Safe Space Leadership

ARTICLE

Promoted for expertise, then left to work out leadership

When the work keeps calling, the people side of the role is the first to give.

Where the time and investment go

13%
of managers' time goes to developing their people, against nearly 40% on immediate problems and administration
DELOITTE, 2025 (GLOBAL)

31%
of Australian employers report people management capability gaps among their leaders
AHRI, 2026

14%
of employers name leadership and management as their key training priority, against 23% for technical skills
AHRI, 2026

Many leaders are promoted for being good at the work: the engineer who solves the hardest problems, the specialist everyone turns to. The promotion changes their title overnight. It rarely changes what fills their week.

The work still arrives, and it's still what they know best. So it gets their time first, and the people side of the role gets what's left: one-to-ones postponed, feedback saved for later, development that keeps slipping.

Doing instead of leading

This isn't a lack of care. More than a third of managers (36%) say they feel insufficiently prepared to lead people, according to Deloitte's global research. When no one has shown them what leading people involves, familiar work fills the gap.

What organisations reward

Organisations often reinforce the pattern. Leaders are usually measured on what their team delivers, not on how they lead the people delivering it.

Under pressure to deliver, focus narrows to the work, and leaders effectively stop showing up for their people. Yet the intent is there: two-thirds of Australian employers (66%) say managers are the most critical role for service delivery over the next three years. But of those with a workforce plan naming managers as most critical, 46% don't include managers in it.

Making space to lead

Creating space for people management is a shared responsibility. Organisations shape how much room leaders have: what they're measured on, how much they carry, and whether time with people counts as part of the job. Leaders decide how to use that time, starting with a regular one-to-one.

Supporting the move into leadership

The step from expert to leader of people is a major career transition. Safe Space Leadership works with organisations and their leaders to build the skills, habits and support that make leading people part of the job, not what's left after it.

Make the time count

Our free guide, *Five questions for your next one-to-one*, has questions that shift the focus from the work to the person.

safespaceleadership.com.au/resources

SSL builds leaders people choose to stay for.

General information about leadership practice. Sources: Deloitte, 2025 Global Human Capital Trends (nearly 10,000 business and HR leaders in 93 countries; global; leader and manager perceptions); Australian HR Institute, Quarterly Australian Work Outlook, March Quarter 2026 (612 employers) and September Quarter 2025 (601 employers). Published November 2026. © Safe Space Leadership 2026