



OPEN WATER'S DEEP DIVE INTO THE INSIGHTS
FROM THE **GLOBAL LEADERSHIP FORECAST 2025**

Whitepaper

Leading from the Edge

5 Ways Resilient Leaders Can Thrive Under Pressure



Breaking Point or Launching Point?

The Global Leadership Forecast 2025 paints a stark picture.



At first glance, it reads like a leadership crisis – and at a time when leadership is needed most. But with the right tools, capability, and approach, this could be the time to turn things around. The edge we're on might be the breaking point, but it could also be the launching point.

What organisations need now are leaders who can balance boldness with empathy, clarity with trust, and pressure with purpose. Resilience doesn't mean pushing harder or stretching thinner. It means cultivating the inner capacity* to lead with strength and presence, even under relentless pressure.

In this whitepaper Open Water draws on the insights from the *Global Leadership Forecast 2025* to explore how life science leaders can meet today's immense pressures with resilience – strengthening trust, finding clarity, building connection, and creating conditions for teams to thrive.



*At Open Water, we call this working with Mindset Inside™: the inner beliefs, habits, and narratives that shape how leaders show up.

When leaders understand and shift these inner drivers, they unlock the confidence, clarity, and trust needed to lead effectively on the outside.

[Learn More](#)

How Resilient Leaders Thrive Under Pressure

An Overview



↪ These 5 strategies are only a click away!

1. Start With Trust

The Global Leadership Forecast 2025 reports that trust in direct managers has plunged, and senior leaders aren't far behind.



Trust in direct managers
46% (2022) → **29% (2025)**



Trust in senior leaders
32% (2025)

These stats may sound like a disaster waiting to happen – but what if trust isn't altogether gone, rather, it is crying out to be rebuilt differently, and that presents a rare moment of opportunity. When trust is restored, **it can change everything.**

Trust in ACTION

Trust is rooted in consistent everyday behaviours.



Leaders who operate from a **place of fear or who are overly controlling** will likely erode trust.



Leaders who lead with **human connection: curiosity, empathy, and psychological safety** build trust.

The data from leadership experts Zenger Folkman show us that:

11×

Leaders who support development are 11 times more likely to earn trust.

9×

Leaders who offer meaningful feedback are 9 times more likely to be trusted.

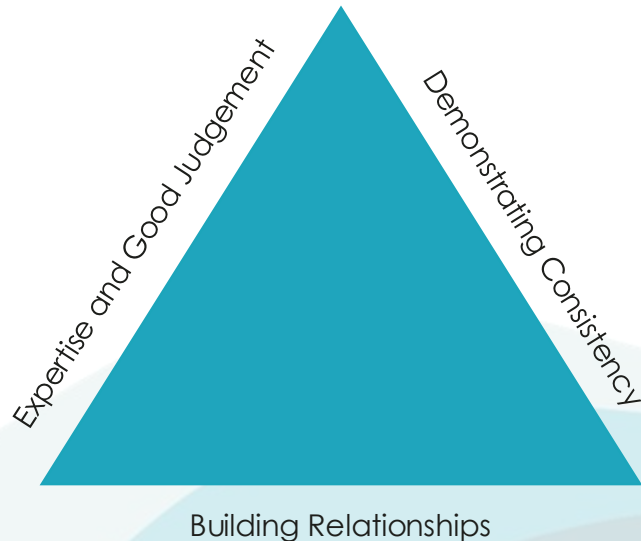
**60%
vs 28%**

Trust among engaged employees is more than double that of burned-out employees.

The Resilient Leader's Trust Blueprint



Zenger Folkman's research on the Trifecta of Trust shows that three behaviours account for most of the variance in trust across thousands of leaders worldwide:



1. **Expertise and Good Judgement** – making smart decisions, being well-informed, and anticipating challenges.

2. **Demonstrating Consistency** – walking the talk, honouring commitments, and following through.

3. **Building Relationships** – creating human connection, balancing results with warmth, resolving conflict constructively and with EQ, and giving feedback that fuels growth.

Leaders who score above average in all three areas land in the 80th percentile of trust; but when a single one of the three components is missing – trust falls off sharply.



