



# The Strategic HR Leader's Guide to the First 90 Days

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First 90 Days



## Introduction

You've probably heard some version of the saying, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression." While that sentiment can create a lot of pressure to make a strong first impression, there is a lot of truth to it.

As an HR leader in a new role, you need to know that having an impact is not something that is going to happen overnight — it is a continual process and journey. That being said, the groundwork you lay in your first three months in the role can have a major impact on how the rest of your time in the role goes.

Rather than seeing this as a threat or a source of pressure, we encourage you to see this as an opportunity. By putting some thought into how you want to show up and what you want to accomplish in your first 90 days, you can set the foundation for long term success.

Okay, so the first 90 days of a new role are important, you get it... but what exactly should you be striving to accomplish in these first three months?

Consider this guide your map to the first 90 days. In it, we'll point out key milestones to aim for along the way and offer practical tips and tricks to help you get there. With our guidance, you can confidently chart your course and make the most of this pivotal time in your career.

But first, let's take a step back and envision the big picture. What does a victorious first 90-day period look like, and what kind of outcomes can you expect to achieve? Let's paint that picture together, so you have a clear idea of what you're striving for as you embark on this journey.

## First, Envision the End Goal

Getting an idea of what success looks like first, before diving into specifics, can help serve as your North Star as you establish the steps needed to get there.

Without this North Star, it can be difficult to make decisions about what to prioritize during this time.

So without further ado...



## What does a successful first 90 days look like?

### **You have a clear understanding of the company's goals and how you fit into them.**

You know what goals the company is trying to achieve in both the short and long term, and the metrics that are being used to measure them. From there, you have developed an understanding of how your work will contribute to the realization of those goals, and have begun to develop actionable steps you can take to help get there. You will also have developed an understanding of what is going well and what can be improved.

### **You are able to demonstrate results and early wins.**

You're not expected to achieve everything in these first three months, but you have shown that you can drive impact by producing tangible, measurable results. By securing quick wins, you have demonstrated to the business and the rest of the executive team that you are making a difference.

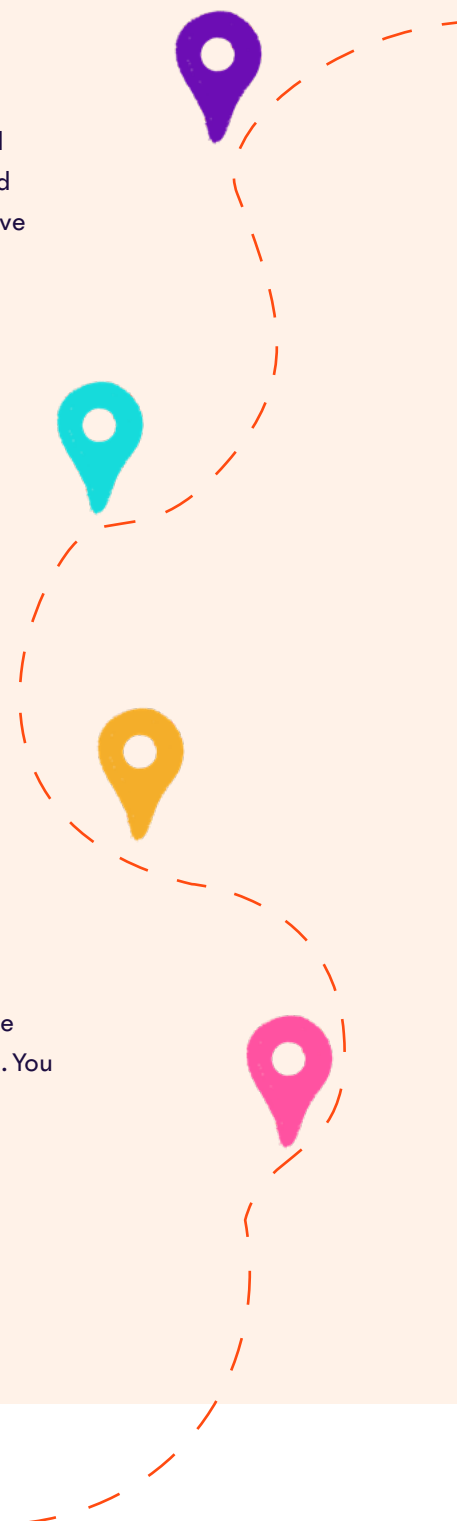
### **You have begun to form bonds.**

You've established yourself as a professional, but you have also taken the time to really form personal bonds with others in the organizations, including your own team. You have scheduled meetings with employees at all levels to get to know them as people (consider using a tool like [15Five's Best-Self Kickoff](#)). You have learned about the company culture and found your own ways to contribute to it.

