

# When to Be a Coaching Leader vs. a Managing Leader

A quick guide for leaders navigating performance, growth, and accountability.

## Why It Matters

Great leaders know when to **coach** and when to **manage**. Both are essential but each serves a different purpose.

- **Coaching leadership** develops capability and confidence.
- **Managing leadership** ensures accountability and results.

The key is knowing which one your team needs right now.



### The Coaching Leader

**Focus:** Growth, reflection, and potential

#### Best used when:

- You want to develop long-term capability
- The employee has skill but needs confidence
- You're preparing someone for a new role or greater responsibility
- Mistakes are safe learning opportunities
- You want to build ownership and engagement

#### What it looks like:

- Asking more than telling
- Guiding with questions and feedback
- Encouraging reflection and experimentation
- Supporting without rescuing

#### Results:

- **Growth, empowerment, and deeper trust.**



### The Managing Leader

**Focus:** Direction, structure, and performance

#### Best used when:

- Expectations or timelines are not being met
- The employee lacks clarity or skill
- The stakes are high or the margin for error is low
- Decisions need to be made quickly
- Accountability must be reinforced

#### What it looks like:

- Setting clear goals and boundaries
- Providing direct feedback and direction
- Monitoring progress closely
- Holding people accountable to standards

#### Results:

- **Consistency, alignment, and reliable execution.**

## Finding the Balance

Leaders who shift *intentionally* between coaching and managing create high-performing, resilient teams.

Ask yourself:

- Does this situation call for **development** or **delivery**?
- Does this person need **space to grow** or **structure to succeed**?

When leaders get that balance right, performance and culture thrive — together.

# Leadership Navigation Checklist for Managers

Use this quick guide to determine whether to coach or manage in any situation.

## Step 1: Assess the Situation

Ask yourself:

- Is the goal **performance-driven** (urgent or high stakes) or **development-driven** (growth and learning)?
- Does this person have the **skill, will, or both** to succeed independently?
- What's the impact if the outcome isn't achieved on time or at standard?

→ If urgency and performance risk are high → **Manage first.**

→ If growth and learning are the goal → **Coach.**

## Step 2: Choose Your Leadership Mode

| Situation                                  | Leadership Approach | What to Do                                  |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Employee is capable but hesitant           | <b>Coach</b>        | Build confidence; ask reflective questions  |
| Employee is new or unclear on expectations | <b>Manage</b>       | Set structure, clarify outcomes             |
| Team is facing change or new challenges    | <b>Coach</b>        | Encourage adaptability and learning         |
| Deadlines or standards are slipping        | <b>Manage</b>       | Reestablish accountability and follow-up    |
| Performance is solid, potential is high    | <b>Coach</b>        | Stretch goals and develop next-level skills |
| Issues recur despite feedback              | <b>Manage</b>       | Set consequences, reinforce standards       |

## Step 3: Combine and Transition

Great leaders know when to shift gears:

- **Start by managing**, then **transition to coaching** once clarity and consistency are in place.
- **Coach after managing** to sustain performance and develop autonomy.

Example: "Let's align on expectations and deadlines first (manage), and then we'll explore how you can build confidence in owning this next time (coach)."

## Pro Tip for HR Teams

Encourage managers to **reflect after key conversations**:

- Did I lead with clarity and accountability?
- Did I create space for ownership and learning?
- What mode will help most next time — coaching or managing?