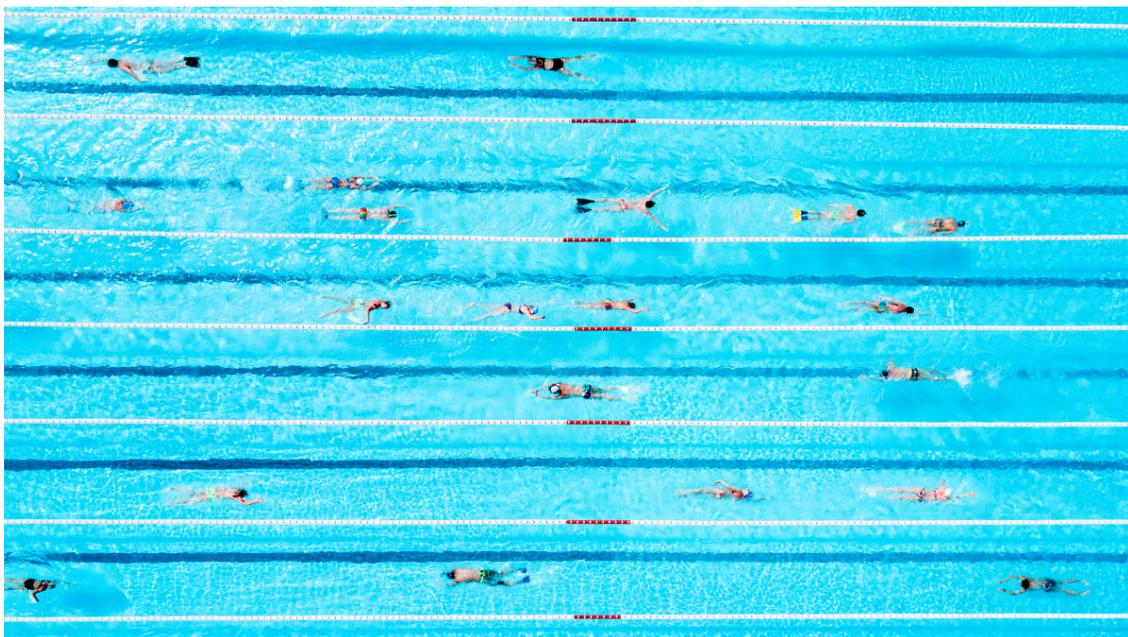


Leading Teams

How Managers Drive Results and Employee Engagement at the Same Time

by Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman

June 19, 2017



Summary. Is it possible to be a high-standards, results-driven leader while at the same time building an engaged, fun-to-work-with team? Data from 60,000 managers suggests that the answer is yes — but that younger, more junior managers may be better at it than older,... [more](#)

Is it possible to be a high-standards, results-driven leader while at the same time building an engaged, fun-to-work-with team? Many people would contend that doing either of these things well makes it almost impossible to succeed at the other. And yet our examination of 360-degree assessment data from more than 60,000 leaders showed us that leaders who were rated in the top quartile of both skills ranked in the 91st percentile of all leaders. It seems that not only is it possible to do both things well, but the best leaders are the very ones who manage to do both.

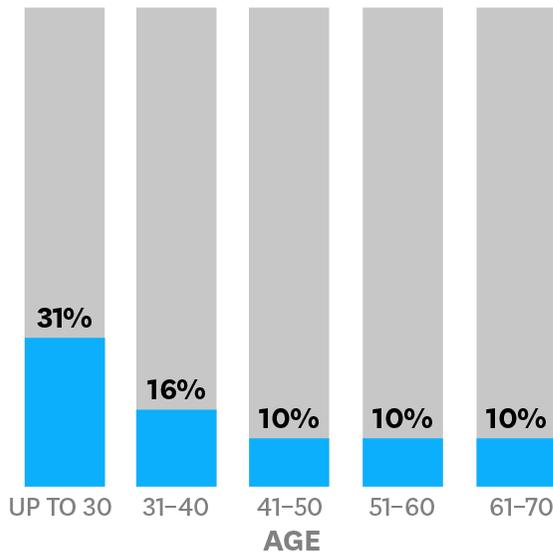
But there aren't very many of them — specifically, we isolated leaders who ranked in the top quartile on both driving for results and people skills. We found that only 13% of leaders in our data set fit this profile. Still, this left us with a data set of 7,800 leaders to analyze.

To explore the specific attributes and behaviors of these leaders, we looked more closely at this subset of our data. We found that younger leaders excelled in this ability to run an effective and fun team environment. We found that leaders who were under 30 years of age were two to three times as likely to be effective at both results and engagement than their older compatriots. Nearly one-third of the group under 30 years of age achieved both priorities well. Around age 40, it seems, leaders appear to have made their choice between being results driven or interpersonally strong. From there forward, only 10% of leaders in any age group would do both things well.

Why? Perhaps younger people place a heavier value on work relationships than older generations do. Certainly, that seems true anecdotally: Young people do seem more interested in having close, personal friendships with their colleagues, while older workers seem more likely to say, “Work is work, and life is life, and never the twain shall meet,” perhaps because those older colleagues know more people outside of work. Perhaps older colleagues feel less of a need to rely on soft skills, assuming that colleagues will be influenced by their greater experience.

