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15Five's Manager Enablement Playbook for HR Leaders

Table of Contents

Introduction

It took society the entire industrial age and a good chunk of the information age to realize the true impact people managers have on an organization. The "command-and-control" approach to leadership was embraced for centuries, while the thoughts, feelings, and psychological impact on employees were rarely considered.

Fortunately, over the last few years, strategic HR leaders have emerged and put a magnifying glass on the problems that develop when managers aren't set up for success. Executives who are finally seeing the light are sanctioning more investment in manager enablement than ever before. In 2023, 60% of HR leaders said leader and manager effectiveness was their top priority, according to a study by **Gartner**.

But just as manager enablement has become a bigger priority for many organizations, economic factors have come into play, affecting budgets and staffing—and leaving HR teams to do more with less.

So when it comes to manager effectiveness, where should you focus your time and budget? How can you tell the difference between an effective manager and an ineffective one? And how can you replicate the success of "good" managers at scale?

We wrote this guide to help you answer those questions and offer some tips and tools that can help you measure key talent metrics, improve manager effectiveness, and create a continuous learning environment for your managers.

Why Positive HR Outcomes Depend on Effective Managers

The manager-employee relationship influences nearly every aspect of the work experience and is a top driver of the critical outcomes that HR leaders are tasked with driving. Manager effectiveness has a significant impact on employee engagement, performance, and retention, in particular.

Unfortunately, many managers today don't have the necessary skills to drive engagement and performance, and may struggle to navigate the technological and cultural changes happening in the workplace. Many also lack the emotional IQ or self-awareness necessary to lead with empathy and engage their team members.

Without support or investment in their growth as leaders, these managers can negatively impact their teams and the organization as a whole.

Managers are a top driver of employee engagement

An individual's direct manager has a significant impact on their level of engagement. According to **Gallup research**, managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores across business units.

Engaged employees contribute more, do higher-quality work, and help make their teammates better. That kind of engagement is only possible with managers who know how to enable it. On the flip side, employees with ineffective managers can quickly become disengaged.

If they aren't getting proper guidance or clarity about priorities, employees can lack focus and become overwhelmed. When they don't feel they're being properly supported or growing professionally, motivation can also wane.

When people are being led by a poorly-trained or ineffective manager, engagement suffers drastically. And managers often don't realize there's a problem with their leadership until an employee hands in their notice.

Employees with effective managers perform better

Think about some of your company's top performers. Do they have good managers? Chances are pretty good that most of them do.

Employee performance and manager effectiveness are inextricably linked. Effective managers are champions for their direct reports, giving them the tools and support they need to build thriving careers. In return, employees are more engaged and perform at a higher level.

Employees need managers who check in with them regularly on their progress towards goals and address any challenges they may be having. They offer constructive feedback, guidance, and support to their teams. They also talk to individuals about their career goals and explore new opportunities for growth and development.

When managers build a foundation of trust with their direct reports, those employees and their teams perform at a higher level. In fact, in our **2023 Manager Effectiveness Survey**, 67% of employees reported working harder for a manager who cares about their growth as a professional.

Ineffective managers drive away top talent

Tell us if you've heard this one before: "Employees don't leave bad jobs, they leave bad bosses." While it's not always as cut and dry as that, it is true that ineffective managers are typically one of the top drivers of turnover in an organization.

The impact of employee turnover—particularly *regrettable* turnover—can be felt throughout a company, from dips in productivity to wounded team morale. In today's competitive talent market, replacing high performers is difficult and expensive, and high turnover is a serious threat to business success.

In our **survey**, 57% of employees reported that their #1 reason for leaving a company was a negative workplace culture. The #2 reason was unsupportive management (52%).

On the other side of the manager effectiveness coin, 56% of employees said having a good boss is one of the most critical factors for staying at their company.

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Too many managers aren't prepared to lead effectively

As employee expectations and work cultures have evolved, the role of the manager must too. Unfortunately, many managers aren't getting the training or coaching they need to lead successfully in today's workplace.

One **15Five study** found that 65% of managers feel underprepared and struggle to perform in their roles. They need (and desperately want) more training and development to level up their leadership skills. Our **research** even uncovered that 76% of candidates for open manager roles would be more likely to accept a position when management training or coaching is offered.

