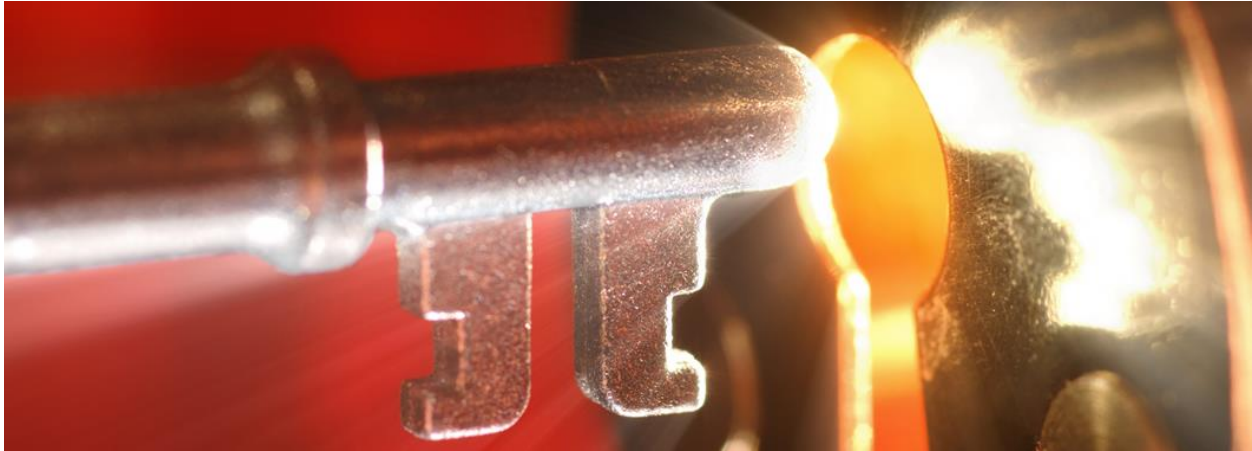


# Six Keys to Unlocking the Potential of Frontline Managers



Times of change present many challenges for organizations, particularly for frontline managers whose people will be responsible for implementing the change. Pressure to perform is high, as are emotions and everyone is expected to do more with less.

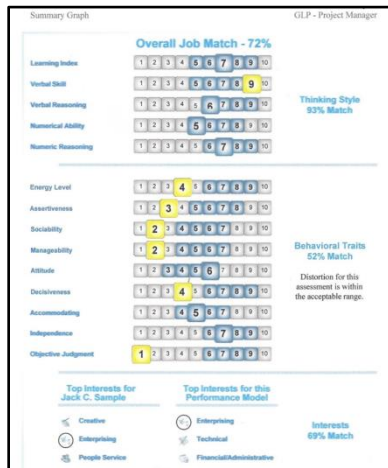
The effects of poor frontline management may be particularly damaging at service companies where researchers have consistently detected a causal relationship between the attitudes and behaviors of customer-facing employees on the one hand and customer perception of service quality on the other. In service industries, research has found three factors drive performance: the work climate; the ways teams act together and the ways that things are done; and the engagement, commitment, and satisfaction of employees. Leadership - particularly the quality of supervision and the nature of the relationships between supervisors and their teams - is crucial to performance in each of these areas.



This fact inspired us to identify six keys to unlock the potential of frontline managers:

- Identify employees with the capability and interest to be good managers
- Help your managers clarify their teams' goals and the roles each team member has in achieving those goals
- Help your managers understand the people they manage
- Help your managers understand themselves and how they impact their people
- Don't assume your managers know how or when to coach their employees
- Minimize administrative work to give managers more time to develop people

## 1. Identify Employees with the Capability and Interest to be Good Managers



Don't assume a top contributor will succeed as a manager.

We've probably all heard the story of the company that promoted its best sales person to a sales management position, only to have the person fail miserably in the role and then leave the company. Let's face it, managing sales people to achieve a collective goal rather than directly through one's individual efforts isn't for everyone. Then there's the administrative burden of overseeing time and attendance, approving expense reports, interfacing with the muckety-mucks in corporate to implement a new policy that will go over with your team like a lead balloon, and of course, all of the personal drama.

Although the prior example is a common one, the same situation often applies to creative, technical, and professional people as well. The best designer, programmer, or engineer in your organization will seldom make the best manager. Not everyone is cut out to do this job; nor does everyone want to do this job. The attributes that make a "top performer" are not always the same ones required to be a top performing manager. It's been said, "When you promote a top performer to a managerial position, the organization often loses on two accounts – they lose their top performer and they end up with a lousy manager". Once promoted, it often times very difficult to demote that individual back into their previous position or reposition them into a different role.