### **You have established a sense of credibility.**

You have proven yourself as a credible HR leader and gained the respect of others in the organization — both those at the executive level, and the employees that you manage. You are given a seat at the leadership table, and your opinions are sought out and valued.

**Now, let's break down how exactly you get to these outcomes mentioned above.**



## But First...Before Day 1

Calling this guide “The HR Leader’s Guide to the First 90 Days in a New Role” may have been a bit misleading, as the real work begins before Day 1. Before you get your new email address and are invited to Very Important Meetings, there is plenty that you can do to lay the groundwork for a successful start.

- 1. First, be sure to rest your mind and body, and find some centeredness.** You are about to enter into a fast-paced, stressful time where the pressure to be “on” will feel extra heavy. You want to ensure you are entering into this endeavor as your best, most clear-headed, grounded self. Take some time to get ahead of chores and life administration tasks so that you have to spend a little less bandwidth on these things as you ease into your new work situation.
- 2. Next, do your research — or better yet, do a refresher on the research that you already did on the company during your interview phase.** This involves perusing the website, learning about the industry, and writing down questions as you go. Just as you (hopefully) didn’t walk into the job interview without doing research on the company and writing down a list of questions, you shouldn’t walk into Day 1 of your new role with no demonstrated knowledge of the company or questions to ask. You’re not expected to learn everything on your own — of course not! But showing that you’ve done your research and are eager to dive in and learn more by asking thoughtful questions will make a great first impression. In order to go deeper on the research you’ve already done, consider asking if you can be sent any internal documents on topics such as the company’s strategic vision, messaging, history, culture, values, strategy, OKRs, etc. before you start. Maybe you can even be sent a recent quarterly business review. This material will give you a leg up on having some knowledge when you walk in the door. But it will also grant you a sense of heightened confidence as you have the idea that you know what you’re talking about when diving into conversations and asking those questions you’ve developed.
- 3. Finally, don’t be shy about reaching out to members of the executive team to introduce yourself and start building rapport before Day 1.** Something as simple as a LinkedIn connection request with an introductory message can go a long way in getting the executive team excited about your arrival, and can get the wheels turning in their head about how they might collaborate and synergize with you.





# The First Month

The first 30 days are all about listening and learning. While it can be tempting to dive in headfirst and start making changes and driving impact right away, it is important to slow down before you speed up, and fully get an understanding of the current state of the organization and what is needed. If you enter into your new role aggressively asserting that you know what needs to be changed, it can leave a bad taste in the mouths of the employees that have been in the

organization for months or years, engaging with and trying to solve the problems day in and day out. Now is the time to put assumptions aside and put your curious listening hat on.

This time is your opportunity to observe, ask questions, and get to know your coworkers and the unique challenges that they face, so that you can begin to form an idea of how to help solve them.



## During these first 30 days:



- **Gain a deep understanding of the internal structures of the company.** This includes the organizational chart, and the different departments and teams that make up the company and how they work together.
- **Understand the company from a macro perspective.** In what industry does the company operate? Who is the ideal customer base? How does the business make money? How has the company evolved over time? These are all questions that are good to find answers to during this early phase.
- **Learn about the current HR practices and processes.** Whether there is a team of HR practitioners that you are going to be leading, or you are building the HR function at the company from scratch, you have a lot to learn about how the company currently manages its people operations function and tasks.
- **Learn about the HR tech stack.** What tools does the organization currently have in place for people operations? Is there a performance review tool? An engagement survey tool? By gaining a deep understanding of the capabilities and limitations of your HR tech stack, you can identify gaps in the current technology infrastructure and evaluate opportunities to optimize or upgrade your tech stack to better support your HR function and the goals that you want to accomplish.
- **Learn about the company's current goals and strategy.** What does the company hope to accomplish in the next quarter? What about next year? How successful has the company been in meeting its goals in the past few quarters, and if the answer is not very successful, what have the biggest challenges been?

Now, let's take a look at the actual, tactical steps you should be taking in these first 30 days.





