ZENGER | FOLKMAN

LEADERSHIP SKILLS 2024 REPORT

Research and Insights by
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INTRODUCTION

In the last year, we've focused our research on core leadership behaviors. These range from well-known capabilities such as risk-taking to emerging skills like coachability. Zenger Folkman's *Extraordinary Leader* Assessment evaluates 19 differentiating leadership behaviors that set exceptional leaders apart from the rest. However, as world events unfold and new technologies surface, we see that the importance of certain behaviors changes to meet employees' current needs.

While any one leader may not naturally excel at the latest behavioral trend, our research underscores that even modest strides in enhancing a strength have a tremendous impact—on the individual, their team, and ultimately, the entire organization.

People can change and grow regardless of age or position. The research we've conducted over the past year is intended to guide your efforts in 2024. Remember, it's not about being perfect—it's about attempting new actions.

And it's this effort that leads to **extraordinary results.**

Effective

COACHING UTILIZES COACHABILITY.

As the elements of optimal leadership continue to evolve, being coachable pinpoints the need for individuals to become rooted in continuous learning and adaptability.

THE RESEARCH

For over a decade, we've evaluated leaders' coaching abilities. Our recent analysis of 3,458 leaders highlighted the **key behaviors of the most effective coaches:**

- Understand others' needs. It takes time, but it shows you genuinely care.
- Listen to understand without judging; it encourages others to seek your coaching.
- Balance achieving results with addressing team members' concerns, even prioritizing their problems when needed.
- Boost self-esteem by regularly recognizing others' achievements and efforts.
- **Stay coachable** by overcoming faulty assumptions and maintaining a learning mindset, focusing on seeking, responding, reflecting, and acting for self-improvement.

THE CHALLENGE

Coachability declines with age and position. Our research on thousands of leaders shows that mid to senior-level leaders' interest in feedback and coachability **declines by over 36% vs. early-career leaders.**

COACHABILITY

Supervisor Manager Executive Sr. Executive
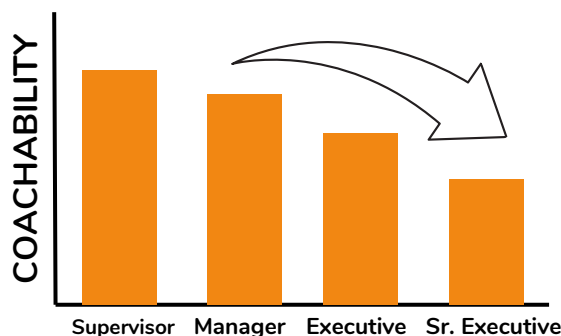
THE LEARNING ZONE

"A coachable person values self-improvement and operates consistently in a learning zone by applying the practices of seek, respond, reflect, act."
—Kevin Wilde

Self Improvement

01

VALUES Self-Improvement
Coachable leaders value living in their learning zone as they confidently regard themselves as a work-in-progress, not a finished product.

02

SEEKS
Coachable leaders seek input from others on how they can improve. They ask for feedback and advice from those around them.

03

RESPONDS
Whether incoming feedback was asked for or offered gratuitously, coachable leaders respond openly.

04

REFLECT
Coachable leaders thoughtfully consider if the feedback has merit and seek ways they can use it to grow.

05

ACT
When acting on feedback, coachable leaders begin with a mindset of experimentation and know achievement comes in small steps.

COACHABILITY

Every day, there are coachable moments that MATTER. These moments accelerate our growth as more trusted and capable leaders and coaches. COACHABILITY—it's the vital capability where ALL development begins.

Explore Zenger Folkman's newest development session, **Coachability.**

The year of

MANAGING AND

CHAMPIONING CHANGE.

Leading in 2024 merges strategy with an openness to adapt as generative AI redefines our future at an unprecedented pace. Managing a team now extends beyond tasks to harnessing technology that complements rather than replaces human roles, demanding leaders who are as empathetic as they are visionary.

EMPLOYEE COMMITTMENT

WE ASKED OVER 400,000 DIRECT REPORTS, "ARE YOU CONFIDENT THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION WILL ACHIEVE ITS STRATEGIC GOALS?"

Leaders with low competence at championing change (i.e., bottom 10%) had **direct reports who scored at the 32nd percentile** on their confidence in reaching goals.