MANAGER RESPONSES

Which of the following do you need training in? →

Strengths-based manaagement

How to intrinsically motivate employees

Giving effective feedback

Setting & tracking goals

Conducting a fair & effective performance review

Creating a psychologically safe workplace

60%   40%   20%

The disconnect in manager expectations

Our research uncovered a massive disconnect between both managers and employees and managers and their organizations. Managers aren't really sure what effective leadership looks like because their organizations aren't setting clear expectations. And because those standards haven't been set, many managers assume they're performing well—even if their employees don't agree.

While most managers acknowledge they need more training, 64% are "highly confident" in their own leadership ability. Unfortunately, the people working for many of those managers aren't as confident— just 37% of employees are impressed with their boss's management skills.

There seems to be a major discrepancy between what employees need from their managers and what managers *think* employees need. To add insult to injury, 40% of employees said they could do a better job than their manager.

What does an effective manager look like?

Because every industry and organization is different, the measuring stick for manager effectiveness and success can differ too. While each manager has unique personality traits and communication styles, many of the characteristics and behaviors typical of great managers are universal.

RedThread Research recently conducted a study on **the practices that drive manager effectiveness**. Their survey of more than 700 employees in North America and Europe uncovered seven practices that drive manager effectiveness—four of which are owned by managers, and three that are the organization's responsibility.

Organizational practices driving manager effectiveness:

1. Providing clarity on what managers need to do to succeed in the future
2. Providing data-based insights into team engagement
3. Providing opportunities for managers to connect with coaches outside the organization

Manager practices driving manager effectiveness:

1. Treating team members with respect
2. Managing difficult conversations effectively
3. Removing barriers to getting work done
4. Fostering connections with the team

Behaviors and competencies of effective managers

Through our research and thousands of conversations with HR leaders, we've developed the following behaviors and competencies to keep in mind when assessing manager effectiveness:

1. **Business acumen:** Effective managers analyze complex situations, anticipate future trends and possibilities, and develop plans that account for various factors across the business.

2. **Goal-setting:** Effective managers prioritize work and define measurable objectives that an individual or organization wants to achieve.

3. **Enabling productivity:** Effective managers provide resources and tools and remove blockers to help individuals work efficiently and effectively toward achieving their goals.

4. **Giving and receiving feedback:** Effective managers know how to give their employees constructive feedback. They also aren't afraid to ask for (and act on) feedback on their own performance and leadership.

5. **Influencing others:** Effective managers can influence people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. They're aware of their team members' values and needs and use this knowledge to drive organizational impact.

6. **Supporting career growth:** Effective managers mentor, train, and coach individuals to develop the knowledge, skills, and experiences they need to achieve their career goals.

7. **Building strong teams:** Effective managers create a collaborative, high-achieving team environment in which members are committed to a common purpose.

8. **Developing yourself:** Effective managers lead by example. They keep themselves organized, focused, and productive while also managing their teams at a high level.

Measuring these behaviors and competencies provides an avenue for strategic HR leaders to invest in the appropriate training, tools, and support to help managers grow and thrive.

The Manager Enablement Framework

To drive manager effectiveness, managers must be enabled with the right expectations, learning opportunities, and tools to continuously improve.

To help HR teams successfully launch a manager enablement program, we developed a simple framework that includes steps to getting executive buy-in, measuring manager effectiveness, and improving it across your organization.

1. Get Executive Buy-In For Manager Enablement

To drive manager effectiveness, managers must be enabled with the right expectations, learning opportunities, and tools to continuously improve. To help HR teams successfully launch a manager enablement program, we developed a simple framework that includes steps to getting executive buy-in, measuring manager effectiveness, and improving it across your organization.

Partner with the CFO

For any strategic initiative, the CFO is a great person to have in your corner. They can be the difference between you getting the budget you need or seeing your plans dead in the water.

Two veteran CFOs—Sayle Hutchison of 15Five and Scott Broomfield of BlueBoard—joined us on a **webinar** to share some insider tips for HR leaders who want to "get a yes" more often from their financial leaders.