## Action Items for Month One

- ☐ Study the organizational structure, company mission and vision, employer value proposition, company values, and company policies.
- ☐ Complete any steps required of you by the formal onboarding program (if one exists).\*

\* **Note:** This is a great opportunity to take notes on your experience going through the onboarding process, so you can improve it for new hires down the line!

- ☐ Review current HR roles, processes, and programs (for example: goal setting, performance reviews, compensation reviews, talent acquisition, onboarding).
- ☐ Set up introductory meetings with members of your team and your manager(s).
- ☐ Set up 1-on-1s with each executive and key leaders of functional departments.
- ☐ Gain an understanding of the company goals and each executive team member's departmental goals.
- ☐ Review the current suite of tools used for HR and people operations purposes.
- ☐ Have a conversation with your manager about role expectations and how your role will help the organization achieve its broader goals.
- ☐ Begin documenting strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.



## The Second Month

While the first month was all about listening and learning, the second month is all about letting your experience and expertise begin to emerge. That means integrating all of the information and insights you have gathered over the last month and beginning to notice opportunities for improvement and impact. Ideally, during these next 30 days, you will be able to identify some low-hanging fruit opportunities for you to make some quick wins to demonstrate immediate impact, while also beginning to lay the groundwork for strategies that will drive long term impact.

### How to uncover opportunities for quick wins:

To identify potential opportunities for quick wins, start with the pain points and friction you have noticed during the first month. Are meetings inefficient? Are the tools managers use to communicate with direct reports clunky or ineffective? Is there a cross-functional meeting that could be created that would create a lot of synergy and alignment?

Note these pain points and then ask yourself: Where can I make a significant difference without causing too much disruption? Will the changes required be met with a high level of resistance? Is the potential for impact equal to or greater than the effort and disruption required to achieve it?

Those changes or shifts that could have a great impact with little to no friction or resistance are the **perfect** ones to tackle during this time.





# The Second Month

After identifying some potential quick wins, it's time to spread the word and get others on board. To do this effectively, start by highlighting what's working well in the organization, leading the conversation with positivity and optimism. By doing so, you'll establish yourself as a leader who's not afraid to celebrate even the smallest successes, which can foster a more collaborative and supportive team dynamic. This, in turn, can make it easier to enlist the help of others in pursuing those quick wins, and can set the stage for more significant achievements down the road!

This second month is also a great time to begin establishing **baseline people data** that can help inform the strategy that you will craft.

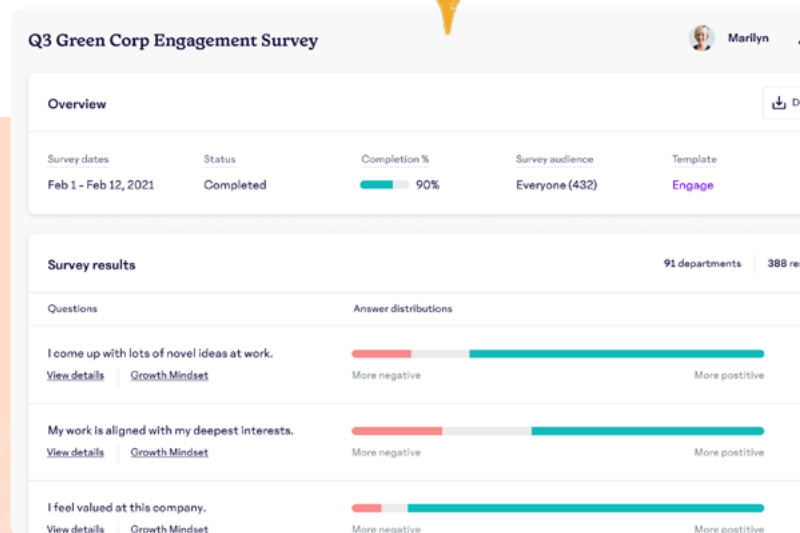
First, find out what kind of data your organization is already collecting, so you can identify any gaps that need to be filled. This could include information about employee demographics, job roles, performance, and engagement. By conducting a thorough review of existing data sources, you'll gain a better understanding of what information is already available, and where there may be opportunities to gather more data.

With 15Five's **Engage** tool, HR leaders can turn engagement insights into engagement outcomes. Our evidence-based assessment and easy-to-use analysis tools make it simple for you to tap into the pulse of your organization, quickly find out what's working and what's not, and then take action by giving managers and employees tried-and-tested tools to drive engagement outcomes.

