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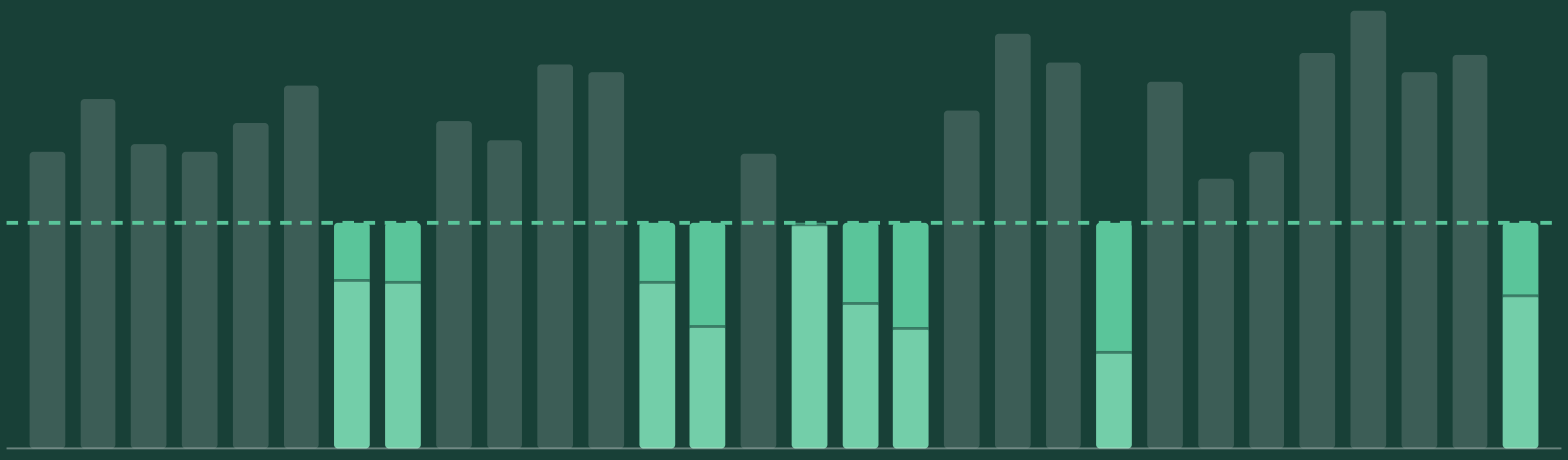
A GUIDE FOR CEOS AND EXECUTIVE TEAMS

Raise the floor. Lift every team.

How a designed management system turns the managers you already have into the engine of your next stage of growth.



Picture every manager helping you run the company.

Imagine a company where a new manager knows within weeks what good looks like here. Where a supervisor in operations and a manager in sales solve a shared problem without escalating it. Where you hear about issues while they are still small, because they surface sideways before they climb to you. That is what a strong management layer makes possible, and most companies already have the people to build one.

Decisions move to the right level

Managers make the calls they are closest to, with confidence. Executives stop being the bottleneck for questions a manager could answer.

New managers get up to speed faster

They learn what good looks like from a written Standard and a group of peers, instead of from their own expensive mistakes.

Teams work across boundaries

Managers who know each other solve cross-functional problems directly. Fewer issues bounce between departments.

Executives see clearly

Recurring themes from manager conversations reach the leadership table while there is still time to act on them.

Your culture holds as you grow

Every value you name reaches people through a manager. When managers share one version of the company, so does everyone else.

Your best people stay

The manager relationship shapes how people feel about their work. Raise the quality of every manager and it shows up in who stays.

Strategy sets the direction. Your managers decide whether it happens.

Managers carry the load. Few were trained for it.

Gallup's workplace research tells a consistent story. The manager is the biggest single influence on how people experience their work, and most managers were handed the role with little preparation. Spans of control keep widening, and managers' own engagement is falling.

70%
of the variance in team engagement comes down to the manager

44%
of managers have ever received any management training

8.2 → 12.1
average direct reports per manager, 2013 to 2025: up almost 50%

82%
of the time, companies pick the wrong person for the manager role

22%
of managers are engaged at work, down 9 points since 2022

20%
of employees worldwide are engaged at work

A bigger job every year

Managers are leading more people than they did a decade ago, often while still carrying their own individual work. The role has grown faster than the support behind it.

