FROM COG TO COACH:

CRUSH YOUR 2024
GOALS BY ELEVATING
FRONTLINE MANAGERS

Frontline managers do more than merely keep workers in line. They teach new skills, help customers, answer questions, and respond to issues that arise in the moment.

At least, they do at the strongest companies. At other organizations, frontline managers are merely cogs in the system – and their untapped potential can drag down the organization rather than propel it forward.

Translation?

If you want a more agile, productive and profitable organization, fundamentally redefine what you expect from frontline managers.

In this eBook, you'll learn:

- Why frontline managers need the power to coach their teams,

- How to determine whether your frontline managers have the tools they need to lead,

- Which tools and opportunities to provide for success,

- How other companies have reached their goals by elevating frontline managers, and

- Where to turn for help improving frontline manager performance.

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THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF FRONTLINE MANAGERS

Frontline managers play a critical role in any industry with employees at several sites, including remote workers. And they have a big impact: **two-thirds of the U.S. workforce reports to a frontline manager.**

Because frontline managers play such a large role in customer-facing efforts, their work defines customer experiences. Yet frontline managers often have limited flexibility to make decisions and little room for creativity. Their ability to adapt to the customer in front of them is essential – yet that very ability is often curtailed by constraints from higher levels of leadership.

"COGS" VS. "COACHES" – RISKS AND REWARDS

In a traditional organization, frontline managers are little more than cogs in the system. They're tasked with overseeing direct reports and relaying information from executives to workers. They enforce rules and policies, but they're given few opportunities to exercise judgment, use discretion, or contribute ideas for improvement.

Across industries, **most frontline managers spend only 10 to 40% of their time supervising employees.** The rest is spent on administration, meetings, and paperwork.

If this sounds familiar, your company is like many today. Your company is also less productive and less agile than competitors who tap into the value of their frontline managers.

It's time to change that.

WHAT DO YOUR FRONTLINE MANAGERS DO?

Are your frontline managers cogs or coaches?
Tools or teachers? Enforcers or explorers?

To determine where your approach lies, ask where
your frontline managers spend their time:

- Are they in meetings, doing administrative
  work, or "following the process"?

- Or are they helping their teams understand the
  why and how behind those processes?

Frontline managers who spend most of their time following processes
have little opportunity to coach their employees. They cannot provide
insight because they aren't expected to generate any understanding
of their own. Their first job is to follow; they lead in title only.

Frontline managers empowered to coach their teams can
lead. They can provide insight and guidance to their teams,
boosting performance and addressing unique situations as they
arise. They can also generate stronger financial returns.

WHY YOUR TEAMS NEED COACHES, NOT COGS

Companies that enlist their frontline managers as coaches and guides see better results than companies that don't:

- 90% of high-performing organizations connect frontline managers to workers through a range of learning and teaching modalities.

- High-performing organizations are 48% more likely to help their frontline managers coach teams than their low-performing counterparts.

- One company that focused frontline managers on coaching duties reduced hours worked by 19 to 25% while also increasing sales nearly 10%.

Treating frontline managers as cogs in the system may have worked during the Industrial Revolution. In the Information Age, however, this antiquated approach generates antiquated results – and holds a company down rather than driving its growth and performance.

TIME TO ELEVATE: UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF FRONTLINE MANAGERS

Company direction and coaching for performance are a must for unlocking a team's abilities. Companies seeking to maximize the value of their frontline managers should shift toward a system where frontline managers spend more time managing and coaching and less time on administrative tasks.

When frontline managers can make coaching their top priority, companies see the results in increased performance and higher financial returns. High-performing companies support frontline managers in:

- Making in-the-moment decisions about real-life situations as they arise,

- Exercising flexibility to address problems and implement effective solutions, and

- Coaching their workers in how and why to perform optimally.

CASE STUDY #1: MAJOR CHANGES FOR A MANUFACTURER

The Challenge:

A global equipment manager found itself facing a corporate crisis. A perfect storm of backlogs, capacity constraints, and quality and profitability issues threatened the company's vehicle assembly lines, imperilling not only the company but the entire industry it served.

Leadership at the company faced a grim answer: To save operations, they needed to cut five plants down to running two shifts – and raise production levels and quality at the same time. To make the challenge even tougher, they needed to show results in seven weeks.
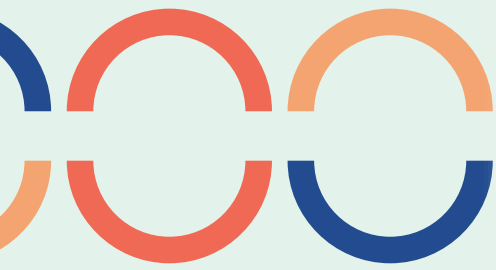
The Solution:

Give frontline managers a critical role in the change. As executives communicated the why and how of the changes, frontline managers' roles shifted from administrative work to the hands-on efforts of changing critical processes and workflows to match lean principles.

