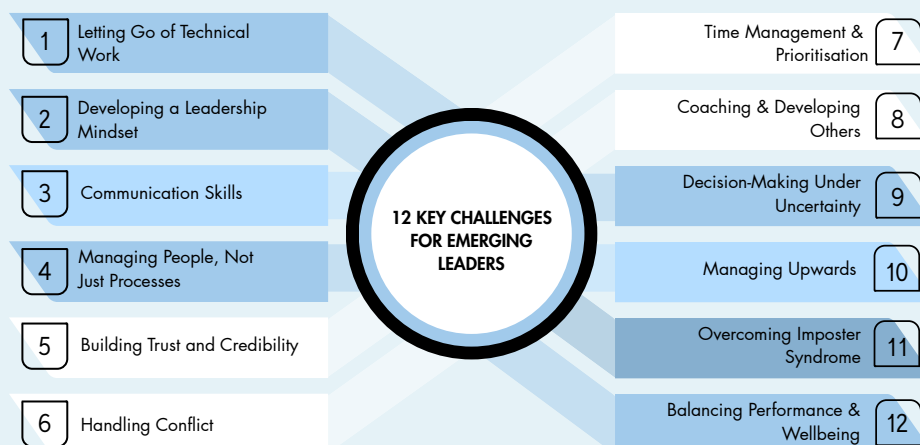# FROM
Technical Expert TO
Effective Leader

12 KEY CHALLENGES AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

One of the biggest challenges I have seen organisations face in my 35-year career is promoting their best technical experts into leadership roles—only to find that these high performers struggle to manage people effectively. They were outstanding in their technical roles, but leadership requires an entirely different skill set.

For HR Managers, Senior Leaders and business owners overseeing teams of 50-500 employees, this transition can be a frustrating bottleneck. When technical specialists lack the right leadership tools, the result is inefficient teams, disengaged employees, and increased pressure on HR and senior leaders to fix problems that shouldn't exist in the first place.

If you've ever had to step in to mediate a conflict, reassign work because a new leader was overwhelmed, or coach a struggling manager through basic people issues, you're not alone. The solution isn't just hoping they figure it out—it's giving them the leadership toolkit they need to succeed.

Let's explore 12 key challenges I have identified, faced by first-time and emerging leaders, real-world examples of how these issues show up in the workplace, and practical solutions that will save you time and help your organisation thrive.

1 Letting Go of Technical Work	Time Management & Prioritisation 7
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12 KEY CHALLENGES FOR EMERGING LEADERS

LETTING GO OF TECHNICAL WORK

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Sarah, a senior engineer, was promoted to team lead. Instead of delegating, she kept taking on technical work herself, slowing down the team and creating a bottleneck. When she did delegate, she would often jump back in to 'fix' any mistakes, which left her overworked and her team disengaged.

THE HR CHALLENGE

Many new leaders struggle to let go of the work they excelled at. They think, "It's faster if I do it myself." This leads to burnout, disengagement, and teams that don't grow because they're never trusted with important work.

✓ DELEGATE WITH INTENT

Encourage leaders to ask, "Who on my team can take this on?" instead of defaulting to doing it themselves. Leadership isn't about doing—it's about enabling the team to succeed.

✓ TRUST THE PROCESS

Don't fix it, give it back – Many new leaders undermine their own delegation by stepping in and fixing mistakes themselves. Instead, return the work to the team member and coach them through improving it. This builds trust, empowerment, and accountability—showing that they are truly responsible for their work.

✓ FOCUS ON PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

Encourage leaders to prioritise development and movement towards a goal over immediate perfection. A slightly imperfect but self-corrected task is far more valuable in the long run than a 'perfect' one that the leader had to redo.

2 DEVELOPING A LEADERSHIP MINDSET

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Ben was promoted from top sales consultant to sales manager but kept competing with his own team instead of coaching them. He would jump in to close deals himself, take over client calls, and chase his own targets—leaving his team feeling unsupported and demotivated. Instead of empowering his team, he was still focused on his own success.

THE HR CHALLENGE

Many new leaders don't realise that leadership success is measured differently. They're used to being rewarded for their own performance and struggle to shift their focus from doing the work to developing others. This often leads to micromanagement, frustration from the team, and a lack of trust in the leader's ability to support them.

When leaders hold onto control, they send the message that they don't trust their team.

REDEFINE SUCCESS

Instead of asking, "What did I accomplish today?" they should be asking, "How did I help my team succeed today?" This simple mindset shift moves them from individual contributor to team enabler.
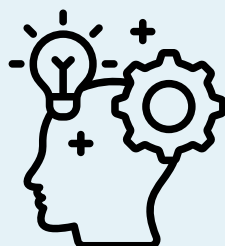
SHOW TRUST BY STEPPING BACK, NOT STEPPING IN

Many new leaders take over when they see their team struggling. Instead, they should give work back and guide their team through solving the issue themselves. Asking "What do you need from me to get this done?" helps drive ownership, confidence, and accountability.