[Learn more about 15Five's Engage.](#)

Once you have a clear picture of what data is currently available, you can then work on filling the gaps and gathering more information by running an engagement survey. When crafting this survey, be sure that the questions are well-designed and aligned with the organization's goals and values. Also, communicate clearly with employees about the purpose of the survey and how the results will be used, to ensure that they feel comfortable sharing their honest feedback.

Running an **engagement survey** will help you build a solid foundation of knowledge about your organization, and can provide valuable insights into how to improve engagement and productivity. By being thorough and thoughtful in your approach, you can set the stage for success in your new role and make a positive impact on your organization.



## Action Items for Month Two

- ☐ Take note of what is currently working well, and existing HR/people operations strengths that you can celebrate and build upon.
- ☐ Document pain points that you observed in the interview phase and month one, and translate them into potential opportunities for quick wins.
- ☐ Continue to strengthen internal relationships.
- ☐ Plan an organization-wide employee engagement survey, unless one was conducted recently (within the last quarter or two).
- ☐ Collect and analyze data from the engagement survey.
- ☐ Schedule follow-up interviews with stakeholders to gain deeper insight into the results of the engagement survey.
- ☐ Draft a “current state assessment” of the organization and the HR/People team that covers current strengths and opportunities for quick wins.\*

\*Note: This current state assessment will also form the basis of the long-term strategy that you will be developing in month three.



# The Third Month

The third month is where you fully shift from learning and absorbing, to taking action and having an impact. This is the time where you should begin taking on more substantial tasks and responsibilities, and fully fleshing out your strategy and beginning to take steps to implement it.

During this phase, you should be synthesizing all of the information, insights, and data you have gathered over the past two months into a course of action. And don't just synthesize it — this is also the time to be vocal and share what you've found with other stakeholders in the organization. By presenting a series of findings that are backed by quantitative and qualitative data, and then connecting those findings to potential solutions, you will be demonstrating your expertise and positioning yourself as a leader who can jump in, get their hands dirty, uncover the truth, and take steps to make a tangible difference.

Month three is also where you will begin to determine the tools that you will need to bring your long-term strategy to life. This can include a range of HR technologies, such as HR information systems (HRIS), applicant tracking systems (ATS), and learning management systems (LMS), which can streamline HR processes and improve efficiency. In addition, talent management systems, such as performance management software and employee engagement platforms can help you attract, retain, and develop top talent, enabling you to build a high-performing workforce.

**Don't just acquire tools for the sake of having them. It's crucial to choose tools that align with your organization's needs and goals, and that can be effectively integrated with the existing systems and processes. You'll also have to consider factors such as cost, ease of use, and scalability, as well as the level of support and training required to ensure successful adoption.**



## Action Items for Month Three

Develop a draft of the HR strategy (either overall strategy if you are CHRO or a similar title, or a strategy for your specific function if not) which should include:

- ☐ Mission and value proposition of the function.
- ☐ Identification of internal HR “customers.”
- ☐ Recommendations for HR investments
- ☐ **Detailed strategies for each of the following pillars of the strategy:**
  - ☐ Processes.
  - ☐ Systems.
  - ☐ People.
  - ☐ Technology.
- ☐ **Goals/OKRs.**
  - ☐ Risk assessment potential obstacles that could arise and a plan to achieve goals in spite of said obstacles.
- ☐ Present draft of HR strategy to executive leadership team and gather feedback.
- ☐ Incorporate feedback and plan out goals for the next three months that will help you make progress on achieving the larger goals set out in your strategy.
- ☐ Create a personal development plan.
- ☐ Meet with your manager to have a retrospective look at your first 90 days.



# Days 90 & Beyond



Congratulations! You've made it through the first three months in your new role. Now the real work begins!

Just kidding (sort of). After you reach the three month milestone, you should take a moment to pause and appreciate how you've navigated this challenging time. While it's true that there is a long road ahead, you've navigated through the murkiest waters and are now in a great position to actually go after those wins – big and small – and drive impact.



**Once you've taken a moment to pat yourself on the back and exhale, it's time to dive back in. Here are some tips for how to expand upon the foundation you've set and truly make a long term impact ...**

## What to Focus On For Long Term Impact

For long term impact as an HR and people operations leader, focus attention on these crucial areas:



**Maximizing employee performance.** When employees are supported in doing their best work, they thrive, and they help the organization as a whole to thrive as well. By focusing on maximizing employee performance, HR leaders can play a critical role in improving the overall effectiveness of the organization and supporting its long-term success.