According to Sayle and Scott, many of the things that matter most to HR—like improving manager effectiveness and increasing employee engagement—are just as important to CFOs, and most are eager to partner with HR on those business outcomes.

Scott recommends presenting the most probable upside and downside to greenlighting your initiative. If you can show that even the worst-case scenario could still be profitable or reduce long-term costs, it's a whole lot easier to sell your CFO on why a manager enablement program makes good business sense. (Tools like the Manager Effectiveness Indicator — more on that later — can give you manager-specific data to strengthen your argument.)

Build a business case

It's not only the financial investment that matters when it comes to launching a successful manager enablement program. Company leaders need to see that measuring and improving effectiveness isn't just "an HR thing" but rather a top priority for the business. They also need to visibly show their support and rally the rest of the organization around the cause.

Unfortunately, executive support isn't always a given. **LinkedIn's Workplace Learning Report** states that only 27% of L&D professionals feel their CEOs are active champions of learning across the organization.

If company leaders don't show their support for your manager enablement initiatives, why would managers themselves take it seriously?

To get the buy-in you need from leadership and maximize your chances of success, you must be able to show the impact of manager effectiveness and how improving it can yield positive business results.

In order to build a rock solid business case for strategic HR initiatives, you need to start with the pain point and connect potential solutions to business impact. We like to follow this four step framework:

EXECUTIVE BUY-IN PROCESS FOR STRATEGIC HR

Identify the problem.
First, identify the core problem in the organization — in this instance, manager (un)effectiveness — and be sure to share additional context related to it. Take it a step further by connecting the core problem to potential negative impacts the business could be facing as a result.

Propose a solution(s).
Next, proposed a data-informed solution to address the pain point — in this case, investing in manager enablement.

Identify business impact.
Demonstrate how your proposed solution could have a positive business impact. Provide a few examples and be as quantitative as possible. Use outside research to support your claims. Your CEO and CFO will want to see step-by-step how you created your business case, including the assumptions you are relying upon and the sources you used for creating your benchmarks.

Align on next steps.
Lay out the proposed timeline and/or a list of action items to get the strategy off the ground. At each phase, list key stakeholders that need to be involved.

Remember to focus on the potential long-term business impact of measuring manager effectiveness and using software-powered coaching, including increased employee productivity, performance, and engagement.

2. Measure Manager Effectiveness

Before you can improve manager effectiveness, you have to be able to measure it. Without data and insights about where your managers are and the specific areas that need work, you'll spend a lot of time and money on the wrong things—with minimal results.

Many companies have turned to surveys as a means to measure manager effectiveness due to their relative ease of administration and potential for gathering insights directly from employees. However, relying solely on surveys to gauge manager effectiveness presents several limitations. Surveys often capture only a snapshot of a manager's performance, lacking the ability to encompass the full spectrum of their day-to-day interactions and nuanced decision-

making. Furthermore, survey responses, which are captured at only one point in time, can be influenced by various factors, including the timing of the survey, individual biases, and the perceived anonymity of the process, potentially leading to incomplete or skewed assessments. A sole reliance on surveys can overlook the dynamic and multifaceted nature of effective management, which is why a more holistic approach that incorporates a broader array of real-time data sources is ideal for effectively measuring manager effectiveness.

To assess a manager's impact and abilities, we recommend a combination of individual goal setting/tracking and HR software developed specifically to measure manager effectiveness.

Manager Effectiveness Indicator

The factors that contribute to manager effectiveness are numerous and complex. Measuring it at scale requires an ability to continuously pull in real-time data, make sense of it, and come up with the right next steps to move the needle.

Because we believe manager effectiveness is too important to the success of an organization to leave it unmeasured, we developed the **Manager Effectiveness Indicator (MEI)**.

The development of the Manager Effectiveness Indicator was a meticulous and comprehensive process that incorporated insights from diverse sources, including over 200 interviews with HR leaders. The insights gleaned from these interviews was supplemented by the analysis of data collected from over 60,000 managers in the 15Five platform, unveiling patterns and correlations in managerial behavior and performance.