Compare that with those in the top 10% whose **direct reports were at the 74th percentile.**

The graph below shows that 32% of leaders in Top Management positions received feedback that leading change was critical for their success. Only 14% of supervisors received the same message.
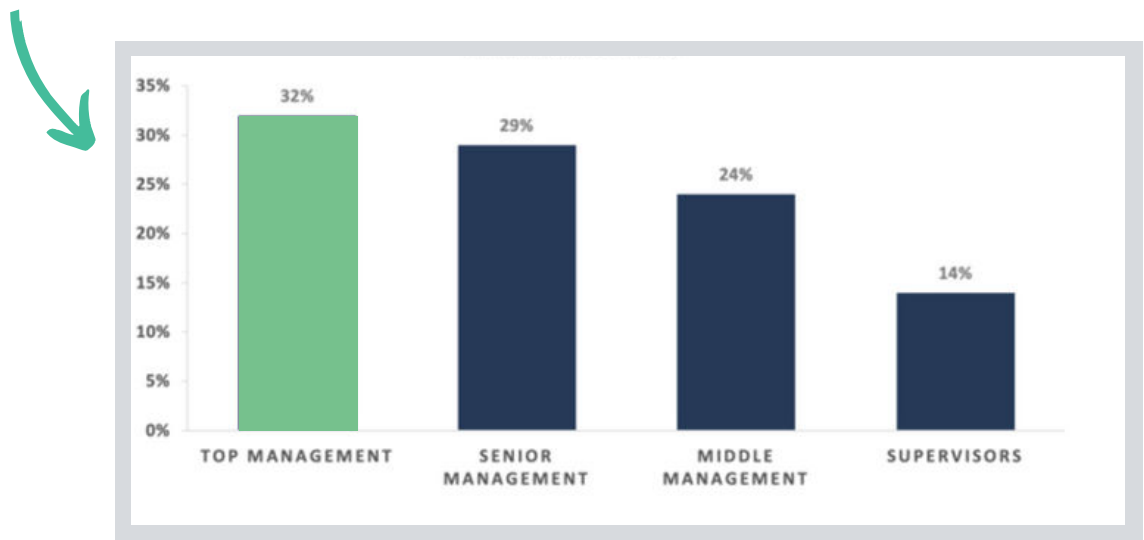
WHAT EMPOWERS LEADERS TO MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN?

SUGGESTIONS

QUESTIONS

Fostering Innovation.

There is a big difference between being innovative and supporting innovation by others. Often, someone in your organization has a brilliant idea that will make change much easier, faster, and less painful.

- How do I react when presented with new ideas that are not my own?
- What mechanisms can I put in place to encourage and reward innovative thinking in my team?

Acting Quickly. We found in our research that leaders who acted quickly were 2x as effective at making change happen. Leaders who increase the speed of a change process will likely be more effective in the long run.

- What are the potential costs of delaying action when a problem or opportunity is identified?
- How can I streamline decision-making processes to respond more rapidly to changes?

Developing External Perspective. What is the big picture? What is happening in your market or industry? Keeping an eye on the outside, especially customers, helps everyone understand why the change is necessary.

- When was I last engaged directly with customers to understand their needs and perspectives?
- How can I regularly incorporate external trends into our strategic planning?

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Learn more about Zenger Folkman's **Leading Change Microlearning Session.**

The
IN-OFFICE
EDGE.

The "coffee badging" response to mandates to return to the office has prompted executives to question whether coming in is more about connection than task completion.

"What you don't want is a scenario where people are in the office connecting and learning and then having to put in extra time from home to catch up on the work tasks on their to-do lists. The challenge, then, is to create commute-worthy experiences that accommodate the work that still needs to be done so "going into the office" doesn't become another "do more with less" ask of employees."
—Justin Angsuwat

IN OFFICE VS. REMOTE

ZENGER FOLKMAN COMPARED DATA FROM 1,355 LEADERS WORKING IN OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS AND 999 LEADERS WHO WORKED REMOTELY. WE FOUND:

- There are no discernible differences in the overall leadership effectiveness between leaders operating remotely and those in office settings.

- The engagement levels of direct reports remained consistent, regardless of whether their leader was remote or on-site.

But what truly differentiated the two groups of leaders were two distinctly dissimilar mindsets in their direct reports.

1. Employees working in the office exhibited higher confidence in their **organization's ability to achieve strategic goals.**

2. Conversely, those working remotely displayed higher scores in discretionary effort, reflecting their **willingness to go the extra mile** in their roles.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT
FOR REMOTE WORKERS

Recent data shows only minor differences in the levels of engagement between employees working in the office versus those working remotely. Yet, one compelling variable emerges as the linchpin of engagement: **the overall effectiveness of the leader.**

AS LEADER EFFECTIVENESS ASCENDS, SO DOES ENGAGEMENT.

