

# Essential Leadership Skills to Inspire Better Performances

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Today, each employee has a different perspective on where, when and how they work—and it's changing workplace culture. [According to a Forrester webinar](#), employee power (which takes into account how employees make decisions and what they expect from their organization) is one of four “shocks” reshaping the future of work. Tight labor markets have strengthened employee power even further.

As a result, many organizations and managers are challenged to maintain culture, engage workers and improve performance when all their people are working differently.

How can managers universally support employees to inspire everyone to do their best work?

The answer is an aligned leadership team—one where leaders operate from a healthy state of mind, which enables them to act with empathy and compassion in their daily interactions. A healthy state of mind is key because it allows leaders to show up with confidence to get results while maintaining vulnerability to learn, grow and improve in times of disruption.

## Increase Empathy in the Workplace

Leaders looking to support employees' human needs and build employee engagement must prioritize human capital issues, such as the overall employee experience, the future of work and learning/upskilling requirements. Thus, CEOs and CHROs around the globe are working to improve overall employee wellbeing by building more empathy in the workplace. Empathy in the workplace starts with leaders because they set the culture for the employees under them.

To begin improving empathy in the workplace, [teach leaders to listen to what workers think and feel about their work](#), which in turn builds trust and helps employees feel safe and respected at work. Employees can unlock their full potential in such an environment.

**A 10-year study from Harvard Business Review found respondents rated the best executives as the ones that “formed deep, trusting relationships” and led with “humble confidence that graciously extended care to others.”**

Employees frequently state that they value transparency, trust and compassion in the workplace. Data from [a survey of 14,000+ U.S. workers suggests workers need the following to be successful at work](#): clear expectations, openness to questions, minimal rules and productive meetings, creative problem solving, rewards and recognition, acknowledgment of employees' feelings, and a clear sense of purpose to their work. Compassionate leadership can actively work on all these areas to build a safe workplace for all workers.

This data also matches up with what our partners at [Principled Transformation](#) have found—the way to accelerate workplace culture is to develop leaders who operate with a healthy state of mind, demonstrated through confident vulnerability. In their book [The Art and Science of Culture](#), Matt Herzberg and Chad Carr discuss how leaders who have the right combination of confidence and vulnerability show up as authentic, which builds trust among all their employees.

When workers view their leaders as authentic, they want to collaborate and work with them. In such a setting, their ideas, passions, discretionary efforts and results all flourish.

## **How to Develop Confident, Vulnerable Leaders**

Most humans (and leaders) fall into a habit of functioning on an “autopilot” setting (utilizing subconscious habits to complete tasks), especially in times of stress and change. When leaders do things without noticing how they're doing them, they are relying on what's comfortable and what they know—which also means they may miss necessary changes that would address shifting employee or business needs.

When leaders are aware of these tendencies and willing to be public about their capacity for growth, their openness creates opportunities across the organization for employees to experiment, take risks, make mistakes and grow from their experiences. The leaders' authenticity demonstrates that we're all human, which means we have times when we're at our best and times when we could be better. Leaders' confident vulnerability creates psychological safety.

Principled Transformations recommends leaders engage in a three-step process to help overcome autopilot tendencies, refocus and operate from a healthy state of mind so they can lead with confident vulnerability.

1. Quiet your busy mind
2. Notice what's going on around you
3. Take intentional and purposeful action

## 1. Quiet Busy Minds

In their research, Principled Transformations found most adults have developed habitually busy minds. In fact, [studies show that people process about 70,000 thoughts a day](#). Just like having the volume up too loud on headphones, busy minds prevent leaders from noticing what's around them. A quiet mind, however, promotes listening, being present and tapping into innate wisdom.

Successful leaders must be aware of their busy minds and learn how to reset energy levels. Some ways to quiet your mind include:

- Exercising
- Focused breathing
- Taking a technology break
- Going for a short walk
- Deep breathing
- Refocusing thoughts before going to the next meeting

## 2. Notice Surroundings

Once leaders have quieted minds, they'll be more aware of key areas that affect their team's work performance, such as:

- State of mind (Are mindsets healthy or unhealthy?)
- Energy level of team (Is overall team vibe positive or negative?)
- Focus level of team (Is overall focus high or low?)
- Support levels (Is anyone overwhelmed and are there any barriers I, as leader, can remove?)
- Goal clarity (Do my people know what is expected of them?)
- Feedback levels (Is each person getting appropriate feedback?)

These questions sound great, but where specifically should leaders start when looking to build or maintain workplace culture? Start with reflection on the positive work employees are engaging in, and then share appreciation and feedback!

Appreciation and appropriate feedback can make waves in improving individual mindsets, raising team energy levels and setting clear expectations. It doesn't have to be complex either. Coming from a direct supervisor, simple statements like "I really

appreciated the way you did \_\_\_” go a long way in creating a positive, safe work environment.

### 3. Take Intentional Action

Finally, leaders need to take intentional, purposeful action and encourage action in others so they can reach their full potential. The first two steps (quieting minds and noticing surroundings) allow purposeful action to flourish.

Intentional action can take many forms, depending on the needs of the team, but often includes:

- Being clear about expectations
- Asking more questions and being open to new ideas
- Giving feedback about results (good and bad)
- Rewarding good performances, even if it’s just a quick recognition

**Related:** *It’s especially important for leaders to connect with and support remote employees. [Learn how leaders can take intentional actions to demonstrate empathy for remote workers.](#)*

## Vulnerable Leadership Inspires Growth in a Changing Workplace

New ways of working are here and aren’t going away, and leaders need to adapt to not only survive but also create a workplace where employees can thrive. By placing a new focus on empathy and compassionate leadership, as well as giving leaders the essential skills to encourage safe working environments, organizations will be able to support workers regardless of where and how they work.

**Discover more ideas for how to create a welcoming workplace, no matter where employees are working, with the ebook [How to Support Belonging in a Hybrid Workforce.](#)**

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