3 Costly Mistakes to Avoid When Promoting High Performers
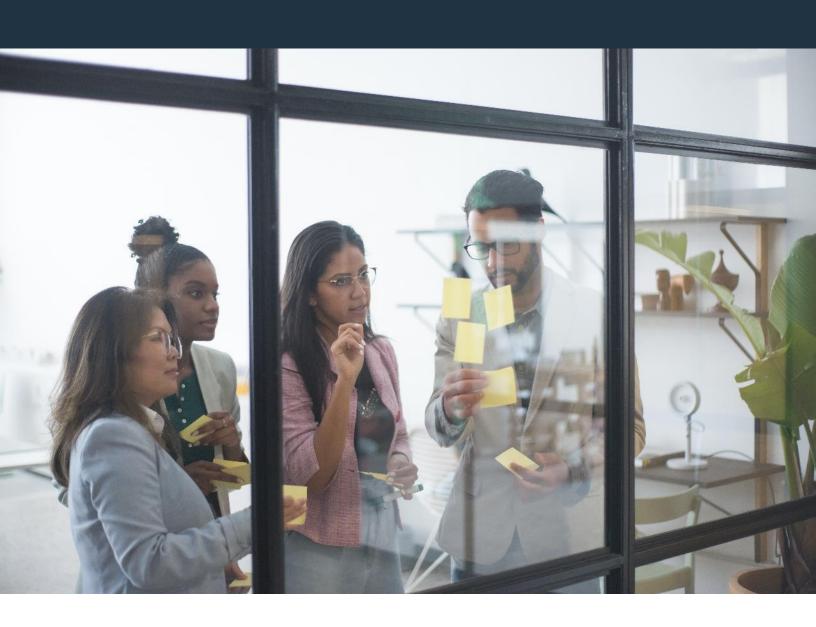
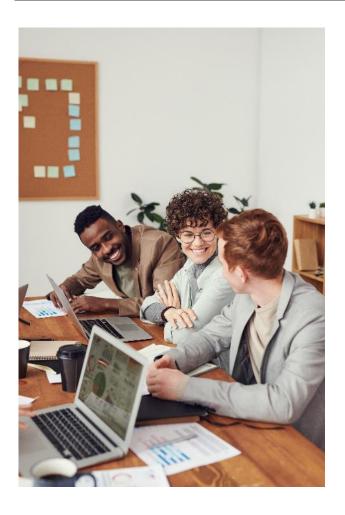**ALIGNED PERFORMANCE**

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"The Leadership Launchpad was our first step toward getting leadership in place that allows us to have a super efficient, productive and happy team."

Jim Brear, CEO of Swimlane

Are you making or avoiding these 3 common mistakes?

You know how people who are really good at what they do get promoted into leadership roles? But they are lacking leadership skills for that new role? They may have mixed feelings about the promotion! They're **excited**, and at the same time **anxious** about not having all the skills they need to be successful. In fact, people have declined promotions because they don't feel equipped to be a great leader!

Successful transitions

Effective leadership is the heartbeat of an organization's success. However, the journey from being a high-performing employee to a capable and inspiring leader is fraught with challenges.

Here, we delve into three critical missteps that organizations commonly encounter when elevating their talent to leadership positions, the impact, and present expert tips to help you pave the way for successful leadership transitions within your organization.

Mistake #1

Lack of Training & Ongoing Support

Being a rockstar developer and leading a team of rockstar developers requires very different skills. Right?

The misconception that an exceptional individual contributor will effortlessly transition into a leadership role is a common one. Leadership requires a skill set distinct from excelling in an individual role.

Without proper training and development, even the most talented individual contributors can struggle when entrusted with leadership responsibilities.

42% of emerging leaders report they had inadequate or ineffective development prior to their first leadership role.

- OpenSesame

"The feedback from both participants and their managers was that the **Leadership Launchpad** was worthwhile and provided valuable tools to the teams. Graduates of the Launchpad reported using the relevant, practical tools and templates provided as well as fine tuning their leadership to be more effective in their roles."

Tamarah Saif, VP of HR, Charlotte's Web

New leaders often face challenges related to team dynamics, psychological safety, and strategic decision-making. They can get overwhelmed managing the day to day while also focusing on strategic priorities.

With new responsibilities, newly promoted people don't often take the time to consider who they are as a leader or reflect on their approach. Articulating their unique leadership style, strengths and weaknesses never quite makes it to the top of the priority list. Well-designed leadership programs provide **dedicated time** for people to think about who they are as a leader.

A powerful way to build leadership skills is to do so in **community**. Learning from others through cohort learning and group coaching expedites the learning curve and helps people avoid mistakes that others have made. Even if each person stepped into their new role at different points with different experiences and backgrounds, they still benefit from learning side-by-side.

> "After so many years in leadership and having gone through many trainings, I am still learning in the Launchpad!" – *David Meyer, Lead Engineer, Swimlane*

Leverage the brilliance of the community with Group Coaching

Leadership development is ongoing

Leadership is a **dynamic** journey; it's not 'one-and-done". The skills and qualities that make someone a successful leader today may not suffice tomorrow.