Advice for Early-Career Managers from a Leadership Expert

In Conversation with Jack Zenger

CEO and Co-Founder of Zenger Folkman, best-selling author, and world expert in data-led leadership, shares his advice on giving feedback in this short clip from our fireside chat, live from Open Water's Cyclorama Broadcasting Studio.

[Watch Here](#)

Why This Matters

For Resilience

Resilient leaders do more than respond to pressure. They cultivate connection and credibility, making challenges appear more surmountable and opportunities seem even more possible.

Zenger Folkman found that relationships matter most, even more than consistency or judgement alone, and even slight deficits in relational trust can undermine all other competencies.

“Human connection is everything.”

– Open Water Mantra

For L&D Leaders

Trust is not an isolated competency rather it's the condition that makes resilience possible.

- Embed leadership development around the Trust Trifecta: build expertise, bolster consistency, and actively cultivate relational awareness.
- Help leaders recognise their trusted – or untrusted – habits and equip with practice plans around strengthening all three.
- Focus on mindset development: supporting leaders to shift how they think and show up, not just what they do.
- This builds stronger leaders and teams that can withstand pressure and pivot when needed.

Trust is the Real Transformation Technology

AI is transforming work at speed – but it's also revealing deep leadership fractures.

3x Frontline leaders are 3x more likely to feel anxious about AI than senior leaders.

28% Only 28% trust their executives to lead this shift.

57% of employees admit hiding AI usage from managers.

These numbers show it's not just a technology challenge – it's a trust challenge.

But there's an upside, frontline leaders are:

2.2x more likely to feel excited by AI when leaders inspire confidence in their ability to navigate change.



Trust matters. AI delivers the most value when leaders build confidence and inspire frontline teams – and we see this in action. Our AI and Analytics Expert, Anthony Aarons, shares examples of how life science leaders are amplifying their impact in the article linked below.

[Explore Examples](#)

2. Sustain Resilience Without Burnout

The Global Leadership Forecast 2025 reports:

71% of leaders report significant stress

40% have considered stepping down

McKinsey reports:

77% of employees using AI say it has increased their workload

Forbes reports:

66% of U.S. employees are burned out

While headlines suggest exhaustion, burnout is not just about hours or workload – it's about how leaders experience the gap between what's being asked of them and what feels possible to deliver.



“One element of our **Connected Programs™** centres around building the skills and capabilities leaders need to close that gap. The exact gap varies depending on context, but the work begins by Equipping leaders to meet it.”

Ben Shoshan
Open Water CEO & Co-Founder

The Burnout Mismatch

Maslach and Leiter's research highlights burnout as a mismatch between leaders and their work environment, specifically in workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values.

For leaders – particularly mid-level leaders and managers – those mismatches often sound like this:

- 'I'm delivering more and faster, with fewer resources.'
- 'I feel accountable for outcomes but with little influence over decisions.'
- 'I lead teams across functions or geographies with little real connection.'
- 'I'm being pushed to chase metrics when what I care most about is patient outcomes or scientific impact.'

When organisational demands clash with these mismatched narratives the result goes beyond fatigue – it depletes confidence and purpose.

At Open Water, we highlight the power of aligning these three areas:

- Competence: Am I equipped and resourced to succeed?
- Organisational Needs: Am I truly enabled to meet the priorities of the organisation?
- Passion: Does this connect with what I deeply care about?

When these elements align, leaders don't just thrive – but they experience their work as purposeful. When they fall out of balance, burnout takes hold.

Resilience is Built, Not Born

Resilience matters. Resilience is not about pretending the pressure isn't there. It's learning to carry it differently – sustaining clarity, energy, and purpose when demands don't let up.



"Resilience is not something you're born with – it's something you build, by consciously choosing challenge and resetting your capacity to take on what comes next."

– Jim Steele, *Unashamedly Superhuman* (Capstone, Wiley)

Neuroscience supports this: tackling meaningful challenges builds the brain's "willpower circuits," expanding capacity for future stress instead of draining it.

Jim explains the need to activate the brain's seeking system – our in-built mechanism that releases dopamine, boosting energy, curiosity, and persistence. By tapping into this, leaders can find the motivation to move through pressure and challenge with creativity and drive.