Younger Leaders Are More Likely to Be Rated Highly on Both Their Business Results and Their Team's Satisfaction

PERCENTAGE OF LEADERS



SOURCE ZENGER FOLKMAN
ANALYSIS OF 7,800 LEADERS

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But we also wondered if the results we found correlated not with age (or not only with it), but with position. And indeed, that's what we found.

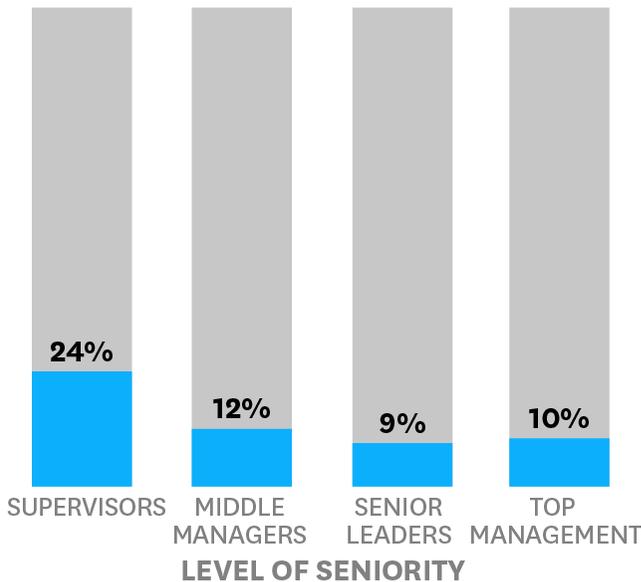
Supervisors are much more likely to carry both capabilities than senior managers, we found. In fact, supervisors are twice as likely to do both things well than senior managers. In this case we did see some decline in both

skills with age, but people skills declined more than drive for results as leaders moved from supervisor to top management. Both skills decline with age, and age and position are strongly correlated with each other. It's also more likely that people with less power, such as supervisors, feel they have to rely on their people skills if they're going to get the results they want. The thing is, older or more powerful managers would also benefit from emphasizing their people skills, even if they don't realize it.

To understand how some leaders are able to perform both capabilities well, we compared the results for the group in the top quartile of both skills to all other leaders in the data set. We analyzed 40 behaviors and performed a statistical test (t-test) contrasting both group's results. By analyzing the items showing the most significant differences, we performed a factor analysis and identified six

Supervisors Are Twice as Likely to Be Rated Highly on Both Their Business Results and Their Team's Satisfaction

PERCENTAGE OF LEADERS



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clustered groups.

These appear to be the behaviors that enable that 13% of leaders to consistently use both sets of leadership skills.

We labelled these clusters “behavioral bridges,” because the evidence suggests they enable leaders to simultaneously drive for results and practice good interpersonal skills. Obviously, these outcomes single out leaders as possessing

six powerful skills that allow them to perform at a much higher level than those who lack these traits.

1. Communicates clear strategy and direction

- **Drives for results.** Peak results hinge on everyone having clarity about the direction and understanding the strategy to achieve it.
- **People skills.** When people are lost or confused, they quickly become dissatisfied. Leaders who communicate well and provide clear direction have a much more engaged team.

2. Inspires and motivates

- **Drives for results.** More than three-quarters of leaders (78%) were rated higher on their ability to drive for results than on their ability to inspire and motivate others. We often refer to driving for results

as “push” and to inspiring as “pull.” When a leader has the ability to drive hard for results and at the same time inspire high effort and performance, they are much more likely to achieve results.

- **People skills.** Inspiring behavior unleashes the energy within people to do their best work. Most of us want to make a positive difference in our work and the world. Leader who can inspire and generate loyalty, commitment, passion, and enthusiasm in their team members excel at creating a positive work environment.

3. Establishes stretch goals

- **Drives for results.** Setting stretch goals that team members accept has the ability to get others to work harder and raise the bar.
- **People skills.** When stretch goals are collaboratively set with a team, amazing things happen. Work becomes fun. Everyone is all in. People feel valued and competent.

4. Has high integrity and inspires trust

- **Drives for results.** If a leader who is not trusted sets stretch goals, team members will often assume they are being manipulated and taken advantage of by their manager. A trusted leader’s motives are beyond reproach.
- **People skills.** A key component of building positive relationships with others is being trusted. To be trusted, leaders need to “walk their talk.” They never ask their team members to do something that they are not willing to do themselves.

5. Develops others

- **Drives for results.** Leaders who care about the development of subordinates and who also take the time to develop these people reap the benefits in the results produced. Well-trained people are far more productive.
- **People skills.** Most people want the opportunity to develop new skills and competencies. Leaders who are focused on helping team

members develop are always viewed in a very positive light. Developing others has the twofold impact of elevating performance and creating a culture that is fun and engaging. It also attracts more people who want to work in it.

6. Is coachable

- **Drives for results.** Leaders who resist feedback are much like the emperor with no clothes. Since they do not seek or want feedback, people see do not speak up. Problems slip through the cracks. Deadlines are missed. However, if a leader seeks feedback and is receptive to advice, colleagues will not stand by if they see that leader is about to make a mistake.
- **People skills.** Leaders who ask for feedback from others and work to make improvements are highly respected. Their coachability is an example to everyone.

Having the ability to simultaneously drive for results and practice excellent people skills is a powerful combination that has a dramatic impact on a leader's effectiveness. As noted earlier, we found that leaders who possess both of these skills were rated in the 91st percentile in their overall leadership effectiveness. Hopefully, you can identify one or two of these six behavioral bridges that will help you achieve this magic combination as well.

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