Continuous feedback and evaluation provide leaders with valuable insights into their performance, allowing them to adapt, grow, and stay relevant in an ever-changing business landscape.

Moreover, neglecting continuous evaluation can lead to **stagnation**, where leaders become complacent and fail to adapt to the evolving needs of their teams and the company.

Even experienced leaders may unknowingly develop **blind spots** and continue with outdated or ineffective approaches, which can hinder their effectiveness and impact on the team and the organization as a whole.

Learn about the **Leadership Launchpad**

EXPERT TIP

Create a culture where feedback and continuous evaluation are not only encouraged but ingrained in the leadership development process.

"Average players want to be left alone.
Good players want to be coached.
Great players what to be told the truth."
- *Doc Rivers*

Mistake #2

Basing Promotion Solely on Seniority

Promoting employees based solely on seniority is a well-intentioned yet flawed practice. This approach is widely used as a means of reward or recognition of their technical capabilities. While experience can bring valuable insights and knowledge to a leadership role, **readiness and suitability are equally vital factors**. A lengthy tenure within an organization may indicate dedication and loyalty, but it doesn't automatically translate into effective leadership.

Promoting based on tenure alone can result in individuals **struggling to perform and meet the expectations** of their roles. This can lead to decreased team morale, reduced productivity, and even turnover, as employees may become disillusioned when their leader lacks the necessary leadership skills.

"If every manager went through the **Leadership Launchpad**, the world would be a much better place."

Toby Van de Grift

Promoting star performers

Often, high performers get considerable satisfaction from the work they do and aspire to deepen their subject matter expertise. While they may be amenable to assuming a mentoring or training role, taking on the responsibility for leading others may not be a priority for them.

Creating a reluctant leader can inadvertently disrupt team dynamics, create friction, and undermine the cohesion of the workforce. Reluctant leaders lack the drive needed to propel the team and company forward.

23% of emerging leaders regret accepting promotions into a leadership role.

- OpenSesame

Nearly 40% of newly appointed executives fail within the first 18 months.

Some leaders fail because of overconfidence or a belief that their previous success guarantees success in their new role.

The Corporate Executive Board

Promote the right people for the right reasons at the right time.

Leadership isn't solely about technical prowess; it encompasses a broader array of qualities that are equally critical. Skills such as setting and inspecting clear expectations, building trust, having difficult conversations, and delegating effectively are the linchpin of successful leadership. Failing to evaluate and acknowledge these essential skills prior to a promotion can cause leaders, despite their technical competence, to struggle to inspire and guide their teams effectively. It's akin to having a brilliant conductor who knows the music but can't orchestrate the harmony of the ensemble.

"The coaching I received during the Launchpad helped me realize very practical ways to deal with conflict and have tough conversations. I have used the advice many times in work and my personal life."

Alaina Heck

While technical skills are undoubtedly important, they don't necessarily correlate with effective leadership. Not all high-performing employees possess the innate leadership qualities and aptitude required to develop high performing teams, inspire others, and make strategic decisions.

Consider, for instance, a scenario where a senior employee excels in their current role but lacks the necessary self-awareness or a growth mindset required for a managerial position. Promoting such an individual can have adverse consequences, including resentment among team members who might be better suited for a leadership role, even if they have less technical experience. The good news is that many of these skills can be learned and developed!

Lack of goal alignment

It's not uncommon for promotions to occur as a result of exceptional performance or seniority, without a comprehensive assessment of whether the individual genuinely desires a leadership role.

This can happen when a high performer or subject matter expert has nowhere else to grow in the organization or is at the top of their salary band. They may take the promotion for a 'step up', but then realize they got more satisfaction from doing the actual work.

Could there be another path to growth?

Alternative ways to grow include being part of an expert panel at an industry conference, serving as a mentor, or publishing an article.

> "What I enjoyed most about the Leadership Launchpad is that it really addressed the humanity behind being a good co-worker or manager." - *Peggy Zimmerman*

EXPERT TIP

*Organizations must strike a balance between recognizing technical expertise and determining **readiness** to ensure the right individuals are promoted into leadership roles.*

Mistake #3

Insufficient Integration

Another common pitfall when promoting employees is the failure to clearly communicate expectations to everyone affected, from the new leader to their team to people they will now be interacting with across the organization.

