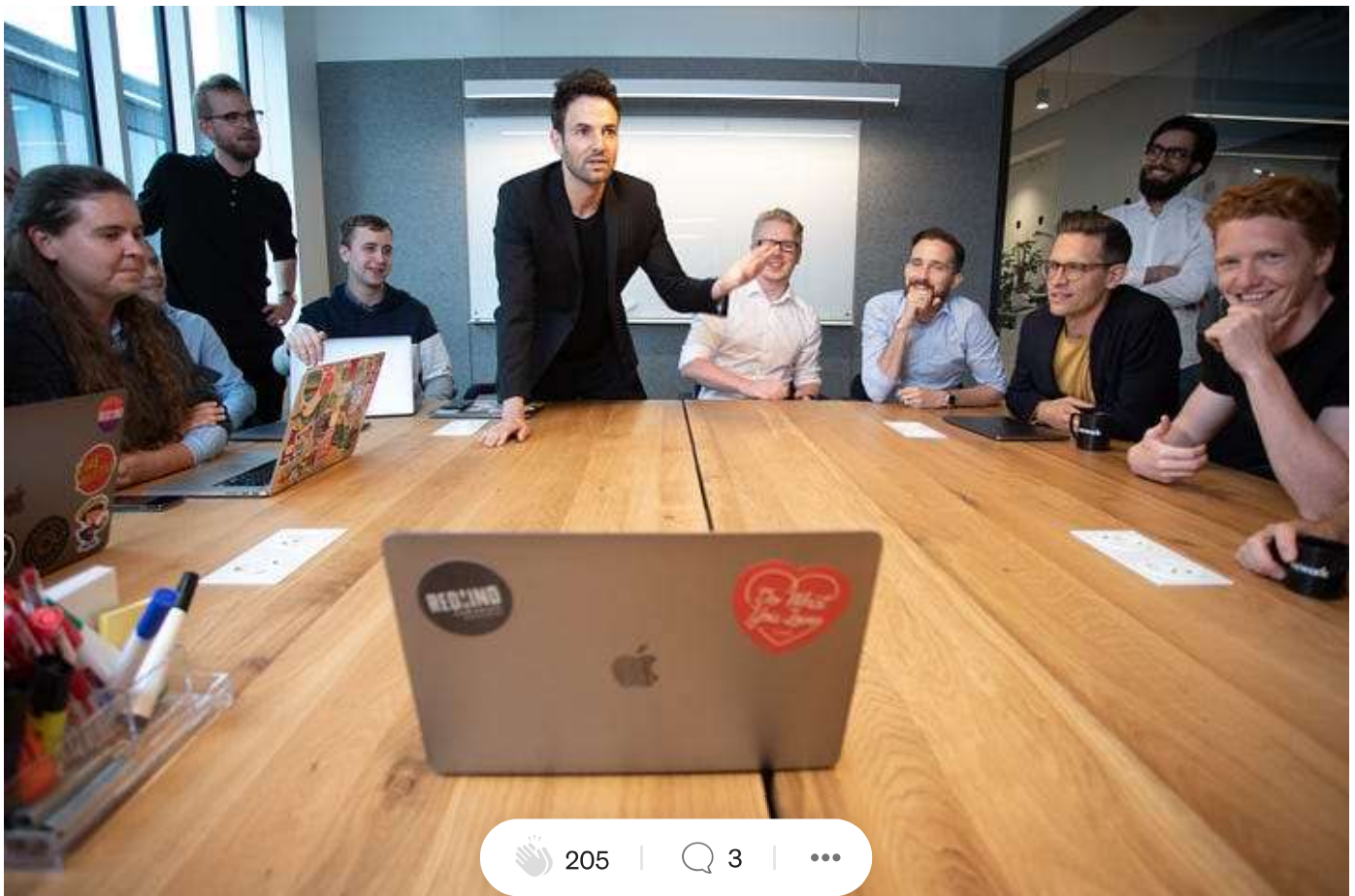
Save



LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT | WORK | BUSINESS

# Leadership Training Isn't Working, Focus on This <sup>\*</sup> Instead

An unpopular perspective on management fundamentals



Off camera, 2 supervisors, a manager, and a director are role-playing a coaching script about a conflict at a fast-food restaurant while our on-screen leader coaches their use of the “vision” to engage the fry cook. Their peers look on in amusement and terror, fearing they’ll be called on next. Photo by [Redmind Studio](#) on [Unsplash](#)

It’s no secret that the workforce is undergoing immense change. Speculation abounds about quiet quitting, quiet firing, remote work, mass layoffs, unemployment, and a looming recession. According to a [June 2022 Gallup survey](#), over half of the workforce is quiet quitting, there seems to be a broken link.

### **Que the leadership workshop!**

It’s the main training workshop for the year: All the managers and supervisors, all day or week — all packed in together in the conference room or chained to Zoom — for an intensive deep dive into the philosophies of leadership. They listen to hour after hour of insights, they bumble through unrealistic role plays, take notes, ask questions — they receive vague, roaming answers riddled with contradictions, jargon, and avoidance.

When the workshop lets out, the leadership team returns to their stations, tired and backlogged. As they scramble to catch up, recent insights are pushed aside, and untested ideas begin to muddy in their heads.