3 Habits of Resilient Leaders

Research shows leaders who use at least three resilience practices are 1.9× less likely to burn out. The most effective?

1 **Reflection** – creating the space to think, not just react.

2 **Dialogue** – meaningful connection with peers and team members.

3 **Learning** – reframing every challenge with a growth mindset.

“Growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts.”

– Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006)

For L&D Leaders

Supporting resilience is not about helping leaders shift from unhelpful internal narratives and practise behaviours that sustain them. It's about putting the “Mindset Inside™” and realising the tools we have available to change our behaviours.

- Build coaching and coaching circles into programs as standard, not optional extras.
- Create safe spaces for leaders to explore identity and test new narratives.
- Normalise resilience as a leadership practice as core to performance as strategy or execution.

Resilient leaders don't avoid pressure.

They're ready for it and inspire their teams to be ready too.

3. Harness Purpose as Retention Power

The Global Leadership Forecast 2025 shows a striking purpose gap:

67% of C-suite leaders feel deeply connected to purpose

35% of frontline leaders say the same

That's a 20-point drop since 2020. Why does that matter?

Purpose isn't just feel-good language. Leaders who feel connected to purpose are:

17x more likely to stay and feel energised

The data might look like purpose is fading. But what's really being lost is the clarity and consistency in which it's communicated.

That's why purpose remains one of the most powerful levers leaders can pull to build resilience and keep teams engaged.



Open Water Connected Programs™ develop leaders and organisations to help them connect with their purpose. By exploring how their capabilities, beliefs, values, and sense of identity align with a larger mission, leaders gain clarity, strengthen motivation, and inspire their teams around a shared vision.

[Learn More](#)

The "Execution Mindset" Risk

Frontline and mid-level leaders are often pulled so deeply into tasks, targets, and firefighting that self-reflection falls off the agenda. When that happens, self-awareness can drop, work feels transactional rather than meaningful – and motivation drains away.

Resilient Leaders as Meaning Makers

Resilient leaders close this gap by becoming meaning makers: inspiring people see how their daily effort contributes to something bigger. The idea isn't new. Writers from William Bridges to Herminia Ibarra have described leaders as sense-makers in times of change, and Simon Sinek popularised the same principle with Start With Why. The bottom line is, people commit more deeply when they understand why their work matters.



Jim Steele calls this "telling the truth in advance" – using identity statements like "I am an impactful leader" or "I'm guiding science that saves lives" to reframe mindset and create a ripple effect that lifts the energy and persistence of teams. – *Unashamedly Superhuman* (Capstone, Wiley)

For L&D Leaders

Purpose doesn't live in posters or annual strategy decks – it comes to life in how leaders show up daily. To make purpose tangible:



Equip leaders to weave purpose into everyday conversations, not just all-hands meetings.



Develop leaders to connect with their "why" and inspire their teams do the same.



Develop teams to connect with their purpose and their narrative.

When leaders act as meaning makers, they retain talent, sparking energy and resilience – giving teams the stamina to withstand pressure because they know why their work matters.

Open Water Case Study

Can't Stop Won't Stop



We created a new narrative focused on connection to purpose to reignite our client's team – taking every member on a high-potential journey. For the first time, 2,000 biopharma colleagues across 15 global locations, from California to Madrid to Tokyo, came together to experience this narrative brought to life by their senior leadership team.

[Learn More](#)

4. Rethink Leadership Quality

According to the Global Leadership Forecast 2025:

4 in 10 leaders rate their organisation's leadership quality as high.



Yet in organisations where employees report a strong overall experience, that rating rises **19-fold**.

Gallup's latest State of the Global Workplace shows:



30% global engagement – the lowest it's been in 10 years.

34% of salary – that's what disengaged employees cost organisations in lost productivity.

These statistics show that leadership quality goes beyond capability – it's about the connection and experience leaders create for their people to keep them engaged, productive, and connected to their purpose.



Zenger Folkman's global research into high-impact leadership highlights one competency above all others as the differentiator...



Inspiring and motivating others to high performance.