By synthesizing these varied insights, the resulting Manager Effectiveness Indicator emerged as a multidimensional tool, both grounded in theory and informed by the practical realities of effective management in modern organizations.
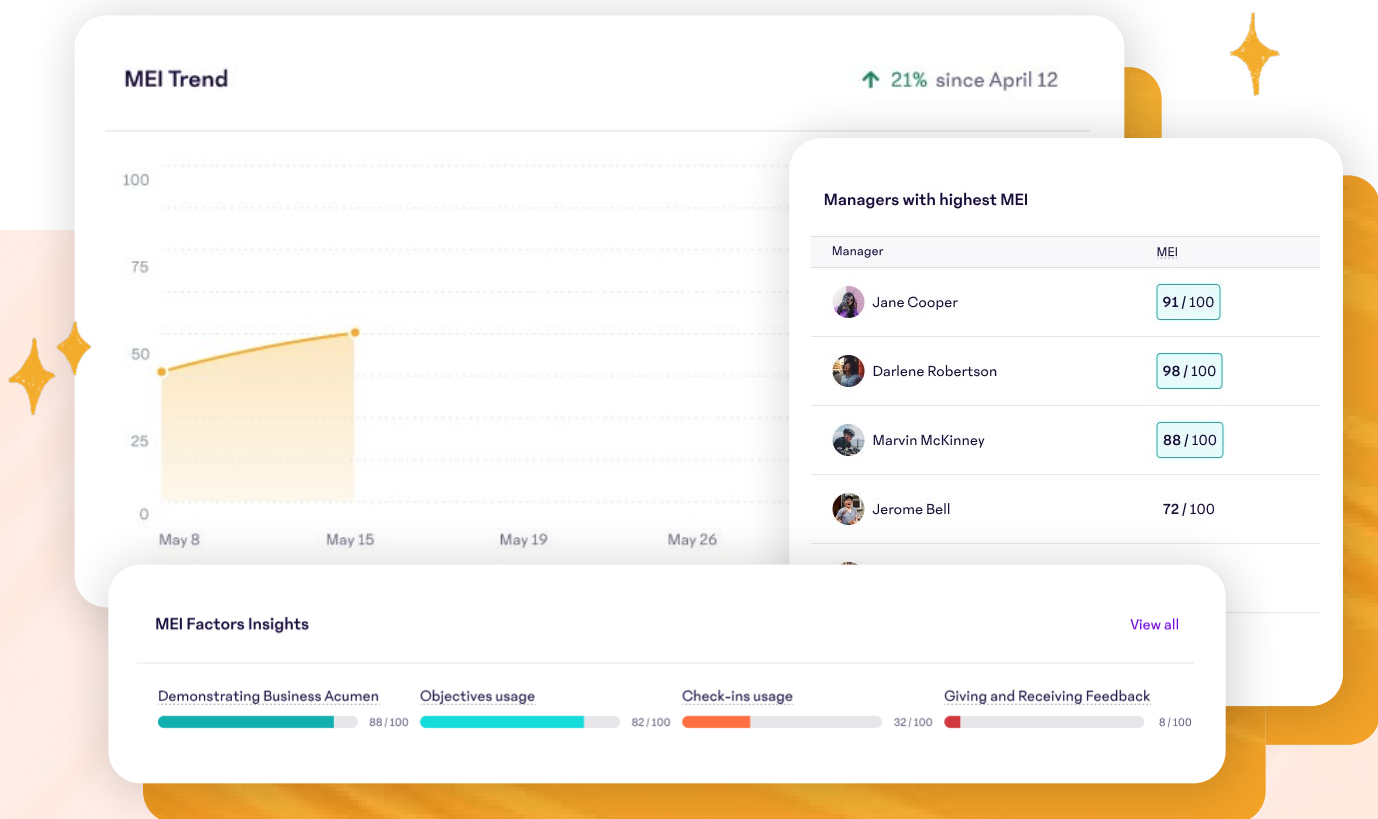
With the MEI, you can easily see which managers in your organization are excelling and which ones need more support—and in what areas—so you can take action. You can tackle problems before they become costly issues and identify positive trends to replicate across the organization.

The MEI offers a holistic view of how effective your managers are, how they're impacting bottom-line metrics, and what you can do to help them improve. The tool uses data from 15Five to examine the skills, behaviors, and outcomes of a manager and their team.