The Results:

After ten weeks, output at the plants rose by 40%, even though one shift at each had been eliminated. Quality increased by 80%. Frontline managers now spend five hours a day on the shop floor helping their teams improve and only three hours a day on paperwork and administrative tasks.

CASE STUDY #2: CHANGING BEHAVIOR MEANS CHANGING MINDS

Sometimes, the first step toward creating frontline coaches is to convince your managers they have what it takes to lead. Such was the case for this employer:

The Challenge:

A chain of convenience stores found its frontline managers weren't providing the boost the company needed. Internal analysis revealed that frontline store managers spent 61% of their time on administration. When managers had to interact with customers, they often struggled, because the company's guidelines for doing so were poorly defined.

The Solution:

When asked what could change, managers defined four areas that fed their sense of powerlessness in their roles:

Lack of control over key performance drivers, like sales in key product categories.
No access to tools to help them monitor daily performance.
Inadequate leadership and coaching skills.

An ever-changing rotation of "motivational" activities that put more work on managers' plates but didn't actually address key problems or contribute to success.

Leadership listened – and took a hands-on approach to teaching a new process. They had frontline managers participate in a model store where work proceeded differently, and managers played a coaching role. They also streamlined sales reporting and meetings, giving managers a more consistent schedule within which they could plan their coaching time.

The Results:

After these changes took effect, managers' administrative time decreased nearly 50%. Instead, managers spent up to 70% of their days coaching workers and helping customers.

ELEVATING FRONTLINE MANAGERS: IDENTIFY KEY SKILLS

Harvard Business research identifies five essential skill groups for frontline leaders. Efforts to elevate frontline managers should focus on developing these abilities in managers.

According to Harvard Business, an outstanding frontline manager:

Develops Others

- Coaching skills
- Delivering ongoing feedback
- Supporting employee morale through the learning and refinement process

Creates Accountability: Leads Teams That Deliver

- Employs strong interpersonal skills in management.
- Builds team cohesion.
- Keeps teams focused on what matters.
- Provides meaningful work to team members.

Leads Authentically

- Demonstrates behaviors aligned with their principles and values, as well as the principles and values of the company.
- Earns others' trust by demonstrating empathy, self-awareness, and the ability to admit mistakes.

Communicates for Influence and Impact

- Continually improves in-person and distance communication skills.
- Deals effectively with conflict.
- Manages difficult conversations.

Champions Inclusion

- Helps all team members cultivate a sense of belonging.
- Maintains awareness of their own biases and helps others spot unconscious bias.
- Celebrates diversity, equity, and inclusion.

All frontline managers need these skills, but some managers and workplaces will have stronger abilities in one area than in others. Prioritizing training can help bring your teams up to speed quickly – and help them put new skills to use right away.
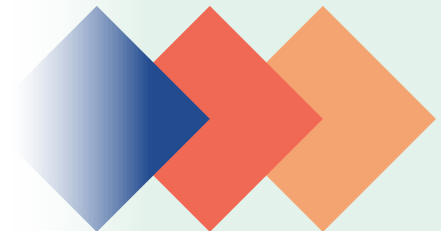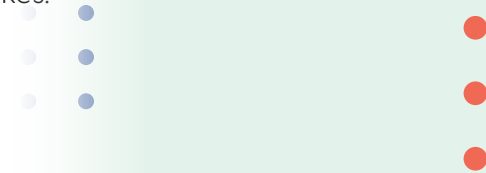
ELEVATING FRONTLINE MANAGERS: CREATE YOUR ACTION PLAN

Once you've prioritized the skills your frontline managers need, it's time to build an action plan. When doing so, keep the following points in mind:

- **Explicitly Redefine the Role of Frontline Manager.** Your frontline managers and their teams are used to thinking of themselves in their current roles. To shake up their thinking, refocus them by explicitly reshaping their roles.

- **Emphasize the Importance of Frontline Managers in Affecting Retention**. For decades, studies have shown that employees don't quit companies – they quit individual bosses, and they often do so when they don't feel supported by their frontline manager. Use a focus on retention to drive the redefinition of frontline managers' roles.

- **Don't Overlook Digital Skills.** Remote and hybrid work, new digital tools and platforms, and other features of today's work world demand strong digital skills and adaptability from frontline managers. Help your managers build these abilities within the context of the five essential skills groups discussed earlier.