MAKE DEVELOPMENT A PRIORITY

Leaders should spend as much time growing their people as they do managing results. If a team member makes a mistake, instead of fixing it, they should use it as a coaching moment—asking, "What do you think went wrong?" and "How would you approach it differently next time?" This reinforces trust and builds a culture of learning.

RECOGNISE LEADERSHIP IMPACT DIFFERENTLY

Instead of celebrating personal wins, encourage leaders to track team progress, skill development, and engagement as key indicators of success. When leaders focus on the long-term success of their people, they create a high-performing, self-sufficient team that doesn't rely on them for every decision.

3 COMMUNICATION SKILLS

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Michael, a newly promoted IT manager, assumed his team understood his directions —until projects kept missing deadlines because no one was clear on priorities. When mistakes happened, he would correct them without explaining the issue, which left his team confused and frustrated.

THE HR CHALLENGE

New leaders overestimate how clear they are when communicating. They assume that because they understand something, their team does too. Many also struggle to communicate trust, preferring to 'fix' issues instead of using them as learning moments.

✓ CLARIFY AND CONFIRM

Teach leaders to check for understanding by asking, "Can you walk me through your plan for getting this done?" instead of just assuming they were understood.

✓ CORRECT THROUGH COACHING, NOT FIXING

Instead of jumping in to fix an error, encourage leaders to ask their team member to identify and resolve the issue themselves. This not only teaches problem-solving skills but also fosters trust and accountability.
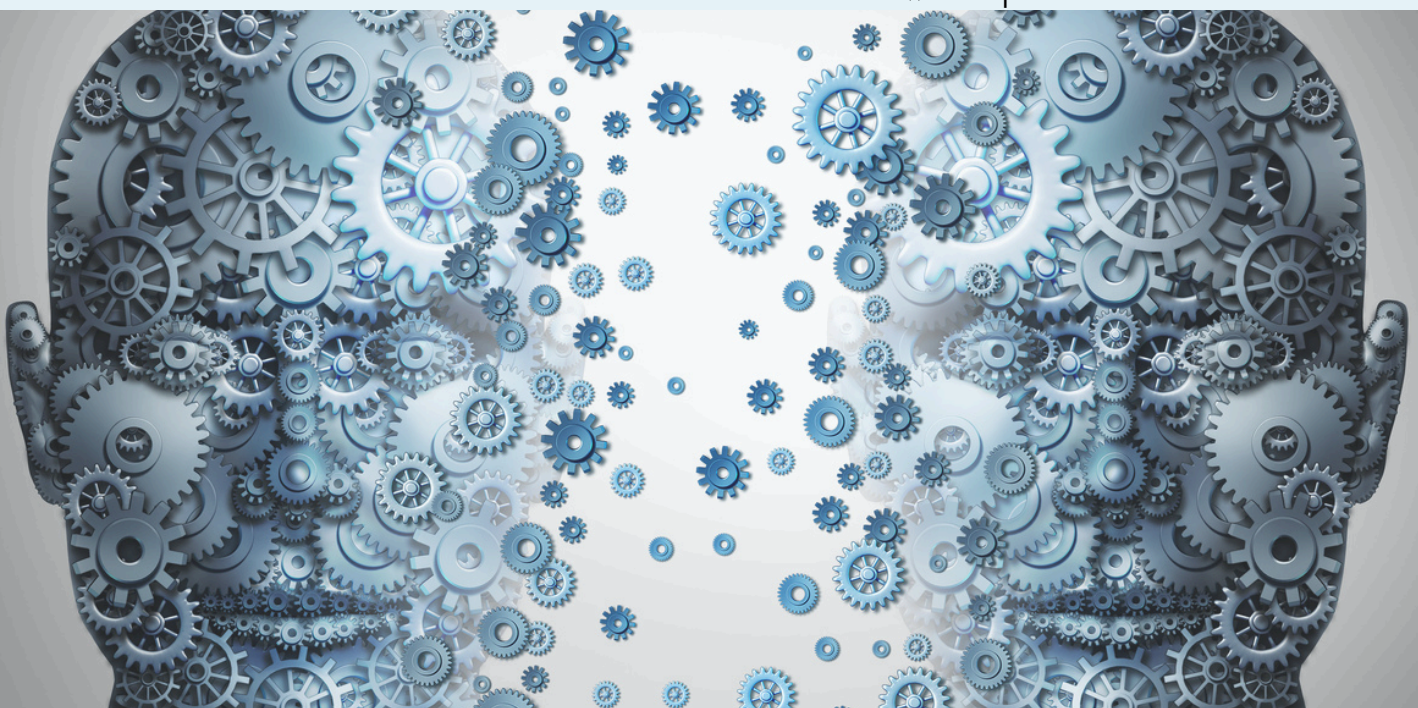
✓ ENCOURAGE TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

Leaders should be open to feedback and encourage their team to ask clarifying questions. A leader who makes communication safe encourages engagement and ownership.

