

# Torch



How to  
effectively  
train **new**  
**managers**  
at scale

# Introduction

Managers are a critical part of every workforce. Not only are they hugely influential in the process of developing and retaining employees, they also oversee projects with multiple stakeholders and are increasingly involved in making strategic leadership decisions.

Unfortunately, most first-time managers don't receive the training or support they need to succeed in their new roles. Many organizations have the expectation that new managers will simply know how to do their jobs. Or they'll expect existing managers to train newly promoted managers in their spare time.

As we've seen time and time again, these approaches don't work. That's why so many high performers who are promoted to management for the first time struggle to keep their heads above water. Almost overnight, these new managers are expected to know how to oversee a team of employees, have conversations about challenging topics like performance and diversity, and take on responsibility for metrics that directly impact the success of the organization - all with little to no training under their belts.

But the truth is that the skills needed to be a good manager aren't intuitive and existing managers simply don't have the resources to spend training other managers.

That's why it's time for companies to re-evaluate their training programs - whether that's kicking off something new or enhancing an existing program that could use an upgrade. In this ebook, we'll explain where new managers are struggling the most, why existing programs aren't working, and what you can do to better support and retain your new managers.



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# The importance of effective managers

Managers are at the frontlines of every organization. As a result, they have a significant impact on many aspects of your company, including:



## Recruitment

In today's increasingly competitive talent market, attracting top candidates is becoming harder to do. Having great managers that prospective employees want to work with can help close the deal with your best candidates.



## Business outcomes

Managers can also have a significant impact on business outcomes. [77% of senior leaders see managers as important to help achieve business goals.](#) Similarly, great managers can help drive significant business outcomes by motivating high performance from their teams and direct reports. That's why good managers increase employee performance by 25% and retention by 40%.



## Retention

You're likely familiar with the saying that people leave managers, not organizations. Studies find that there's truth in this: the number one reason employees quit their jobs is because of a poor quality relationship with their direct manager. In fact, [50% of people have quit a job at some point in their career to "get away" from their boss](#) according to Gallup.

It's clear that managers play an important role across various organizational functions. Sadly, many managers aren't able to maximize their potential because they're not being given the tools or support they need to develop the appropriate skills. In the next section, we'll discuss why this might be the case.





# Why managers are struggling to succeed

It's no secret that many managers tend to struggle with basic management skills like decision making, talent development, and inspirational leadership. That's why [70% of senior leaders are only somewhat or not satisfied at all with the performance of their frontline leaders](#). Even worse, 81% of managers aren't satisfied with their own performance. When we take a closer look, there are usually three fundamental issues that aren't being addressed:

## 1 Managing is like a new career

Shifting from being an individual contributor to managing others is a difficult career transition that requires a new skill set. While an employee might have been successful as an individual team member, they may find themselves struggling with the skills associated with being a manager - such as having tough conversations with direct reports or balancing all their new responsibilities. New managers, while experienced with cultivating their own personal and professional growth, may also have a hard time shifting their mindset and learning how to help others navigate their careers.

## 2 Development is ineffective

Despite the fact that becoming a manager is like transitioning into a new career, [58% of managers have never received any management training](#). Even among those who do receive training, only [10% of respondents say their companies' manager training is effective in preparing managers to lead](#).

## 3 Talent is scarce

[Only 1 in 10 people has the high talent required to effectively manage a team](#). This statistic is based solely on natural talent, which means that - left to their own devices - most people would fail in a managerial role. But with the appropriate resources and tools, a significantly higher number of employees would succeed. It's also important to note that not everyone wants to be a manager - and shouldn't be forced onto this path - which makes the investment in the people who do want to be in this role even more critical.

It's clear that the current approaches to manager training aren't serving us well. In the next section, we'll explore common models for new manager training and how they stack up.



# Common models for new manager training

When it comes to new manager training, companies take various approaches. Below, we identify the three most common ones we've seen and explain what they are, how successful (or not) they tend to be, and how to address any gaps in your program.

## Do nothing

You might be wondering: why is doing nothing being considered a model for new manager training? Because an organization that decides not to invest any time or money into supporting their managers is still making a deliberate choice. With this decision, companies aren't setting their leaders up for success and can expect to see higher turnover rates, lower productivity levels, and unhappy managers - which is why we don't recommend this approach.

Solution: If your company is currently doing nothing when it comes to new manager training, we recommend launching a program from scratch. While this will require upfront investment, you'll reap the benefits of having a more skilled managerial team. You can follow the best practices we outline in the rest of this ebook to help you get started.