[Learn about continuous performance management with 15Five.](#)



**Decreasing turnover.** What good is good talent if you can't keep it? As an HR leader, one of the most impactful things you can do is take steps to engage top talent and reduce turnover at your organization. Reducing turnover not only saves the business money, but also increases employee engagement, establishes a strong pipeline for internal growth, and improves the overall reputation of the organization.

[Get The HR Leader's Guide to Reducing Regrettable Turnover.](#)





**Improve employee engagement.** By getting the pulse on how engaged employees are on a regular basis, you will be equipped with the knowledge you need to drive change that makes your organization a better place to work, helps employees thrive and find satisfaction in their work, and ultimately, helps the organization as a whole continue to move towards its goals.

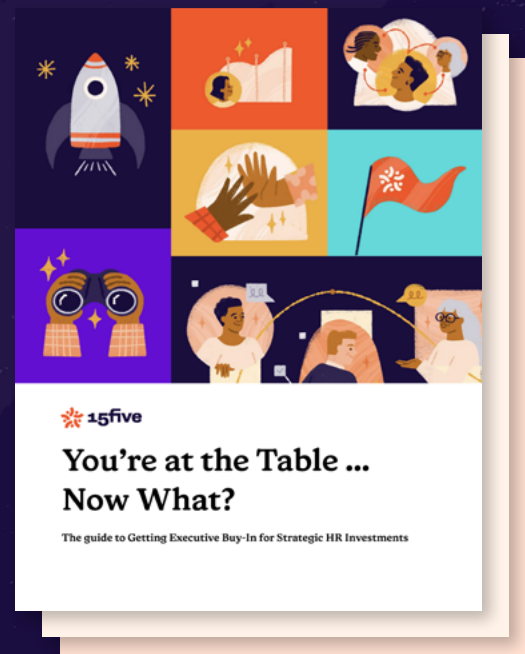
**Turn engagement insights into engagement outcomes with 15Five.**



**Increase manager effectiveness.** The managers in your organization are the linchpin that connects HR strategies to the day-to-day operations of the business. Thus, as an HR leader, you should be equipping them with the support, systems, and structures that they need to thrive and help their team members thrive. Focusing on this area can improve all other areas, including retention, engagement, and performance. And managers today are hungry for development opportunities and support.

**Get Spotlight on Manager Effectiveness: Why It Matters and How to Improve It.**

No matter which initiative you decide to tackle first, you want to be sure you build a strong case for it. Get **“You’re at the Table... Now What? The Guide to Getting Executive Buy-In for Strategic HR Investments.”**





## Common Pitfalls to Avoid in the First 90 Days



**Failing to adapt to the company culture.** Each company comes with its own intricacies, norms, and processes. It is in your best interest to take the time to learn about what makes this company unique, and learn the ins and outs of the company culture, before you jump into taking action. Being able to speak the language of your colleagues and operate within the framework of the existing company culture will make your impact go a lot further.



**Taking big swings too early.** You likely are eager to hit the ground running and prove your impact, but be wary of taking big swings too early. As we've emphasized throughout this guide, there needs to be a period of listening, learning, and integrating before you can take meaningful action. If you try to make big sweeping changes in week one, they may be severely misinformed and actually end up creating more problems for you down the line. Identify those small wins that you can knock out while you take the time to gain insights that will help you go after those bigger wins in due time.



**Failing to embrace the power of technology.** There's no doubt that, as an HR leader, especially one in a new role, you will have a lot on your plate. Luckily, there are a lot of amazing tools out there to support your work, so that you can spend less time in the weeds doing administrative work, and more time actually doing the human part of human resources. Use this time to gain an understanding of what tools are already available or in use in your organization, and then make the case for closing the gaps and incorporating new tools that can take your impact to the next level.



**“If I could onboard again as an HR leader, the first thing I would want to do in my 90 days is build connections with the employees. It’s at the core of everything we do. You have to understand your employee base to actually be an effective HR leader.”**

— Hebba Youssef, Chief People Officer at Workweek



## Common Pitfall to Avoid in the First 90 Days



**Only building relationships with your direct team.** Similarly, it is easy to fall into a habit of only building relationships with the team members that you work with on a daily basis. But failing to ever get outside of that bubble is also a mistake. As a strategic HR leader, you have the power to truly touch and drive impact for every team in the organization, but that can't happen if you don't take the time to build cross-functional relationships. Identify the cross-functional stakeholders whose work you have the potential to impact the most, and develop regular touchpoints to connect with them.