Compelling People

The Hidden Qualities That Make Us Influential

As Neffinger and Kohut highlight, leaders who blend strength with warmth – projecting confidence while demonstrating genuine care – are far more likely to inspire trust and motivate their teams effectively. This balance fosters an environment where individuals feel both respected and valued, driving deeper engagement and stronger performance.

Beyond Performance

For too long, leadership development has doubled down on strategy, process and performance. Hitting targets and delivering metrics matters, but it's not enough.

A leader can deliver results and still leave their team disengaged if they fail to inspire belief and energy.

At Open Water, we start our work with leaders by exploring how beliefs shape feelings and behaviours, focusing on belief-building, mindset shifts, and behaviour transformation to deliver measurable results.

Where Resilience Makes the Difference

Resilient leaders bring energy, clarity, and warmth to their teams. By combining strength and warmth – projecting confidence while showing genuine care – they motivate not through pressure alone, but by helping people see the possibility and believe in themselves under pressure.

For L&D Leaders

Improving leadership quality doesn't mean adding more modules to the program. It requires equipping leaders inspire, motivate, and bring resilience into everyday interactions:



Develop leaders from the **inside out**, focusing on how they think and show up.



Make **inspiring others to high-performance** a core outcome of leadership programs.

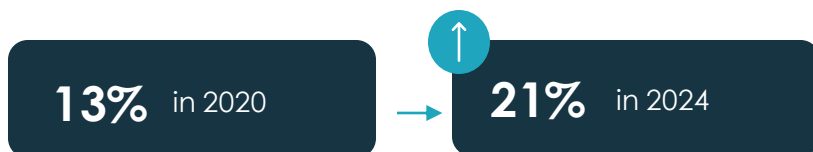


Build resilience practices like self-reflection, feedback, and human connection into the way leaders work every day.

When resilience and inspiration are at the heart of leadership, quality stops being a perception issue and becomes a lived experience for teams.

5. Unlock High-Potential Talent

The Global Leadership Forecast 2025 shows attrition among high potentials has risen from:



Why?

- 1 Lack of development.
- 2 Unclear career paths.
- 3 Lack of leadership and growing opportunities outside traditional employment.

On the surface, this looks like a pipeline problem. But it's also an opportunity for leadership to step up.

Resilient leaders will make these high-potentials want to stay by creating belief, stretch, and support – the conditions where talent thrives.

Growth Isn't About More Training

High-potential employees don't leave because they need more training courses. They leave when they don't experience the mindset shifts and behavioural stretch that help them see themselves as leaders today.



Open Water's Connected Programs™ focus on those mindset shifts – equipping leaders to have a greater understanding of self and how their behaviours and communication styles affect others.

We give them the tools to:

- Adopt and sustain new behaviours
- Build the capabilities and confidence to lead others.

[Learn More](#)

The Role of Resilient Leaders

When leaders create environments where:



For L&D Leaders

Supporting high-potential talent isn't about scaling up the curriculum. It's about embedding growth into the culture leaders create:

- 1 Equip leaders to provide stretch opportunities that are purposeful, not just more work.
- 2 Make feedback and coaching part of the culture.
- 3 Encourage leaders to model resilience by showing how they themselves learn and adapt.

When high-potential employees experience growth as part of their everyday work, and have the psychological safety and space to do so, they deepen their commitment creating the conditions where talent thrives.

Conclusion:

Leading from the Edge

Trust is fragile, stress is rising, and leadership quality is underwhelming.

But the message we'd like to leave you with in this whitepaper is how can we turn this into opportunity? With the right approach we can help create more adaptive, resilient leaders and foster strong thriving cultures.

Resilient leaders are the ones who will turn it around. By building trust, sustaining resilience, keeping purpose alive, staying connected and inspiring people to perform at their best, they create teams that thrive.

At Open Water, we call this working with Mindset Inside™. Mindset is shaped by our experiences and perceptions. It influences our emotions – from fear and resistance to motivation and passion. Understanding this is key to driving lasting behaviour change, resilient, adaptive and high-performing teams.

The question for organisations now isn't "Do our leaders have the right capabilities?"
It's **"Are we consistently equipping them with the time, tools and support ready to lead from the edge?"**



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