You need to identify these rare individuals and then have a clear plan for developing them. Sadly, according to our research, two out of three organizations lack a process for identifying future top performing managers and even fewer organizations consistently follow that process if they have one. Promotions are still too often made based on personal likes/dislikes, snap decisions made during the interview process, and the like.

Actions to identify employees with the capability and interest to be good managers:

- Use assessments to identify employees who demonstrate the behaviors and interests that will make them successful managers.
- Help managers understand the core behaviors, capabilities and preferences of the people they manage so that they can adapt their communication and management styles to get the most from their people.
- Help managers develop the mindset that they will be more successful if the people they manage succeed. This helps managers become invested in the success of each individual.

## 2. Help Your Managers Understand Their Team's Goals and Roles



Even a very willing and capable manager will not be successful unless he or she aligns their people and efforts with the organization's objectives. It is both difficult and frustrating for everyone to hit a moving target.

One of the most productive steps you can take is to help your managers develop a clear understanding of the results they need to achieve and how they're going to achieve them. This helps them align their people and activities with the outcomes most important to the organization. It also creates a foundation for discussing resources, priorities and timing. When managers effectively communicate what's expected to their people, it helps everyone get on the same page.

Whenever possible, work with your managers to set reasonable milestones and goals that are leading indicators of his or her success. This too creates an effective starting point for progress and performance discussions. The acronym SMART is a good methodology to follow:

- Specific - What exactly do you want to accomplish?
- Measurable - How do you plan to measure progress toward meeting your goal?
- Achievable - Think of this SMART objective as a reality check.
- Relevant – The goal should be worth your time and effort.
- Time-bound - A realistic deadline should be linked to your goal.

Actions to help your managers understand their teams' goals and roles:

- Use these goals to create a personal “dashboard” that helps the manager set his or her own priorities that drive results. Require the manager to update their goals weekly and use their progress to facilitate a coaching discussion. Check back with the manager on a periodic basis to ensure that their priorities and the individuals on their team are properly aligned.
- Create tools to help your managers communicate these requirements and track progress toward these goals. Seek direct input from frontline employees in the form of employee surveys and 360° management assessments to determine if the message is getting through.
- Finally, encourage open communication between employees and their managers in order to clarify job requirements and eliminate work that doesn't add sufficient value.

### 3. Help Your Managers Understand the People They Manage



“No law or ordinance is mightier than understanding.” ~ Plato

Clearly defining goals and jobs is very important for any organization; but, all employees within the organization then need to perform if they, their manager, and the organization are to be successful. As a leader, each of us has our own style and preferences and this influences how we best respond to our managers. When a leader or a manager understands his or her people, they can also be aware of potential conflict or “chemistry” issues between themselves and other members of the team. Thus, the manager can be more aware of and more proactive in dealing with issues that may negatively impact performance.

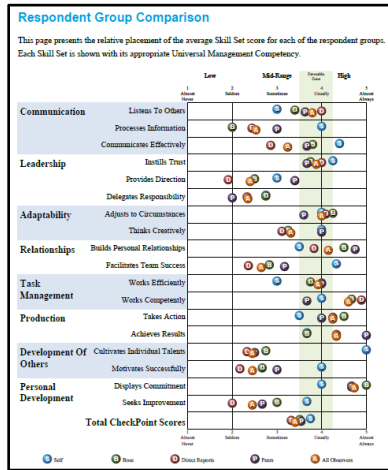
Additionally, nearly one in three people surveyed did not believe their organization made good use of their abilities. This represents significant potential the organization can tap into in order to improve productivity. Every day we see organizations hire and deploy employees with little or no thought to helping their managers understand how these new employees work or even whether or not they are a good fit with their job, their fellow employees, their manager, or the organization’s culture.

When they are a “good fit” and their manager has insight to the individual’s skills, behaviors, interests, and emotional intelligence, the manager is in a much better position to motivate, coach, and communicate with the employee. When that happens, people feel valued, enjoy their work, and they perform better.

Actions to help your managers understand the people they manage:

- Human beings are complex creatures who can be very hard for the average manager to read, especially in the early stages of the working relationship. Ironically, this is when the manager needs the most help. Our suite of valid assessments can be very helpful for an organization to develop a deeper and more objective understanding of its people.
- By helping a manager to understand his or her employee’s skills, behaviors, interests, and emotional intelligence, it will allow the manager to leverage their employees’ strengths and mitigate their blind spots. It also helps the manager communicate better with the employee, zero in on the employee’s most critical developmental needs, and focus on the informal on-going coaching in support of the employee.

## 4. Help Your Managers Understand Themselves and How They Impact People



Self-awareness is being conscious of what you're good at while acknowledging what you still have yet to learn. This includes admitting when you don't have all the answers and owning up to mistakes. This is especially true when it comes to a manager's leadership and communication style.