## Stale program

It's also common for companies to have new manager training programs in place that have gone stale. In other words, the training hasn't been updated in a significant amount of time and doesn't serve the needs of their new managers. This is an inefficient use of resources since you're spending money to keep the program afloat and managers are spending time to participate - with minimal results.

Solution: It's time for an upgrade! The good news is that you already have a structure in place. Now you need to collect feedback from managers, identify where the training is failing to meet its purpose, and revamp the parts of your program that need to be updated.

## Best-in-class

Companies with a best-in-class new manager training have taken the time to craft a custom program for their employees. This type of training usually offers a wide array of resources - from leadership assessments to 360 degree feedback to mentoring or coaching - in an effort to meet the needs of their first-time managers. A best-in-class manager training also combines best practices in management thinking and learning design with the specifics of the organization.

Solution: Once you already have a best-in-class program in place, you need to maintain and occasionally iterate on your program. Just as the needs of the workplace are constantly changing, your new manager training also needs to evolve to stay relevant to the needs of your employees.

# Why current approaches to manager training are ineffective

Now that we've covered some of the common models for new manager training, let's take a closer look at what causes some of these approaches to fail. When it comes to stale programs, in particular, there are a number of specific challenges we can identify:

## A lack of investment

Investing in any form of human capital can be expensive. The most advanced companies invest, on average, [\\$4,000 per manager per year](#). As you might imagine, these costs scale up quickly - which can scare companies out of making any substantial investments in their managers. However, this results in outdated programs and ineffective managers, which will ultimately cost organizations money.

## Inconsistency

It's common for new manager training to be inconsistent. The programs tend to be either one-off learning opportunities or stop-and-go training. This lack of continuous engagement and cohesion makes learning challenging for new managers.

## A one-size-fits-all approach

Everyone has different learning styles - including managers. That's why an off-the-shelf approach to new manager training tends to be unsuccessful. This approach doesn't enable managers to personalize the training experience to meet their unique needs, preferences, or method of learning and will ultimately not be useful to them.

Now that you have an understanding of what makes current approaches to new manager training so ineffective, you can address them head on. In the next section, we'll dive into best practices that you can focus on instead.

## No one-on-one support

Managers need support - both from their peers as well as more experienced leaders. Unfortunately, many training programs don't have built-in support systems, which can leave managers feeling lost or frustrated when they don't have anyone to turn to with their problems and concerns.

## A heavy lift

Designing, launching, and implementing a new manager training program requires a lot of heavy lifting - especially from an administrative perspective. HR teams have to come up with a process for keeping track of their participants (and their progress), find ways to keep engagement high, and use multiple tools to manage various aspects of the program. All of these factors make manager training programs challenging to scale.

# Best practices for onboarding and training new managers

To address these common issues with new manager training, we put together a list of best practices to help you either launch or revamp your own program.

## Onboard new managers like they're new employees

Most company leaders are aware of the importance of onboarding for new hires. Research shows that [a strong onboarding program can improve retention by 82% and productivity by 70%](#). It's clear that giving employees the time and space to ramp up in their new roles, ask questions, and be guided through the expectations of their job are critical to their success.

The same mindset should be applied to managers as well. As we mentioned before, being a first-time manager is equivalent to starting a new career. Given this, managers also need to be guided through a formalized onboarding process. This is the time to provide them with information around job expectations, available resources and tools, and an overview of skills they'll need to develop over the next few months or years.

## Provide a consistent experience

Manager training shouldn't be a one-time event, but rather a constant in everyday work life - especially since managers are busy and may not have the capacity to join a one-off training event. Many companies try to address this by creating self-paced learning resources. While these can work, they're usually too overwhelming for managers to digest.

Instead, we recommend providing curated, bite-sized content that's always available to busy managers and contains a variety of resources. This can be in the form of videos, short articles, blog posts, scheduled email campaigns, and other forms of content that are easily digestible.

## Make it customized and collaborative

For training to be engaging, learning needs to be personalized to the needs and preferences of the manager. Many organizations don't acknowledge the various learning models and end up defaulting to one that doesn't resonate with many of their managers.

Instead, we recommend taking a more balanced approach to learning and following what's called the [70/20/10 model](#). This means that effective learning opportunities should be 70% challenging experiences and assignments, 20% developmental relationships, and 10% more formal coursework and training. Keep these ratios in mind when developing your training program for managers.

## Establish accountability

With managers juggling so much, it can be challenging for them to be held accountable to a training program - especially one that's self-guided. That's where it helps to have a support system they can turn to for motivation.