Less preparation than it deserves

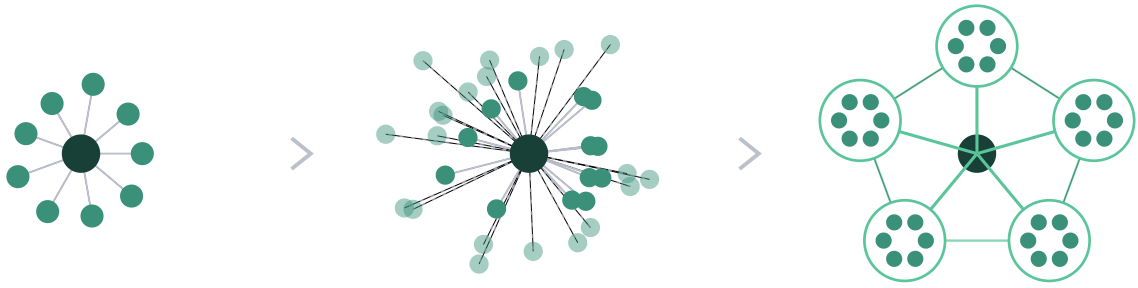
Fewer than half of managers have had any training at all. Most were promoted because they were good at the job they had, and then left to work out the new one.

Most companies ask more of their managers than they have ever prepared them for.

Sources: Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace* (2026); Gallup, "How Managers Impact Team Productivity" (2026); Gallup, span-of-control research (2026); Gallup, *State of the American Manager*.

How this plays out in a growing middle-market company

In a company of 50 to 500 people, the management layer is usually the part nobody designed. It grew one promotion at a time. In the early years that worked, because everyone sat close enough to the founder to learn what good looked like by watching. Growth stretches that distance until it breaks.



PROXIMITY
Everyone learns what good looks like by watching the founder.

GROWTH
The distance gets too big. New managers start guessing.

DESIGN
Shared Standards and a steady rhythm carry what proximity used to.

SIGNS YOU HAVE OUTGROWN PROXIMITY

Decisions route to the top

Questions a manager could answer wait in line for an executive, and the executive team becomes the bottleneck.

Top performers get promoted, then struggle

Doing the work well and leading people who do it are different skills. Few people get help making the jump.

Every manager runs a private version of the company

Ask three managers how they run a 1:1 or handle a missed deadline, and you will hear three different answers.

Training fades

A workshop or an offsite produces a few good weeks. Without reinforcement, old habits return within a couple of months.

Silos harden

Managers rarely talk across functions, so problems bounce between teams and get settled one level up.

Executives hear about problems late

By the time an issue reaches the leadership team, it has become expensive to fix.

These are the symptoms of a company that has outgrown proximity and has yet to replace it with design.

Raise the floor for every player.

In 2002 the Oakland Athletics had one of the smallest payrolls in baseball and won 103 games. Michael Lewis told the story in *Moneyball*. The A's could not outbid richer teams for stars, so they looked for the value everyone else was overlooking and built a system around it.

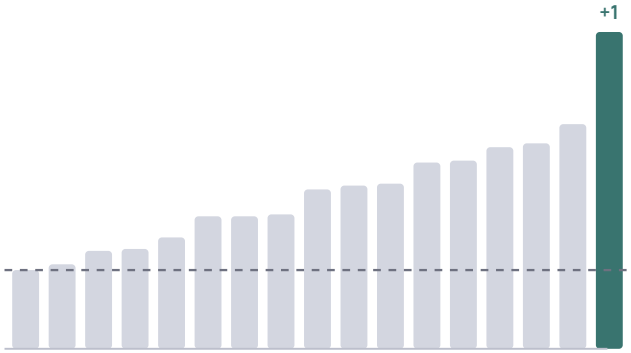
Most leaders respond to a management gap the way the richer teams did. They go shopping for better players: recruit an experienced manager from outside, or hire over the people who are struggling. Sometimes that is the right call for a single seat. As a strategy for an entire management layer, it is slow, expensive and uncertain.

18–20%

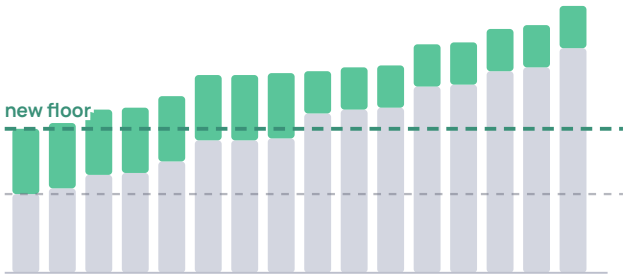
more in pay for external hires than for internal promotions into similar jobs, with lower performance ratings for their first two years and higher exit rates.