**Making too many assumptions.** Don't enter into this new role with the attitude that you understand all of the complexities of the challenges that the organization is facing, and that you are the one who can solve them all. That's simply not true, and acting as if it were will not only harm your ability to make a real impact, but will also just leave a bad taste in everyone's mouths. Remember that you are a newcomer joining the organization and therefore need to take the time to ask questions and learn about the challenges from the people who have actually been experiencing them, before you can dive in and collaborate with those very people to drive real change.



**Living in your past.** In a similar vein, don't assume that what worked in your last role will work in this role. Each organization has different challenges that require different solutions. Be prepared to have to think outside of the box and design strategies and solutions from the ground up, not just copying and pasting the approaches that you've taken in the past.



**Only building relationships with other executives.** Of course, it is absolutely crucial that you form strong bonds with every member of the executive team, in order to truly fill out your seat at the executive table, have a voice, and make an impact. But stopping there would be a grave mistake. Those at the executive level may be experiencing blind spots — that is, there may be problems that individual contributors are struggling with that the executive leadership team is totally oblivious to. Make it the norm to regularly carve out time to have conversations with those at the bottom tier of the organizational chart, so you can get the full picture of the organization.



# You're Not Alone — The Importance of Community

One sentiment that will likely arise no matter what organization you join is this: being a strategic HR leader, especially one in a new role, is stressful. It is just the nature of the work. When you are bogged down in work, trying to solve issues and put out fires, you may feel like you are all alone. But chances are, if you are feeling something, others are feeling it too.

During this time and beyond, be sure to carve out time and space to connect with others throughout the day, especially your HR coworkers, who are especially likely to understand what you are struggling with and can offer an empathetic ear.

If you don't yet feel comfortable talking to coworkers about your stress, you can always reach out to friends or old colleagues in the industry. And, if you are struggling to think of someone to reach out to, you can look for online communities, of which there are many, including our very own community, HR Superstars.

## Join the HR Superstars Community

Looking to expand your HR knowledge and connect with other like-minded professionals? You're in luck — we built the HR Superstars Community for leaders like you. Join the HR Superstars Community today and gain access to valuable resources, engage with peers and experts, and continue to develop your skills to drive meaningful impact within your organization.

[Join HR Superstars Community](#)



# HR Super Stars



## Drive Long Term Impact with 15Five

The first 90 days in a new role as a strategic HR leader are crucial. This time period is when you will set the tone and build a solid foundation for your time in the organization. But these 90 days are just the beginning.

We believe strategic HR leaders should be responsible (and can take credit) for building engaged, productive, high-performing cultures with lasting impact. That's why we take a data-driven approach to employee engagement measurement and performance management. Investment in a holistic performance management system like 15Five is an investment in your company's long term success.

15Five can help you hit the ground running and position yourself as a strategic partner who is committed to driving meaningful change and delivering results. Our tools can help you turn employee engagement insights into business outcomes, run your performance management program from end to end, clarify and track top objectives for everyone in your organization, transform your managers into strong, effective leaders, and build a high-performance culture that enables your people to thrive.





To learn more about how 15Five can help you drive long-term impact as an HR leader, **schedule a demo, or try 2 weeks free.**





**Congrats! You're on your way to growth**

When do you want to accomplish this by?

Start Date	End Date
 3/1/2022	 6/30/2022

How often would you like to be reminded of this growth area?

Start Date

 Every other week 

[Set Another Goal](#) [Done](#)

**Want to see the 15Five platform in action?**

**Request a Demo**



## About 15Five

15Five is the holistic performance management company. 15Five equips HR teams with a complete, single-platform solution to improve manager effectiveness, drive high performance and engagement, and increase retention. By combining easy-to-use software with coaching, manager training, and a thriving professional community, 15Five's approach provides HR leaders with everything they need to achieve their strategic people objectives. 15Five offers a full suite of products including 360 performance reviews, in-depth engagement surveys, robust goal & OKR tracking, and weekly manager-employee feedback tools like 1-on-1s and pulse ratings. Together, all of these enable HR leaders to continuously measure engagement and performance within the flow of work and then empower their managers to drive change from the bottom up. HR leaders at over 3,500 companies, including Credit Karma, Spotify and Pendo rely on 15Five's software and services to make their talent a growth driver.