

FREE GUIDE

5 Signs Your Managers Are Struggling

(And What's Actually Causing It)

The symptoms are obvious. The root cause is concealed. This guide helps you see both, and why most leadership training is off the mark altogether.

"Most leadership problems aren't skill deficits. They're inner-world issues. And until you address what's driving the behavior, no amount of training will make it stick."



Before we dive in.

Your managers are good people. They were promoted for their competence, not for their people skills.

If you are reading this then something is most likely wrong. Maybe your latest engagement survey results had poor ratings of managers. Or maybe the turnover is higher now than it was when you last promoted. Maybe you have a nagging feeling that your leadership team isn't performing as well as it could—and you can't quite put your finger on why.

Here's what most HR leaders don't know: **the symptoms you're seeing at the team level almost always have their origin in the inner world of the manager.** These symptoms don't happen due to lack of skills or knowledge. They originate from the manager's inner world: their self-trust, their self-awareness, their relationship with their own fears and insecurities.

A manager who doesn't trust themselves will micromanage. A manager who is self-critical will be harsh with their team. A manager who doesn't feel psychologically safe won't create safety for others. The behavior you're observing in your leaders is downstream of something deeper.

*Fix the behavior without addressing the root cause, and the change won't last.
Address the root cause, and the behavior transforms naturally.*

This guide walks through the five most common signs that your leadership team is struggling. More importantly, it shines a light on what's actually driving each one. At the end of each sign, you'll find a connection to the inner work that creates lasting change.

This is the foundation of the **IGNITE Framework**: an inside-out approach to leadership development built from 20+ years of working with teams across four continents.

ABOUT THE IGNITE FRAMEWORK

The **IGNITE** Framework develops leaders through six stages:

Inward → **G**rounded → **N**oticed → *I*ntentional → **T**ogether → **E**nergized.

It starts with the inner world of the leader and builds outward to team culture. Every sign in this guide maps to one or more of these stages.

SIGN ONE

They can't let go of the work, and their team can't grow because of it.

WHAT YOU'RE SEEING

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers doing work that belongs to their direct reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers who are overwhelmed, overextended, and burning out
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team members not growing because they're never given real responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottlenecks that slow everything down because nothing gets done without them

WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

When a manager can't delegate effectively, the instinct is to teach them a delegation framework. Give them a matrix. Show them how to categorize tasks. And it might help, but only for a few weeks.

But here's what's actually happening: **poor delegation is almost never a skills problem. It's a trust problem.** The manager doesn't trust their team to do the work as well as they would. Or deeper still, they're afraid that if they hand off the work, they'll become less valuable. Less needed. Less safe.

Until that fear is addressed, no delegation framework will stick. They'll learn the tool and then quietly ignore it, because the anxiety underneath hasn't gone anywhere.

THE ROOT CAUSE

"I don't feel secure enough in my own value to let go of the work. My worth feels tied to what I produce, not who I develop."

IGNITE FRAMEWORK CONNECTION → GROUNDED + INTENTIONAL

This leader needs self-trust work (Grounded) before delegation skills (Intentional) will land.

When a manager trusts their own value, they stop holding onto tasks as proof of worth. They start investing in their team instead.

SIGN TWO

Feedback conversations either aren't happening, or aren't working.

WHAT YOU'RE SEEING

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance issues that linger for months without direct conversation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers who avoid conflict at all costs, until it becomes a crisis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback that's so vague it doesn't actually help anyone change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees who feel blindsided at review time because nobody told them sooner

WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

You've probably tried feedback training. The SBI model. Radical candor. Some version of "here's how to have a difficult conversation." And your managers nodded along and then went back to avoiding those conversations anyway.

Because **the barrier to giving feedback is lack of courage** (not lack of knowledge). And courage requires feeling safe enough in yourself to risk making someone uncomfortable. A manager who needs everyone to like them can't give honest feedback. A manager who is terrified of conflict can't hold a firm conversation.

Teaching feedback skills to a conflict-averse, people-pleasing manager is like giving someone a map and no ability to read it. The tool is there. The inner capacity to use it isn't.

THE ROOT CAUSE

"I need people to like me. Conflict feels dangerous. If I say the hard thing, I might damage the relationship. I don't trust myself enough to handle that."

IGNITE FRAMEWORK CONNECTION → GROUNDED + INTENTIONAL
 Courageous communication starts with self-trust (Grounded).

A manager who is secure in who they are can tolerate discomfort in service of someone else's growth. That's when the feedback tools actually get used.

SIGN THREE

Their team doesn't feel safe speaking up. This is costing you.