Organizations can support managers by forming peer groups of managers in similar situations both within and outside the organization. Establishing these types of [one-on-one connections have been found to increase learning](#). You can also provide mentoring and coaching with experienced leaders or professionals as a method of effective one-on-one support.

## Use software




Using a leadership development platform like Torch can relieve a lot of the administrative burdens that come with maintaining a manager training program. Software will allow you to create more seamless learning experiences for managers, provide the reporting tools you need to measure progress, and offer solutions - such as leadership coaching or mentoring - to keep your managers engaged throughout the program.

# Retaining your best managers

While having an effective training program in place for new managers is critical, it's only the first step. Just as important as setting managers up to succeed is retaining them. After all, you don't want to invest a ton of resources into developing top managers, only to lose them to another company. There are many ways to encourage your managers to stay. We've compiled our top strategies below and explain why they're so effective when it comes to manager retention.




## Offer mentoring or leadership coaching

Mentoring and leadership coaching can be a powerful motivator in getting managers to stay with a company. A 2006 Gartner study of mentorship programs at Sun Microsystems found that [retention rates are much higher for mentees](#) than for employees who did not participate in the mentoring program. Similarly, the Human Capital Institute found that employees at companies with strong coaching cultures are [more engaged](#) than those at organizations who do not, which is a [significant factor](#) in retention. When it comes to mentoring or leadership coaching:

-  Consider using an integrated platform to deliver these leadership development opportunities
-  Make sure to use a platform that can help managers track leadership development towards specific goals and ROI to keep them motivated
-  Take advantage of tools like leadership assessments and 360 feedback to maximize the benefits of coaching and mentoring

## Recognize your top managers

Most of the time, managers are on the giving end of recognition. But it's important to remember that managers - especially new ones - need to be appreciated for their hard work as well. Unfortunately, research shows that [87% of recognition programs focus on tenure](#), which leaves out first-time managers and might be demotivating for them. To better recognize your first-time managers:

-  Focus on performance and progress, not just years of experience as a manager
-  Make sure managers are included in your recognition efforts - not just individual contributors
-  Diversify the way you recognize your managers - it can be anything from a quick "thank you" message on Slack to a hand-selected gift that's personalized to their interests

## Provide opportunities for growth

While companies focus heavily on employee learning and development, it's easy to forget that managers need those same opportunities - even when they're no longer "new" to their roles any more. But the truth is that [76% of managers say that they want more training and development opportunities from their companies](#). And 47% of managers who want more training and don't get it, are thinking of quitting their jobs. To meet the growth needs of your managers:

-  Offer a learning and development budget
-  Give them the opportunity to explore different types of projects and roles
-  Have a training program that extends beyond just the "new" phase and dives into the skills needed by more experienced or tenured managers



# Case study: Unum's manager training program in action

Unum, a leading provider of financial protection benefits in the U.S. and U.K., partnered with Torch to create a training program that would lay the foundation for every Unum manager to be able to effectively lead the company forward. Specifically, the company needed a program that:

- ✓ Could be flexible enough to integrate with busy schedules
- ✓ Enable peer-to-peer learning
- ✓ Accommodate real-time updates
- ✓ Create a habit of learning

Together, Unum and Torch launched a six-week pilot course on "Interpersonal Effectiveness" for 50 managers. The curriculum encouraged peer-to-peer interaction to foster discussions between newer and more experienced managers and could be consumed in about one hour per week - allowing for bite-sized but ongoing, social learning. The program was structured through a mix of individual and group assignments, internal and external resources, and practical challenges to drive engagement.

Torch also provided reporting tools to enable Unum to measure ongoing program engagement, keep discussions moving towards desired outcomes, and guide the participant experience throughout. The program was moderated by an experienced Unum leader who served as a coach and facilitated questions, encouraged the group to stay on track with learning, and shared their own expertise.

The training program was a huge success! Not only did Unum see a 75% increase in participant confidence after the pilot program, but the managers themselves reported great feedback:

*"I realized how to use my communication style to greater advantage to achieve business results and I'm seeing a difference already."*

*"I am brand new to a leadership role, so having an outlet and resources for me to read and work through for my development was what I needed."*

*"It's very difficult to find time in your day to focus on yourself when the needs of your people and business tend to take over. I hope there are more opportunities for leaders like this in the future."*





## Managers are one of the most valuable assets your organization has.

It's well worth the time and money to invest in a training program that sets your first-time managers up for success. Remember: managers influence many critical parts of your company, so building their skills can benefit everything from your recruiting efforts to your bottom line.

Hopefully, our recommendations will help you either launch or improve your own new manager training program. If you're interested in learning more about how Torch's leadership development platform can help you better support new managers at scale, [request a demo.](#)



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