A leisurely read through business articles will quickly beg the conclusion that, although corporations invest billions of dollars on leadership, the holy grail of corporate success, employee/employer relationships are weakening. The training just isn’t having the impact we’d hoped for.

### **So, What Are We Getting Wrong Here?**

Only 1 in 3 managers are engaged at work according to Gallup, another broken link. Company structure and culture often make it impossible to be a good manager. Poorly planned, unrealistic, competing priorities and a lack of resources and practical support leave gaps that a manager simply cannot stitch together.

Another snazzy leadership class isn’t going to help — if anything, this training will feel mocking, forced, or deceitful.

Consider our manager's perspective, we'll call them Fran. Fran asks questions and tries to engage. They try to be proactive and work out the details, and instead of a plan, are left with an unsolvable puzzle and some meaningless jargon about vision and servant leadership (the most fashionable leadership style). The senior leadership team didn't want to get into the weeds, they wanted to keep it high-level. They didn't really try to bring Fran on board, and maybe even pulled them aside for a conversation about being a team player and embracing change.

So now Fran struggles when they tell their team that we all need to embrace change. They spend their time diffusing frustrations by glazing over the real challenges and disruptions this change presents. Fran doesn't even have a good story about the benefits of this change.

Fran's team sees through the veil, they always do. Fran isn't operating with integrity. Trust is broken.

What the team needed was Fran's support to adapt systems, procedures, materials, people, and so on. What they got was dismissiveness, chaos, and overload — and that came from beyond Fran.

Hands up to suggest that leadership is the answer here.

## **Leadership Can't Just be Taught in a Class**

The trouble is that leadership can't simply be learned in a class, not even an all-day class. It's a soft skill, it requires context, specificity, cultural awareness, application, practice, feedback, and measurement. Good leadership is up for interpretation, and, uncomfortably in most corporate structures, it's best judged from below.

We often read about leadership as though it's the next level beyond management, an evolved form. That just being a manager, is simply...less.

But without keen management, leadership is nothing more than jargon underpinned by conjecture and trivialization.

## **Work Isn't Working**

Unfortunately, most managers are surprisingly bad at managing.

It's not their fault. We're glossing over management skills in favor of leadership skills, we're judging from above, and we're overloading managers with the kind of work that interferes with quality management and true team engagement.

And, amid all the leadership talk, what your team and your company need is for the work to work.

- Change requires action and resources to adapt systems, procedures, materials, people, and training.
- Values and visions don't mean anything if they don't come with a path.
- All the communication in the world is meaningless without clear expectations and direction.
- Trying to make everyone feel valued won't work if there's no place for input and initiative.
- People with mismatched authority and responsibility can't impact growth.
- Rules and philosophies don't work if applied inconsistently.
- Alignment can't take the place of organization, forecasting, and planning.
- It's hard to achieve high morale when your team is underpaid, overwhelmed, and can see no path forward.

## **Management Is the Key**

Leadership is only one dimension of management.

Leadership isn't the end-all-be-all skill. It's not even the most important management skill.

Management is the key to conducting business. Management greases the wheels and adjusts the gears to run the well-oiled machine every operation strives toward. Management drives employee productivity and satisfaction. And management addresses quiet quitters who cited clarity of expectations, opportunities to learn and advance, feeling uncared about, and feeling disconnected from the organization as the main reasons for disengaging.

Even the best leaders can't inspire people enough to overcome a lack of systems, organization, clarity, planning, fairness, compensation, and opportunities to learn and grow.

## **Train Management Skills**

For tangible impact in your company, instead of booking that leadership consulting firm for another week-long workshop next year, create real results and train management skills.

- Flesh out Fayol's 14 Principals of Management and get into the details of what that means in your company, your department, and your team.
- Refocus those upward one-on-one meetings to perfect management activities and results.
- Practice meaningful one-on-one conversations between a manager and their team frequently and value those as true feedback and insight.
- Conduct short, frequent workshops on practical skills like planning, organization, time management, LEAN and Six Sigma principles, priority setting, etc.
- Review compensation, equity, division of work, order, turnover, etc., and take actions to continually course correct.
- Train aspects of leadership one idea at a time, as an aspect of management, and practice and review regularly to make tangible improvements.

When someone is promoted or newly hired, train those foundations and pair them with a mentor who will get into the details of management with them. It must be grounded in concrete experiences.

## **All Leaders Must Manage**

All our managers at every level need to be truly supported.

These chain links break from the top down. We like to talk about vision, values, alignment, and culture from the top down. Leadership promises favorable impact — but without keen management, there's only pretense.

All managers need to receive the same quality management they need to give: the same systems, organization, clarity, planning, fairness, value, compensation, and opportunities that their team needs. The higher the position of the leader, the better they need to be at management — the more unity of direction they need to show, the more clarity they must provide, and the more disciplined they need to be.

It can't be anyone's job to only share a vision or only inspire others. Leadership is only one dimension of management.

Quality management is the key to operating a business, not leadership. After all, who cares about your values and vision if no one can figure out how to get the work done?

*Alesia has served countless leaders along their paths during her 20+ years in business support roles. She offers unique perspective and insight into what makes managers successful, what engages teams, what causes trouble, and what makes work...work. She supports leadership at every level, true collaboration, uncommon sense, plain language, and the humanity of humans.*

---