In many cases, managers don't know what they don't know. For example, if a manager comes across as insensitive or aloof, you need to point out the behavior and help him/her improve. It's important for the manager to understand his or her natural management style and how it impacts others both positively and negatively. The manager can't be expected to improve if he or she never receives concrete feedback.

Making a manager aware of his or her negative attitudes and/or the way they “come off” to their employees (e.g., saying, “I am just another associate when I go on the store floor,” or “My job is to make sure that tasks get done”) makes it easier for them to accept change and develop the right skills and capabilities. By learning how to counter these thoughts and adopt more positive ones (e.g., saying instead, “I regularly provide my employees with constructive feedback and tips,” or “My job is to ensure that tasks are complete and that customers are served as well”), the manager can be aware of more appropriate behavior and thus improve their performance.

Actions to help your managers understand themselves and how they impact their people:

- Management is all about people and this requires a high degree of self-awareness and an awareness of others. Managers should go through the same assessment process as their employees in order to understand how their innate behaviors, interests, skills, and emotional intelligence either complements or hinders their personal interactions.
- It is also extremely valuable for managers to receive feedback from multiple constituents, including their supervisors, peers, and subordinates in order to illuminate developmental needs, misalignments, and other issues that may be difficult to communicate openly under challenging circumstances.

The “Respondent Group Comparison” page from our CheckPoint 360° (shown above) illustrates the gaps in perception of a manager's performance as seen by themselves, their boss, their direct reports, and their peers. The same kinds of disconnects can also be seen in the Genos 360° Emotionally Intelligent Leadership Feedback Report



## 5. Don't Assume Your Managers Know How or When to Coach



“Confidence is contagious. So is lack of confidence.” ~ Vince Lombardi

Managers often aren't truly coaching the front line. At over 1000 companies surveyed, only half of the respondents agreed their direct supervisor coached them to do their very best. A McKinsey survey of retail district managers for example showed that much of the time managers spend on frontline employees actually involved auditing for compliance with standards or solving immediate problems. So, don't take for granted that your managers know how or when to coach, even if they are very experienced in their jobs.

Coaching is a skill that requires training and continuous improvement if you want your managers to achieve and sustain a high level of effectiveness. Organizations need to develop a “culture of coaching” which means your executives, managers, and front-line staff brings out the best in each other, constantly improves results, and builds an unstoppable team which works toward the goals of the organization. Ultimately a culture of coaching encourages and enables all employees to not only delight their internal and external customers, but to implement ideas which will increase revenues and profits and increase the value of the organization.

When organizations develop the fundamental coaching skills of their managers, they will also discover that measures such as revenue growth, market share, profitability and customer satisfaction all improve and both managers who received coaching were more likely to set work-related goals and believed subordinates trusted their leadership abilities.

Actions to help your managers know how or when to coach:

- Help your manager understand his leadership style and motivation. Many of us have a number of key leadership qualities, but we still need feedback so they can build on their strengths and fortify their blind spots (I really dislike the word, “weaknesses”). In some cases where it is clear that a manager really isn't ready to lead, the discovery process can help identify other career options which are better suited to his or her style and abilities.
- Provide feedback from multiple constituents. It is extremely valuable for managers to receive feedback from their supervisors, peers, and subordinates to illuminate developmental needs, misalignments, and other issues that may be difficult to communicate openly under challenging circumstances.
- Develop the fundamental coaching skills of your managers and develop a culture of coaching.

## 6. Minimize Administrative Work to give Managers more Time to Develop People



Time is money, so maximize your return on investment.

Time is a precious commodity and time not spent managing must be kept to a bare minimum. According to a recent study done across many industries by the management consulting firm McKinsey, frontline managers spend 30 to 60 percent of their time on administrative work and meetings and 10 to 50 percent on non-managerial tasks such as traveling, taking breaks, participating in training, conducting special projects, or undertaking direct customer service or sales themselves. They spend only 10 to 40 percent actually managing (or coaching) frontline employees.

This type of poor time management is very unfortunate for the organization, the manager, and employees. Time spent developing an organization's employees multiplies their productivity and sends the message that every employee is respected and valued. Time not spent developing one's employees unduly places an inordinate burden and added stress on the manager who realizes they will never be able to dig themselves out of the hole that has been created for them since they didn't develop their employees so they became more productive.

Actions to minimize administrative work to give managers more time to develop people:

- Think very carefully about the administrative tasks you assign to your frontline managers and be sure it adds sufficient value. Consider capturing fewer but more essential indicators.
- Make needed information easy to get so managers aren't spending a whole lot of time aggregating and formatting spreadsheets and making presentation decks which look pretty.
- Provide necessary administrative support and invest in tools or make the exercise so simple it can be completed in a very short period of time.
- Finally, minimize formal meeting and, when they must be held, discourage interruptions that are administrative in nature.