

How to Manage Your Managers

Managing managers is one of the hardest, and most critical, transitions in leadership. You're no longer directly running the business. You're leading the people who do. Your success depends on how well *they* both **run** the business (day-to-day operations) and **build** the business (strategic growth and innovation).

This framework breaks management of managers into three lenses — **Running the Business**, **Building the Business**, and **Leading the Leaders** — and provides concrete diagnostic questions you can use to assess and elevate your managers.

Part I: Running the Business

Your goal: ensure your managers have strong, disciplined operational systems, people, process, and performance that actually work.

1. People

- Are their people happy and engaged?
- Do employees have clear, documented **career plans** that are updated and visible?
- Is there a structured **EPR (employee performance review)** process that's consistent and fair? Is it updated for all employees?
- Are people being **measured** and **coached**, not just managed? Can you clearly see results per person and their utilization levels?
- Are they **motivated** and aligned with the mission?
- What's the **attrition rate**, and what's driving it?
- Are there people "hiding," doing minimal work under the radar?
- Are there toxic behaviors or "anti-system" actors undermining trust?

2. Processes

- How does their **PES (process execution system)** look? Is it clearly defined and step-by-step?
- Can you **follow their processes** end-to-end and see accountability at every step?
- Is there **documentation** — not in someone's head, but written down and maintained?

- Are there **systems and tools** (CRM, dashboards, templates) running the process, or is it manual chaos? Is it easy to view reports from these systems that tell you the actual story of how well the business is running?
- Is there a **training and onboarding system** for new hires?

3. Performance

- Are the **KPIs** tracked weekly or monthly — and can you see them easily?
- Is there **clarity on what's driving the numbers** — why they're up or down?
- Can managers **drill down** into the underlying data and explain what's happening, not just report results?
- Are they sharing **insights**, not excuses?

When you can answer “yes” to these, your managers are *running the business* effectively.

Part II: Building the Business

Running the business keeps the lights on. Building the business creates the future. This is where you see how strategic, creative, and disciplined your managers really are. Each manager should be owning and drive a portfolio of building the business projects and your role is to assess, prioritize and help them drive those with high velocity and quality.

In separate articles we covered how to lead a [single lead, a single building the business project](#) and how to [meta-lead a building the business project a leader reporting to you is working on](#). Below we focus on the portfolio aspect of leading many of these projects. To do so you want to dive in on the following questions:

1. Project Portfolio

- What **current projects** are under way?
- Are there clear **project plans** with timelines, owners, and deliverables?
- Are those plans **high-quality**, or just vague task lists?
- Do projects create **more leverage and value**, or just add more work? Are some projects focused on reducing work?

2. Strategic Value

- Are projects tied to **specific data-backed problems** the team understands?
- If not, will they at least **generate new data or insights** that help improve decision-making?
- Are projects **aligned with company priorities**, or are they pet projects disconnected from impact?

3. Execution Quality

- Are projects executed with **clarity, elegance, and velocity**?
- Can you **see progress visually** (roadmaps, dashboards, demos)?
- If you don't know how to assess the quality of execution, can you **bring in an expert** to evaluate it?
- Do managers know how to **course-correct quickly** when things stall?
- Are projects executed to completeness, and is their impact then evaluated?

When your managers consistently deliver high-impact projects that reduce friction, improve clarity, or unlock new value, they're not just managing the day-to-day; they're *building* the business.

Part III: Leading the Leader

Managing managers isn't just about their teams or projects — it's also about *them as leaders*. This third lens ensures you're building trust, motivation, and growth at the leadership level.

1. Motivation & Alignment

- Are they genuinely **motivated** and inspired by their work?
- Do they **deeply care** about the business and its success?
- Are they personally connected to the mission and outcomes?

2. Career Growth & Ownership

- Is there a **clear career path** for them that they are connected to and are excited by? is it recent and updated? (Tip: they should build it with your support, not the other way around)
- Do they know what success looks like at the next level?
- Are they getting meaningful **stretch opportunities** to grow?
- Are they owning their own growth and pushing ahead on their own?

3. Trust & Relationship

- Have you built a **relationship of trust and honesty** with them?
- Can they come to you with challenges without fear?
- Do they feel supported, not only managed?

Leaders who feel trusted, valued, and stretched will multiply that energy across their teams.

How to Use This Framework

Here is a link to a google sheet for you to run use the above in an actionable way with your team

[+ Managing Managers Framework](#)

Tips:

1. **Run a monthly “Manager Check-In” using this structure.** Review people, process, performance, projects, and leadership systematically.
2. **Identify red flags early.** A drop in motivation, lack of documentation, or fuzzy KPIs is often the first signal of deeper issues.
3. **Coach, don’t rescue.** Your job isn’t to fix their problems — it’s to develop their capacity to fix them.
4. **Bring in experts wisely.** When you’re unsure about execution quality, bring in a domain expert to evaluate and coach.
5. **Celebrate excellence in leadership.** Reward managers who make systems run smoother, grow their teams, and build initiatives that move the company forward.

Final Thought

Managing managers isn’t about oversight — it’s about *multiplication*. You’re scaling your impact through others who themselves lead systems, teams, and growth engines. Do it well, and your organization will run elegantly — with energy, clarity, and purpose.

Framework attachments:

[+ Managing Managers Framework](#)