



From Boss to Coach: How Modern Managers Create Space to Lead

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When I first stepped into management, I thought the role was all about having the answers. I'd walk into meetings ready to fix things, direct traffic, and push projects over the finish line. It felt productive, even satisfying—my team came to me for decisions, I could solve their problems on the spot, and the work kept moving.

Until it didn't.

After a while, progress slowed. My team's growth stalled, my own workload ballooned, and I found myself running on fumes. I was the one pushing every project forward, answering every question, and signing off on every step. Without realizing it, I'd become the bottleneck.

THE MANAGER'S NEW REALITY

The truth is, today's managers are working in a different world than we were a decade ago. Teams are rarely in one place. Messages and updates arrive before you've even had your first coffee. Priorities shift weekly—sometimes daily. And your team isn't just here to get paid. They want meaningful work, a chance to grow, and a manager who's genuinely in their corner.

The old "boss" model—where you keep your hands on every detail—simply doesn't fit anymore. It exhausts you, frustrates your team, and leaves no space for the kind of leadership that actually moves things forward.

I learned that holding onto everything isn't leadership. It's a form of control that eventually slows everyone down. When every decision, approval, or conversation depends on you, the pace of the entire team is tied to your personal capacity. That's a ceiling no organization can afford.

The real shift happened when I stopped thinking of myself as the central problem solver and started acting as the builder: the one who creates the systems, boundaries, and trust that allow the team to move forward without constant intervention.

It's not about stepping back completely. It's about setting things up so they run smoothly whether you're in the room or not.

THE TURNING POINT

My own breaking point came when the mental load became too heavy to carry. On paper, I was performing—hitting targets, keeping projects moving—but inside, I was drained. The constant switching between big-picture strategy and the tiniest operational details was exhausting. I'd spend mornings thinking about long-term plans, then get pulled into a chain of quick-fire approvals, budget clarifications, and last-minute scheduling changes. Even on my days off, I was thinking about what was waiting for me on Monday.

It became clear: I could keep going until I burned out completely, or I could change the way I worked.

LETTING GO WITHOUT LOSING CONTROL

The first thing I did was stop carrying everything in my head. I began documenting decision-making boundaries so everyone knew what they owned and what needed my input. I batched small approvals and quick decisions into two windows a day instead of letting them interrupt me constantly.

I also asked for help. I brought in someone who could act like my second brain—filtering the noise, bringing me only the things I truly needed to decide, and keeping me focused on the big picture.

Leaders need to strip away the mental clutter, put the right systems in place, and free up the headspace they need to lead with clarity, focus, and purpose.

SHIFTING INTO COACHING MODE

With the bottleneck gone, I had space to think differently about my role.

Instead of rushing in with answers, I started asking more questions: What do you think the next step should be? How would you approach this if I weren't here?

It was uncomfortable at first—both for me and for my team—but over time it changed everything. People started coming to me with recommendations instead of problems. They gained confidence, I gained time, and the quality of our decisions improved because more perspectives were in the mix.

I also changed the way I approached one-on-one meetings. Instead of running through a list of updates, I used the time to talk about growth, feedback, and problem solving. We kept project tracking in shared tools, so our conversations could focus on what was working, what needed support, and where people wanted to develop next.

This coaching approach has another advantage: It works beautifully in a world of constant change. When priorities shift—and they will—you don't have one person scrambling to adjust while everyone else waits for instructions. You have a team that can adapt together because they've been building their decision-making muscles all along.

That adaptability is the difference between a manager who survives change and one who can actually lead through it.

PROTECTING HEADSPACE FOR EMPATHY

One of the most overlooked skills in management is empathy—not the vague, soft-edged kind, but the kind that directly drives performance. Empathy builds trust, helps resolve conflict, and lets you spot burnout before it becomes a crisis.

But here's the problem: Empathy requires space. If your brain is overloaded, you can't listen properly, notice subtle cues,

or respond thoughtfully. That's why letting go of the right things is so important. It's not just about efficiency. It's about protecting the mental bandwidth that makes you effective as a leader.

Leaders transform when they finally stop carrying every operational detail in their heads. They show up more present, more thoughtful, and far more capable of inspiring their teams.

BUILDING THE MODERN MANAGER'S TOOLBOX

Today's managers need a different set of tools than they did even five years ago. These tools include:



Collaboration that works across locations, time zones, and functions



Change management as a daily skill, not a crisis response



Feedback and coaching as ongoing habits, not annual events



Decision boundaries that empower others to act



Clear, concise communication that cuts through noise



Protected time and mental space for strategy

Technology, including AI, can help automate and surface priorities. But it's not a silver bullet. Tools only work if you've done the human work of building trust, creating systems, and letting go where it makes sense.

Letting go isn't a single moment. It's something you build into the way you lead. I ask myself regularly:

- Is this really mine to decide?
- Could someone else do this better or faster?
- What would happen if I stepped back here?

Those questions help me stay focused on the work that truly needs my attention—the decisions, conversations, and relationships that only I can handle.

FROM BOSS TO COACH—AND BEYOND

Looking back, the biggest shift I made wasn't about time

management or delegation. It was about redefining the purpose of my role.

When I stopped trying to control everything, I started coaching instead. I built a team that could make smart decisions without me, adapt to change, and grow in ways that didn't require my constant oversight.

It's not glamorous work, and you won't always get the credit. But you will have a healthier team, a workload you can sustain, and a career that lasts.

Because leadership isn't about carrying the most weight. It's about knowing which weight is yours, and having the discipline to set down the rest. [AQ](#)

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