Use these parameters, along with those that are specific to your company and its goals, to help you plan how to teach essential skills to raise your frontline managers from cogs to coaches.
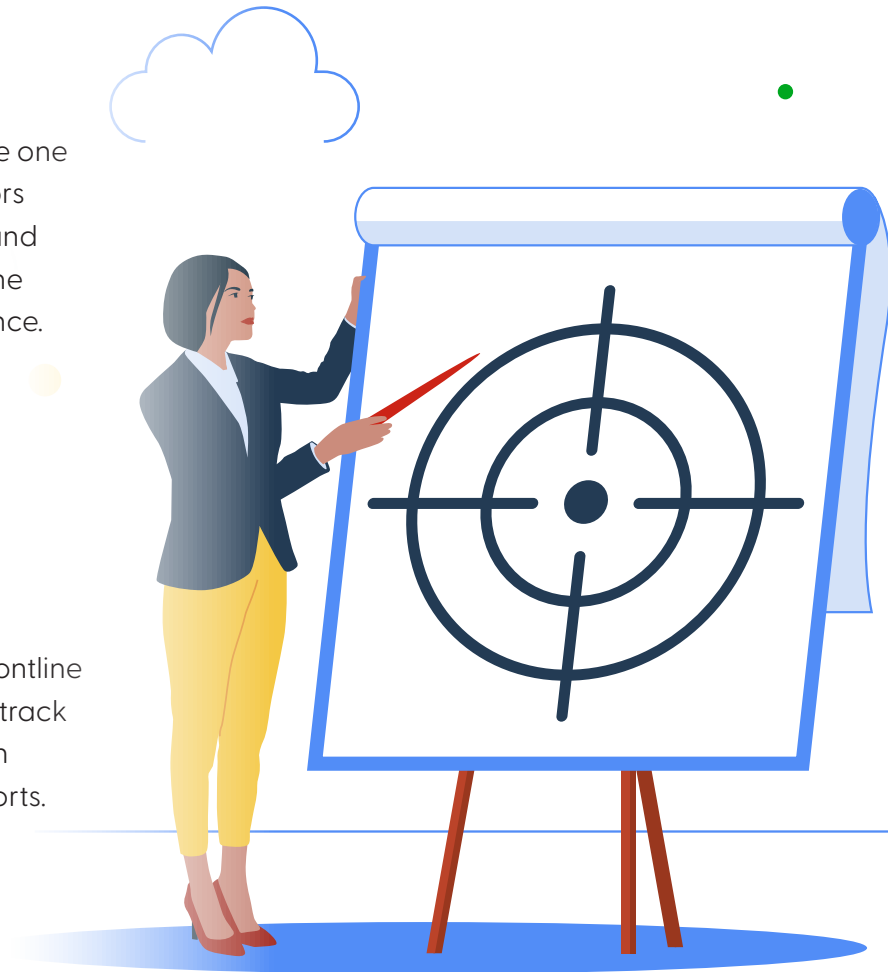
ELEVATING FRONTLINE MANAGERS: BE THE COACH YOU WISH TO SEE

To become effective coaches, frontline managers may need coaching themselves. Use the following strategies to implement your action plan and teach your frontline managers the five skill groups they need to coach well.

- **Define roles and share expectations transparently.** Workers have one role and set of responsibilities. Frontline managers have another. Supervisors and executives have their own as well. Start by clearly defining each role and sharing expectations across the organization. Make it easy for anyone in the company to refresh their memory of each person's role and duties at a glance.

- **Use one-on-one meetings with direct reports and use them often.** One-on-one meetings between an employee and their direct supervisor help both parties stay on goal and address issues before they become too entrenched. Have frontline managers' supervisors meet with them one-on-one throughout the coaching process and give frontline managers time to meet with their team members as well.

- **Standardize your data collection and technology tools.** Many frontline managers flounder when they don't have the data and tools necessary to track or influence key performance metrics. Use a standard set of data collection and technology tools across the company to streamline administrative efforts.

Coaching frontline managers in the field can help frontline managers implement their skills in real time. It can also provide a real-world example of how frontline managers can interact with their own teams.

ELEVATING FRONTLINE MANAGERS: ENLIST EXPERT ASSISTANCE

Loop your staffing partner into your processes for elevating your frontline managers. Your staffing partner can:

- help you plan your talent needs,

- identify the skills needed for effective frontline managers,

- provide additional support from temporary or contract staff to free up your managers for the training and development they need,

- redistribute administrative tasks so your managers can spend more time coaching, and

- provide qualified workers who will thrive in your modern management paradigm.

Ready to unleash your frontline managers' – and your company's – performance in 2024? Start a conversation with your staffing partner.