This correlation underscores leaders' profound influence over their teams' satisfaction and commitment, a pivotal insight that cannot be overstated. There is a statistically significant gap in the engagement:
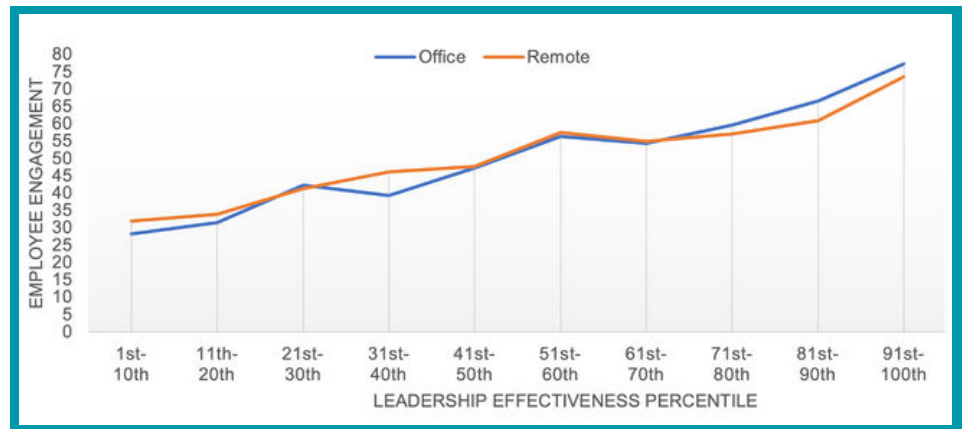
69.6 for those in offices versus 65.3 for remote workers. This disparity underscores the undeniable impact of physical presence, face-to-face interactions, and shared spaces.

IN-PERSON INTERACTIONS FOSTER MORE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES, REAFFIRMING THE VALUE OF PERSONAL CONNECTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE.

KEY LEARNING:

If you're asking people to come back, have a clear plan for maximizing the benefits of connection, making it worth the time, cost, and effort of commuting.

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The heart of unhappiness:
LEADERSHIP'S
ROLE.

What is Causing Employee Unhappiness?

Our employee surveys show that worker unhappiness has many roots. It often stems from a lack of recognition, excessive workloads, or inequitable distribution of opportunities and rewards.

Ultimately, the #1 factor that causes the most dissatisfaction is poor leadership.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Leaders aren't just managing teams; they're nurturing spaces where everyone feels heard, valued, and inspired. It's not just about the bottom line anymore; it's about building a legacy of trust, inclusivity, and genuine care for employee well-being.

> **Disturbing Trend:** The average employee commitment score for the lowest-scoring leaders in our database was at the **3rd percentile**. No organization should tolerate the harm that bad managers do to their people and their business.

RETURN TO THE BASICS: COMMUNICATION

Leadership occurs through communication, and the most important part is not the "half-time locker room speech" but the daily one-on-one interaction with colleagues. **Consider your ability to listen effectively and to ask insightful questions.**