What makes the the MEI unique is that it has the ability to include both observational and objective data points to create a holistic view of manager effectiveness.
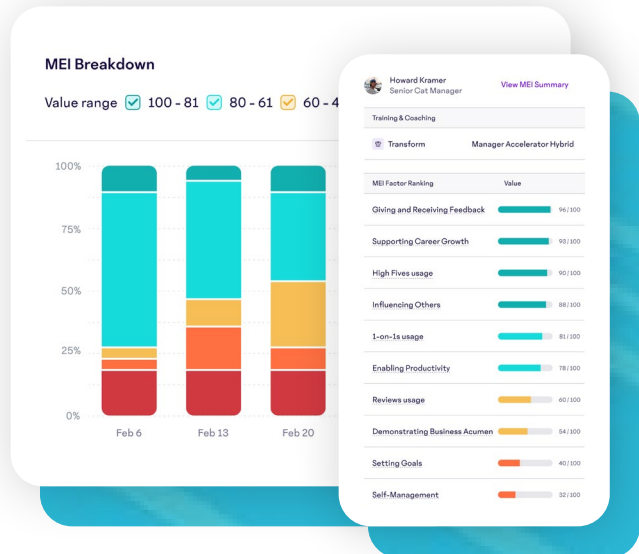
Data from a manager effectiveness review or survey can add the perspectives of direct reports and leadership on how managers demonstrate key skills related to manager effectiveness. This data can then be configured to determine how much it is weighted in the MEI for your organization.

Objective data points are based on behaviors in 15Five that reflect best practices of effective managers. These behaviors include setting and achieving goals, meeting 1-on-1 with direct reports, and providing recognition. The benefit of including objective data is that it is updated more frequently, allowing you to see changes in manager effectiveness much earlier. The weighting of this data can also be adjusted to emphasize behaviors you want to promote with your managers.

MEI Trend   ↑ 21% since April 12

100			
75			
50			
25			
0			
May 8	May 15	May 19	May 26

Managers with highest MEI

Manager	MEI
Jane Cooper	91 / 100
Darlene Robertson	98 / 100
Marvin McKinney	88 / 100
Jerome Bell	72 / 100

MEI Factors Insights   View all

Demonstrating Business Acumen	Objectives usage	Check-ins usage	Giving and Receiving Feedback
88/100	82/100	32/100	8/100

As you work to make improvements in your HR programs, the MEI allows you to see how those initiatives are impacting manager effectiveness. Data is calculated daily and includes insights on weekly trends.

Because the MEI is housed in 15Five's comprehensive performance management platform, you can then go on to see how increasing manager effectiveness has a positive spillover effect on things like engagement and retention.

MEI Breakdown

Value range ☑ 100 – 81 ☑ 80 – 61 ☑ 60 – 4

Howard Kramer	Senior Cat Manager	View MEI Summary

| Training & Coaching | | |
| Transform | Manager Accelerator Hybrid | |

MEI Factor Ranking	Value
Giving and Receiving Feedback	96 / 100
Supporting Career Growth	93 / 100
High Fives usage	90 / 100
Influencing Others	88 / 100
1-on-1s usage	81 / 100
Enabling Productivity	78 / 100
Reviews usage	60 / 100
Demonstrating Business Acumen	54 / 100
Setting Goals	40 / 100
Self-Management	32 / 100

MEI Factors

Value range ☑ 100 – 81 ☑ 80 – 61 ☑ 60 – 41 ☑ 40 – 21 ☑ 20 – 0

Manager	MEI	Setting Goals	Objectives usage
Big Cats LLC.	98	90	84
Jerome Bell Sales Manager	91	89	97
Kathryn Murphy Sales Manager	66	66	92
Floyd Miles Sales Manager	63	71	73
Darrell Steward Sales Manager	60	78	62
Ronald Richards Sales Manager	43	49	56
Ralph Edwards Sales Manager	53	28	27
Annette Black Sales Manager	36	28	29

The MEI can also help HR leaders:

- Understand the distribution of managers across the organization
- Evaluate a manager's span of control and span of influence
- Prepare for data-driven discussions with managers
- Take action on top and bottom performers
- Stay relevant by re-evaluating what a "good" MEI looks like

Because manager effectiveness can mean slightly different things in different organizations, you can configure the MEI to reflect the skills, competencies, and behaviors that reflect your culture and definition of manager success.