WHAT YOU'RE SEEING

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings where nobody pushes back, even when everyone knows something is wrong 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disengaged employees who do the minimum and keep their heads down
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good ideas dying in private conversations that never make it to the room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High turnover among your best performers (the ones who had opinions)

WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

Psychological safety is one of the most researched predictors of team performance. Psychological safety is the belief that you can speak up, take risks, and make mistakes without being punished. When it's missing, teams underperform. When it's present, teams innovate, collaborate, and retain their best people.

But here's what most training misses: **a manager cannot create psychological safety for their team if they don't feel psychologically safe within themselves.** A manager who is afraid of being wrong won't invite dissent. A manager who is defensive when challenged won't make it safe to challenge.

The culture of a team is a direct reflection of the inner world of its leader. You cannot install psychological safety from the outside in. It has to come from the inside out.

THE ROOT CAUSE

"I don't feel safe enough within myself to create safety for others. My own fear of judgment, failure, or losing control gets transmitted directly to my team."

IGNITE FRAMEWORK CONNECTION → INWARD + GROUNDED + TOGETHER

Building psychological safety starts with self-awareness (Inward) and self-trust (Grounded).

A leader who has done this inner work naturally creates conditions for their team to feel safe, speak up, and do their best work (Together).

SIGN FOUR

They're stuck in the weeds and can't think strategically.

WHAT YOU'RE SEEING

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers who are reactive and crisis-driven, never getting ahead of problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders too consumed with day-to-day operations to develop their people
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No clear goals set for the team — or goals that never get revisited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization driven by urgency rather than importance

WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

Managers are stuck in reactive mode: constantly firefighting, always responding, never planning. When a manager is stuck in this mode, the usual prescription is time management training, prioritization frameworks, and goal-setting workshops. While those things have value, they don't address the core issue.

Often what's underneath a reactive manager is something less obvious: **anxiety**. When a leader doesn't feel secure, the urgent always wins over the important. That's because urgency gives them something concrete to respond to. It's a way to feel productive and needed without having to slow down and face the bigger, harder questions.

Strategic thinking requires a certain inner stillness: the ability to pause, reflect, and think long-term. That stillness and presence is very hard to access when you're running on fear or self-doubt. Until the anxiety is addressed, the busyness will continue, because it's serving a purpose.

THE ROOT CAUSE

"Staying busy feels safer than slowing down. If I stop responding to fires, I might have to face the bigger questions, and I'm not sure I have the answers."

IGNITE FRAMEWORK CONNECTION → INWARD + INTENTIONAL

Strategic leadership requires self-awareness (Inward) to recognize the patterns driving reactive behavior. It also requires intentional practice (Intentional) to build new rhythms: goal-setting, prioritization, and development conversations that actually happen.

SIGN FIVE

Their team isn't engaged, and neither are the managers.

WHAT YOU'RE SEEING

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low engagement scores. Especially on questions about manager support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teams that feel like a collection of individuals rather than a cohesive group
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers who seem to be going through the motions themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turnover among team members who cite "management" as the reason for leaving

WHAT'S ACTUALLY HAPPENING

Disengaged teams almost always have disengaged leaders. Not because the leaders don't care (most of them care deeply), but because you can't inspire people you're not connected to. And genuine connection requires a kind of presence that's very hard to maintain when you're overwhelmed, self-critical, or running on empty.

A manager who doesn't feel good about themselves struggles to make their team feel good.

Engagement is contagious.

The research is clear: the single biggest driver of employee engagement is the relationship with their direct manager. Which means that investing in your managers' inner world is one of the highest-leverage things you can do for your business.

THE ROOT CAUSE

"I can't give energy I don't have. I can't inspire connection I don't feel. Until I reconnect with my own sense of purpose and confidence, my team will feel that absence."

IGNITE FRAMEWORK CONNECTION → ALL SIX STAGES OF IGNITE

True team engagement is the output of the full IGNITE journey:

- ✓ a leader who knows themselves (Inward),
- ✓ trusts themselves (**G**rounded),
- ✓ sees their people (**N**oticed),
- ✓ leads intentionally (**I**ntentional),
- ✓ builds real connection (**T**ogether), and
- ✓ brings energy to everything they do (**E**nergized).

READY FOR THE NEXT STEP?

Your leaders are ready to ignite.

Let's build the program that gets them there.

If you recognize your managers in any of these signs, you're not alone, and you're not without options. This is exactly the work I do. And it starts with a conversation.

How it works:

1. We have a free 40-minute discovery call
2. I recommend the right engagement for your situation
3. Your leaders walk the IGNITE journey, and your teams feel it

→ [Schedule a free consultation](#) ←