> *"While many of us think a good listener is like a sponge that accurately absorbs what the other person is saying, these findings show that good listeners are actually like trampolines. They are someone you can bounce ideas off of —and rather than absorbing your ideas and energy, they amplify, energize, and clarify your thinking."* — *Jack Zenger*
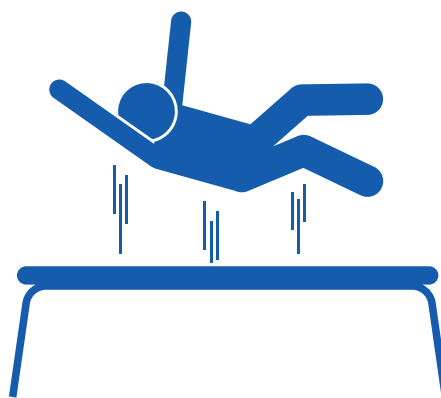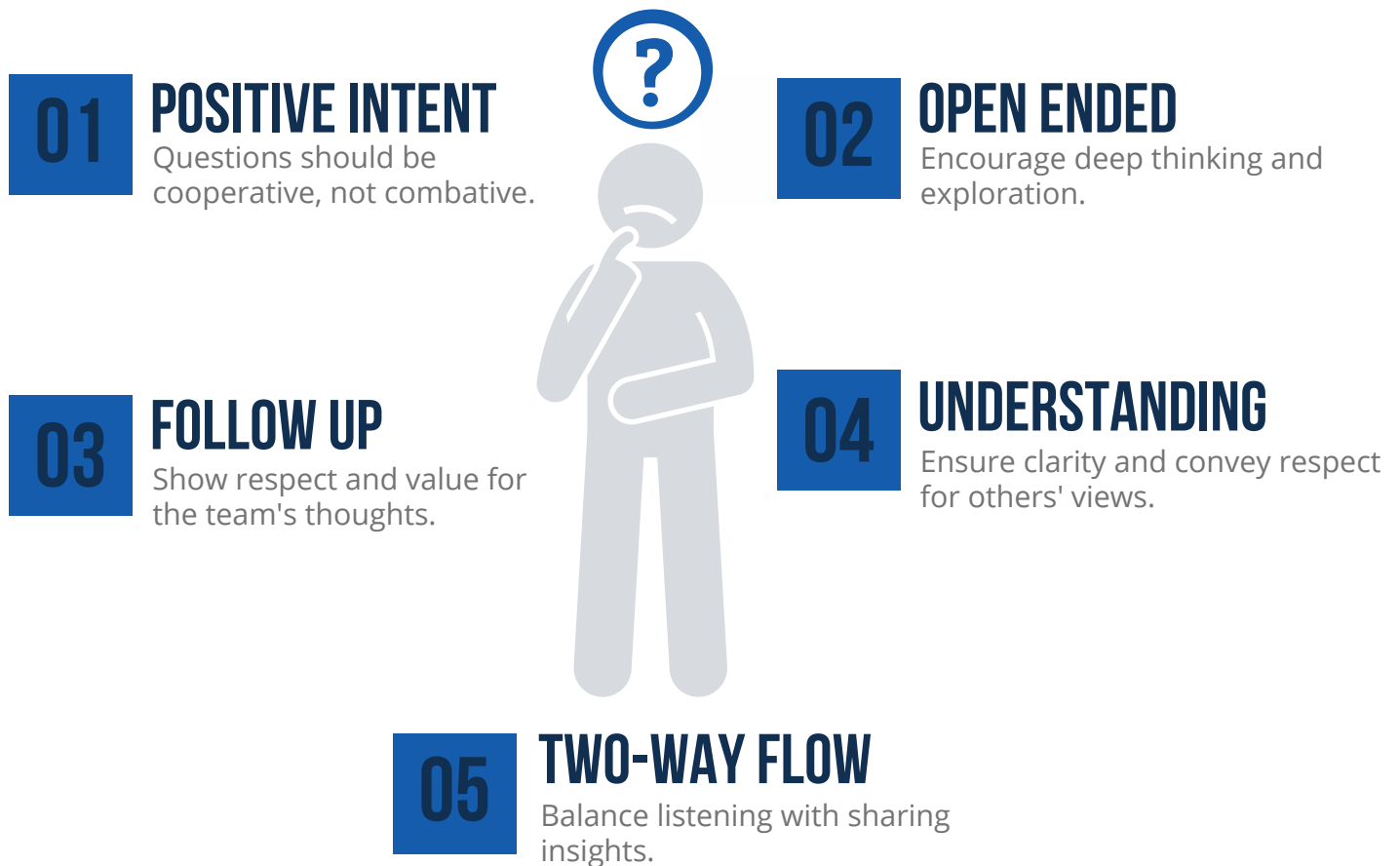
ASKING QUESTIONS

People generally don't ask enough questions because we fail to recognize the enormous benefits of interpersonal bonding and how questions are the gateway to learning important information.

Asking questions, ironically, confirms that we've been listening. The most valuable questions confirm our genuine interest in learning more about what someone is saying. Leaders who adopt this model are poised to foster a supportive, dynamic, and engaged team environment.

KEY COMPONENTS OF ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

01 POSITIVE INTENT
Questions should be cooperative, not combative.

02 OPEN ENDED
Encourage deep thinking and exploration.

03 FOLLOW UP
Show respect and value for the team's thoughts.

04 UNDERSTANDING
Ensure clarity and convey respect for others' views.

05 TWO-WAY FLOW
Balance listening with sharing insights.

CONCLUSION

The future is not on the horizon; it is already here, embodied in leaders ready to guide their organizations through the evolving landscapes of change with confidence and empathy.

The core of progressive leadership lies in the timeless truth: **our greatest resource is our people**, and the most impactful leaders are those who cultivate an environment where every member can thrive.

These leaders are not just part of the future; they are its architects.

Get Started