Learn more about 15Five's Manager Effectiveness Indicator

Get the info sheet ▶

3. Improve Manager Effectiveness

Because every organization's business needs and work cultures are different, you should probably avoid any "one-size-fits-all" management training programs. To really make an impact, manager enablement should be customizable and built around the unique needs and challenges that leaders in your organization experience.

Once you have a mechanism in place to measure manager effectiveness, you can start building an enablement program that integrates learning and growth opportunities that are continuous, experiential, and built into managers' day-to-day work.

Learning and development should address these critical areas of manager effectiveness:

- Creating a psychologically-safe workplace
- Strengths-based management
- Intrinsically motivating employees

- Giving effective feedback
- Setting and tracking goals
- Conducting a fair and effective performance review

When building a manager enablement program, consider not only what training managers need but how they will get it. To see real, measurable improvement in manager effectiveness, managers need both personalized knowledge and user-friendly tools to put their learning into practice. That's where technology and coaching come in, which we'll discuss in a bit.

4. Demonstrate Impact, Continue to Improve

This Manager Enablement Framework is designed to not only initiate change but also to consistently evaluate and refine the impact of those efforts. By tracking progress and showcasing tangible results to the rest of the executive team, you can fortify your initiative's credibility and sustain momentum for ongoing improvement.

If you've put effort and resources into measuring manager effectiveness, as discussed in depth in Step 2 of this framework, you should be able to consistently report on the impact of your manager enablement initiatives.

You should make it a habit to report on impact made in the area of manager effectiveness regularly, whether that is monthly or quarterly.

Sharing these results, even if the improvements take time, keeps all stakeholders informed and invested in the positive journey towards more effective managers, ultimately contributing to the overall success of the organization.

If you utilize a comprehensive performance management platform like 15Five, you can report not just on how manager effectiveness is improving over time, but also how that improvement is driving improvements in other areas such as employee engagement and retention.

And of course, remember that the journey towards maximizing manager effectiveness is ongoing, requiring dedication, flexibility, and a willingness to iterate strategies.

Boosting manager enablement
through software, education, and manager training & coaching

By creating alignment across a cohesive manager enablement program that includes manager education, training, and coaching—powered by the right tools and actionable data—HR leaders have a huge opportunity to develop more effective leaders.

To start, you should be thoughtfully incorporating software that can enable your talent development initiatives and accelerate behavior change. Having software for things like **one-on-ones**, **engagement surveys**, and **goal setting** makes it a lot easier for managers to initiate and employees to participate in these growth-oriented activities. The goal is for these tasks and activities to become habits that are ingrained into the normal flow of work. This technology can also be extremely beneficial for the HR team, as it can provide insights into manager performance and discern which managers may be needing additional support or training.

Some examples of touchpoints where having technology can amplify impact:

Being prompted to give a high five/ recognition at the end of a check-in

Getting a ping to review the priorities of an employee every Friday to ensure alignment

Having a documented, accessible high-level performance conversation at least twice a year

Software helps you identify where work needs to be done so you can begin to scale your efforts and make a real impact. But you can go further faster by adding coaching to the mix.

Coaching helps you shape future leaders

Pairing the right technology with education and data-driven manager coaching is a powerful combination.