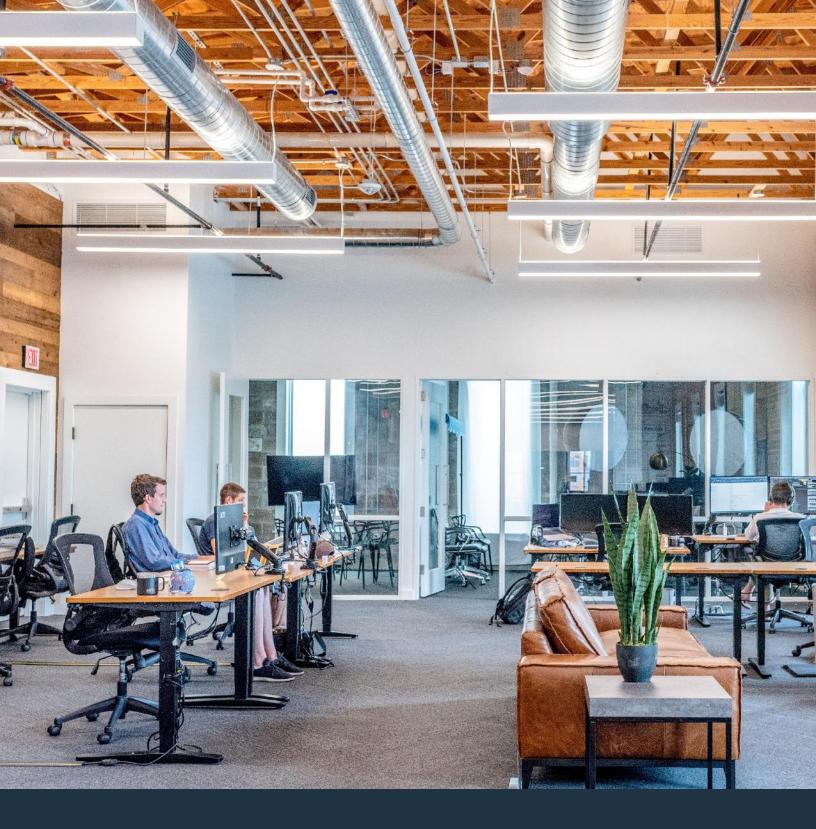**Provide comprehensive onboarding to their new role**

It's not enough to assume that someone understands their responsibilities as a leader, simply because they have been promoted. Without clear and explicit communication of what is expected of them as a leader, individuals can become uncertain or confused about their roles and objectives.

When people leave a job due to their manager, it is often because that leader did a poor job of setting and continually inspecting those expectations. This includes holding people accountable to meeting those expectations.

Companies vary widely when it comes to how much effort they put into integration, with major consequences in terms of time to performance, derailment (through termination or resignation), and talent retention.

Harvard Business Review

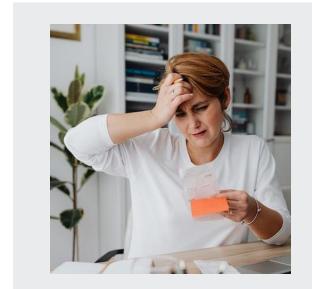**Clarify roles & responsibilities with all stakeholders.**

Gallup

"Great managers coach people to succeed. They communicate clearly, support and advocate for employees, and cultivate the type of work environment that breeds innovation and collaboration."

Onboarding new leaders helps them understand…

► where their decision-making responsibilities begin and end
► when to let go of day-to-day work to take on new responsibilities
► expectations about developing their team members
► how to align team goals to those of the organization
► expectations for continuing to develop their skills

When people are recognized for doing a great job, it's only natural for them to want to continue to do those same things that made them successful.

After all that's their comfort zone! However, they need to **let go of some of the tasks** they're used to handling so they can take on new responsibilities. Trying to do everything they did before plus take on new responsibilities is a recipe for burnout!

Additionally, delegating meaningful work to team members is an opportunity to mentor and help those people develop their skills.

Communicate with the team

If someone else was up for promotion, or thought they would have been a better fit, explain to the individual why the other person was promoted. There could be ill feelings that hinder the success of the team. Team members may be unsure of their leader's expectations, which can lead to frustration, disconnection, even conflicts within the team.

According to a **Gallup** study of one million workers, 75% of employees quit their jobs because of bad bosses, not because of the job itself. That makes **poor management** the number one reason employees choose to quit.

Make it known to stakeholders

After a promotion, new leaders need to foster and build new relationships with people across the company. Facilitating introductions and articulating their new role and responsibilities as well as priorities will set that relationship up to succeed. Strategic networking becomes vital for up-and-coming leaders.

EXPERT TIP

Set clear expectations for roles, responsibilities and priorities to the new leader, their team and their stakeholders.

Avoid these mistakes

Organizations can greatly improve the success rate of leadership transitions by:

▶ Investing in development programs and ongoing coaching so they continue to thrive

▶ Creating a culture of ongoing feedback and improvement for their leaders

▶ Ensuring that promotions align with personal and professional goals

▶ Providing comprehensive onboarding for new leaders into their role

▶ Communicating with their team and stakeholders to set clear expectations

Our Leadership Launchpad integrates **neuropsychology** into all topics for deeper understanding and long-lasting results. Participants not only learn strategies, but why they work.

Learn More About the Leadership Launchpad

Leadership Launchpad

The Leadership Launchpad is tailored to meet your specific needs, values and budget.

Sample topics include:

Transitioning From Peer to Supervisor

Delegating to Empower Others

Managing Time and Focus

Raising EQ for Leaders

Providing Meaningful Feedback

Having Difficult Conversations

GET OUR COURSE CATALOG

Avoid these common mistakes

Let's tailor your **Leadership Launchpad** to meet your specific needs, budget and timeline.

Leigh-Ann Zaharevich, CEO and Founder

Book a discovery call