Matthew Bidwell, "Paying More to Get Less," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 2011

The better play is in the middle of the roster. Every company has a few excellent managers, a few who are struggling, and a large group in between who are capable and could be much better with clearer expectations and a place to practice. A modest lift across that middle group is worth more than any single star hire, and it compounds every year the system runs.



RECRUIT A STAR
One great hire changes one team.



RAISE THE FLOOR
A modest lift for every manager changes every team.

The talent you need is already on the payroll. What it needs is a system to play in.

Remember your first years as a manager.

Think back to when you first had people reporting to you. The work itself was rarely the hardest part. The hard part was everything nobody told you.

You were guessing at the standard

You found out what good looked like after you missed it.

You weren't sure who to ask

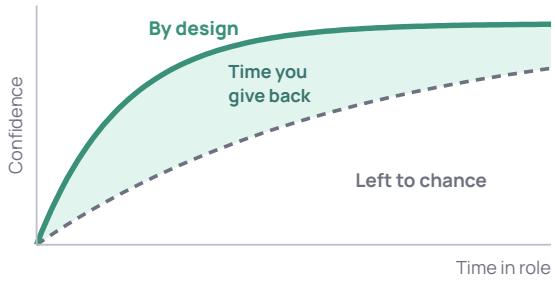
Asking your boss felt risky, and your peers were working it out too. So you kept quiet and figured it out alone.

You worried about how you looked

You held back in meetings until you were sure you wouldn't get it wrong in front of your boss.

You learned by cost

The lessons that stuck were usually the ones that cost you something: a good employee, a customer, a year.



Most of us got there eventually. The question for your company is how long it takes your managers, and what it costs along the way. A designed system shortens that curve.

WHY GOOD MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ARE OFTEN NOT CASCADED DOWN

Psychologists call it the curse of knowledge. Once you know how to do something well, it becomes hard to remember what it was like not to know it. The steps feel obvious, so experienced leaders skip over them or assume everyone already knows.

The result is that a lot of what your best leaders know never gets passed on. Newer managers are left to work it out on their own. A management system fixes this by writing down what good looks like, so it can be taught on purpose.

Build the system for the manager you were, and for the one you were trying to become.

Capture what already works. Fill in what's missing.

Your company already knows a great deal about good management. Some of your leaders run excellent 1:1s, give useful feedback and keep their teams aligned. Management by Design writes those practices down and makes them the shared standard, then adds the core concepts that may be missing.

CLARITY: WRITE DOWN WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

We capture each practice as a **Standard**, a short written description of what good management looks like at your company, and collect them in your **Management Playbook**.

AN IDEA	A STANDARD
"Be a good communicator."	"Describe what success looks like before the work starts."

1	2	3	4
A name, in your own words	Why it matters (what's the goal)	What it looks like done well	Useful tips and tools to assist with execution

ORGANIZED AROUND FIVE MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES (may be tailored for your organization)

1	**Lead Yourself**	How you show up as a manager: working on the business as well as in it, owning your decisions and holding steady when news breaks.
2	**Develop Your People**	Feedback, coaching, delegating, development plans and recruiting for your own team.
3	**Communicate & Build Trust**	Aligning up, down and across: cascading direction, hard conversations and keeping commitments.
4	**Run the Work**	1:1s, huddles, effective meetings, structured problem-solving and clarity on who decides.
5	**Know the Business**	How the company makes money, your own numbers, the financials and building a business case.

A small shared core beats a binder nobody opens.

The Playbook anchors it. The practice is what matters.

Written Standards give every manager the same starting point. The real value comes from managers across the company meeting on a steady rhythm to ask each other for advice, share what is working and practice management together. We call these groups **Management Collaboration Teams**.



A BUCKET, ONCE

A DROP AT A TIME

CONSISTENCY BEATS INTENSITY

A two-day offsite is the bucket: a big splash, and the rock looks much the same afterward. A monthly hour, kept for a year, is the drip that changes its shape.

Learning research has shown this for more than a century. People retain far more when practice is spread out over time than when it is crammed into one event. It is the same principle behind Culture by Design, where one Fundamental is taught and discussed every week.