While most strategic HR leaders believe in the importance of coaching in the workplace, most teams don't have people on staff with coaching expertise. If this is the case for you, partnering with someone outside your organization can bring the resources and fresh perspective to help you execute coaching at scale.
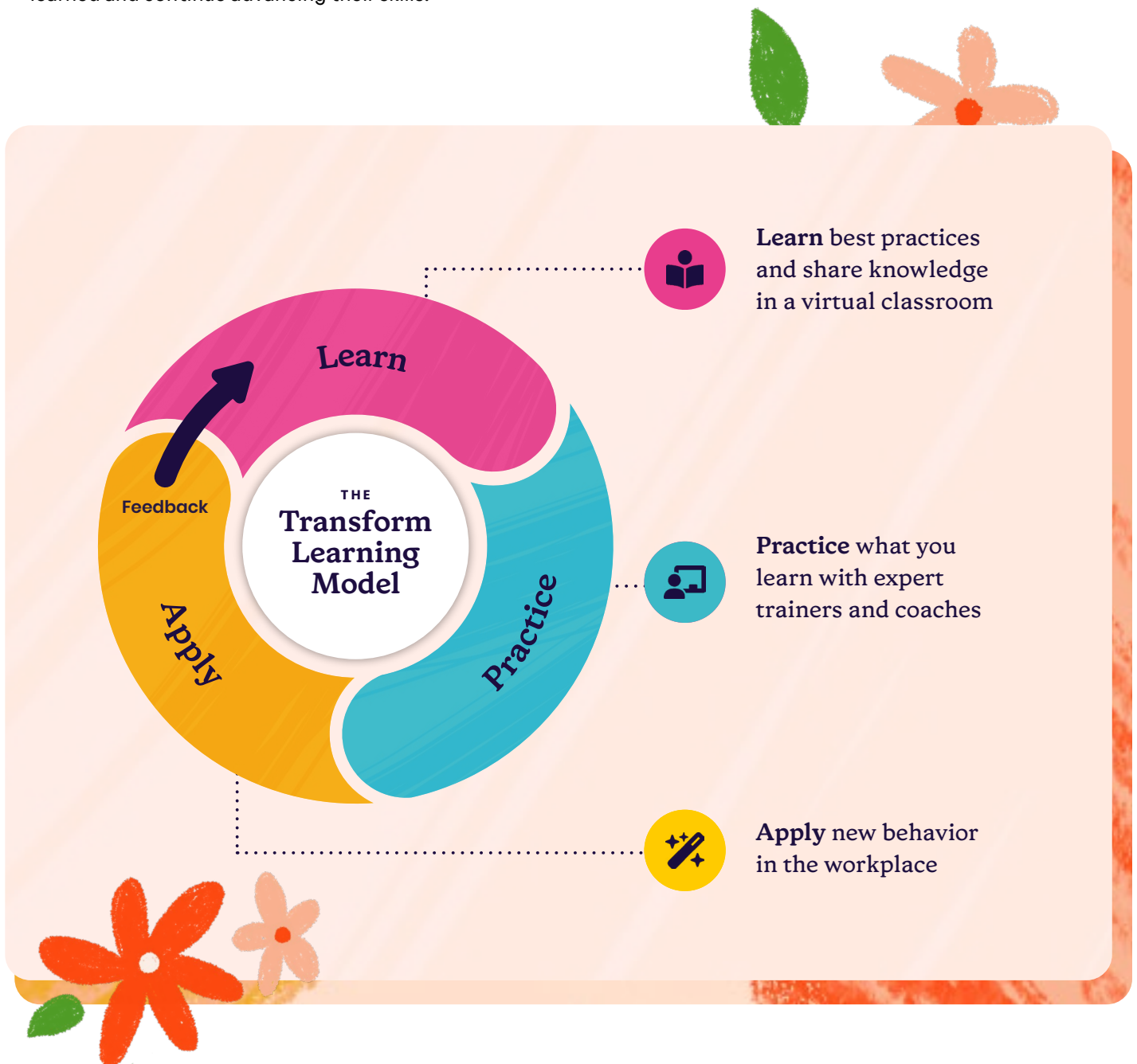
Ongoing learning and development are beneficial to managers and leaders at every level. To optimize effectiveness, anyone who manages people needs a solid foundation of learning, enabled by software and coaching. This practice becomes scalable and measurable with 15Five.

Training & Coaching with 15Five Transform

15Five's holistic training and coaching solution, **Transform**, focuses on helping organizations drive business results and create lasting change. Managers have access to training both live and on-demand, and learn through a blend of instructor-led and coaching-based practice. They apply their skills in the workplace before returning to their cohort to share what they've learned and continue advancing their skills.

Using this blended learning model, 15Five's senior in-house team helps managers at all levels drive performance, engagement, and business results. Managers get to apply their learnings with real-time practice, and have the ability to track progress with our industry-leading software.

**THE
Transform
Learning
Model**

Learn

Practice

Apply

Feedback

Learn best practices and share knowledge in a virtual classroom

Practice what you learn with expert trainers and coaches

**Apply** new behavior in the workplace

Transform can be tailored to your company's specific needs and performance challenges, and you can customize and change manager learning journeys to align with your organizational goals at any given time.

Furthermore, Transform Microlearning gives 15Five customers the ability to invest in their managers within the flow of their work through bite-sized skill development content within the 15Five platform. We added Microlearning to our platform because we know it can have a significant impact on enhancing manager effectiveness, which, in turn, plays a pivotal role in driving results in our customers' top areas of focus: Engagement, Performance, and Retention. **Learn more about Transform Microlearning**.
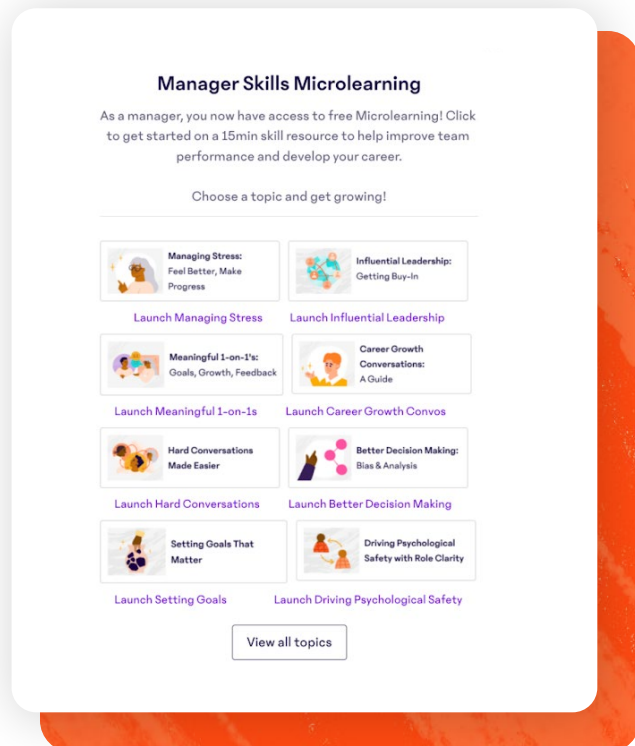

HR teams that use Transform are saving time, reducing turnover, and increasing engagement and performance

"**Developing the types of leadership capabilities needed for today's work world takes more than traditional training. Coaching, practice, and ongoing feedback are required in order to make sustained change, and most companies have found this type of development to be prohibitively expensive. Solutions like 15Five Transform can help companies foster these next-generation leadership capabilities in a scalable and efficient way.**" –**Kathi Enderes**, VP of Research for The Josh Bersin Company

Want to see 15Five's Transform solution in action?

Schedule a live demo ▸
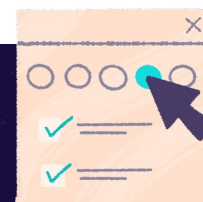
Get a Free Trial of 15Five

Try 15Five free for 2 weeks!

Find out for yourself how 15Five can help you measure performance, drive engagement, and retain talent with a free 14-day trial.

Visit **15five.com/trial** to get started.

About 15Five

15Five is the performance management platform that drives business results. By continuously measuring the indicators of engagement and performance that matter most, 15Five helps HR leaders uncover risks of turnover, poor performance, and ineffective management before they impact the organization. 15Five's approach provides HR with everything they need to achieve their strategic people objectives, and the data to tie those objectives to business outcomes. The platform combines 360° performance reviews, actionable engagement surveys, robust goal & OKR tracking, customizable manager training, and ongoing manager-employee feedback tools like weekly 1-on-1s and check-ins. Together, all of these enable HR leaders to deliver high engagement and performance within the flow of work, and empower their managers to drive change from the bottom up. 15Five is loved by strategic HR leaders, managers, and employees at over 3,500 companies, including Credit Karma, HubSpot, and Pendo.

For more information, visit www.15five.com.