WHY MANAGERS GET SO MUCH OUT OF IT

A safe place to ask

No one sits in a group led by their own boss, so managers ask the questions they would hesitate to ask upward.

Advice from peers who get it

Managers bring live issues from their own teams and hear how others have handled the same thing.

Relationships across the company

Managers who meet every month across functions start solving shared problems directly, instead of escalating them.

A signal for executives

Facilitators capture the themes that keep coming up and bring them to the leadership team while they are still small.

How they're set up 5 to 8 managers · Cross-functional · Same members over time · A fixed monthly date · Led by an executive who asks more than tells

A TYPICAL 60-MINUTE SESSION

Opening	Review the Standard	Work a live issue	Close
15 min	20 min	20 min	5

The Playbook is where managers start. The practice makes them better.

Three steps. Under a day of your leadership team's time.

The setup is delivered as short, focused workshops. After that, the system runs on a steady monthly rhythm led by your own executives.

1

Design Workshops

ABOUT 4 HOURS

A short intake questionnaire, then a working session with three or four of your executives. We draw out what your leaders already know about good management, in their own words, and sort it against the five Capabilities. You leave with your Blueprint: the priorities to tackle first.

WHY IT MATTERS

The system is built from your company's own language and experience, so managers recognize it as theirs from the first session.

2

Team Formation

ABOUT 3 HOURS

A kickoff with your full executive team. We walk through the Blueprint, set the cadence and form your **Management Collaboration Teams**: small, cross-functional groups of five to eight managers, each led by an executive who is no one's boss in the room.

WHY IT MATTERS

Executives own the system from day one, and the groups are built on purpose to cross the silos you want to break down.

3

Activate & Sustain

MONTHLY

A large-group session introduces each Standard. Management Collaboration Teams then meet on a fixed rhythm to practice it on real work, discuss it and question it. We run the first sessions alongside you and supply the materials. Over time, managers co-teach and each Standard gets an owner.

WHY IT MATTERS

This is where managers get better: practicing with peers, month after month. Every quarter you refine the Standards and add the next ones.

Start with what your leaders already know. Version two beats a perfect version one.

A thoughtfully designed management system fuels your business.

Clarity shows managers what good looks like. Consistency gives them room to get there. Together they turn a group of individual managers into a management team that runs the company with you.

- **Silos come down**
  Managers who meet across functions every month start solving shared problems directly.
- **Executives see further**
  Themes from every Management Collaboration Team reach the leadership table early, while they are still cheap to address.
- **Capacity opens up at the top**
  With decisions made at the right level, executives get time back to work on the business.
- **Growth stops depending on hiring stars**
  New managers ramp faster and the whole team improves, so each stage of growth costs less to reach.

WHERE THIS CAME FROM

When we bought Adtech Systems, every decision routed through the former CEO and COO. We could not recruit seasoned leaders into every management role, so we built a system to make the team we already had more effective. Teams began finding cost savings and improvements and bringing them forward on their own.

Management by Design was built by operators rather than a traditional learning and development group. We have seen these challenges across many middle-market companies as CEOs, board members and private equity operators, and we faced them ourselves.

25% → 1.5%
voluntary annual turnover

50%+
increase in gross margins

350 → 80
customers per year at the same revenue, because we could prioritize

If building this on your own seems daunting, we make it easy.

We bring the structure, the materials and the facilitation. Your leaders bring what they already know. In a short discovery call we'll walk through how your managers learn what good looks like today, and you keep what we put together.

Book a discovery call

persistently.us/contact-us

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ABOUT PERSISTENTLY

We design the way your managers lead.

Persistently builds Management by Design: written Standards for what good management looks like at your company, and a rhythm that keeps them in use. We were founded by operators who built this system while running a middle-market company of our own. Persistently is part of the Persistence Management Holdings family of companies, alongside CultureWise.

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SOURCES

Gallup, *State of the Global Workplace* (2026). Gallup, "How Managers Impact Team Productivity" (2026). Gallup, span-of-control research (January 2026). Gallup, *State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders.* Matthew Bidwell, "Paying More to Get Less: The Effects of External Hiring versus Internal Mobility," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 56 (3), 2011. Michael Lewis, *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game* (2003). Hermann Ebbinghaus, *Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology* (1885), the origin of research on spaced practice. Adtech Systems figures are from Persistently's own operating record.

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