MANAGING PEOPLE, NOT JUST PROCESSES

✓ SHIFT FROM CONTROL TO COACHING

New leaders must learn that leadership isn't about personally ensuring everything runs smoothly—it's about empowering others to do so. Instead of stepping in to fix inefficiencies, they should ask their team what's working, what's not, and how they can support them.

✓ MAKE MISTAKES A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY

If an employee makes a mistake, rather than fixing it immediately, ask them what went wrong and how they would correct it. This builds confidence, trust, and accountability within the team.

✓ RECOGNISE EFFORT, NOT JUST OUTCOMES

Many technical leaders focus only on results. Encourage them to acknowledge their team's growth and problem-solving abilities, not just their final output.

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Julie, a promoted warehouse supervisor, was excellent at logistics but struggled with staff morale. She focused on efficiency without recognising that people, not just processes, drive results. When mistakes happened, she would step in to correct them rather than working with her team to improve their approach.

THE HR CHALLENGE

Technical experts often focus on tasks, systems, and outputs—but leadership is about people. If they don't engage their team, they won't get the performance they need.

5 BUILDING TRUST AND CREDIBILITY

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Jack was promoted from the finance team to manager and suddenly had to lead his former peers. His old colleagues questioned his authority, and he struggled to gain respect. When his team made mistakes, he either ignored them or quietly fixed them to avoid confrontation.

THE HR CHALLENGE

Internal promotions can lead to awkward team dynamics. Former peers may challenge their authority, and new leaders may feel they have to "prove" themselves. Trust and credibility are built over time through consistency and fairness.

✓ TRUST THROUGH DELEGATION, NOT CONTROL

New leaders often micromanage or correct every mistake to appear competent. Instead, they should focus on showing trust by allowing their team to solve problems rather than doing it for them.

✓ LEAD WITH FAIRNESS, NOT FAVOURITISM

✓ COMMUNICATE OPENLY AND TRANSPARENTLY

Leaders should be honest about their own learning curve and create a culture where mistakes are learning moments rather than failures.

Internal promotions can create tension. New leaders should focus on being fair and objective, ensuring their leadership decisions are consistent rather than based on past relationships.

6 HANDLING CONFLICT

✓ ENCOURAGE DIRECT AND SUPPORTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Leaders should address issues early and directly using a neutral, fact-based approach. Instead of correcting mistakes silently, they should discuss the issue with the employee and ask how they can improve.

✓ TEACH A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO FEEDBACK

The Facts-Impact-Expectation model helps keep conversations clear and constructive:
Facts: "I've noticed you've missed three deadlines this month."
Impact: "This has delayed the team's progress and created frustration."
Expectation: "Let's talk about what's causing the issue and how we can fix it."

✓ ENCOURAGE ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH COACHING

Instead of fixing mistakes, leaders should ask their team members how they would resolve the issue. This builds ownership and trust.

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Emma avoided addressing under-performance in her new team, hoping issues would resolve themselves. When she did finally address mistakes, she would correct them herself rather than discussing them with the employee, which led to resentment and repeated errors.

THE HR CHALLENGE

Many new leaders avoid conflict because they fear damaging relationships or don't know how to navigate difficult conversations. Others try to 'fix' issues themselves rather than addressing them directly.

7 TIME MANAGEMENT & PRIORITISATION

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

David, a newly promoted site manager, was working 12-hour days because he didn't know how to prioritise leadership tasks over operational work. He kept jumping between urgent requests, responding to every small issue himself, and taking on work that his team should have been handling. His team, in turn, relied on him to solve everything, instead of taking ownership themselves.

✓ SHIFT FROM "DOING" TO "LEADING"

New leaders must recognise that their role isn't to handle everything—it's to create an environment where their team can handle more. They need to trust their team with responsibilities and resist the urge to take over.

✓ CREATE BOUNDARIES AND EMPOWER PROBLEM-SOLVING

✓ DELEGATE WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

THE HR CHALLENGE

New leaders try to do everything themselves rather than focusing on what really moves the needle. They often struggle to distinguish between urgent tasks and high-impact leadership responsibilities. Worse, they create dependency by taking on too much instead of empowering their team to problem-solve.

✓ TEACH THE 80/20 RULE

Leaders should focus on the 20% of tasks that drive 80% of the results. Instead of getting caught in daily admin, they should prioritise strategic planning, coaching conversations, and team development—things that only they, as leaders, can do.

Instead of answering every question, leaders can build trust by redirecting queries back to their team, asking "What do you think the best approach is?" This encourages independent thinking and reduces the team's reliance on them.

Time management isn't just about what's on the leader's plate—it's about how they distribute work. Leaders should delegate clearly and hold their team accountable for completing tasks without stepping in to take over.
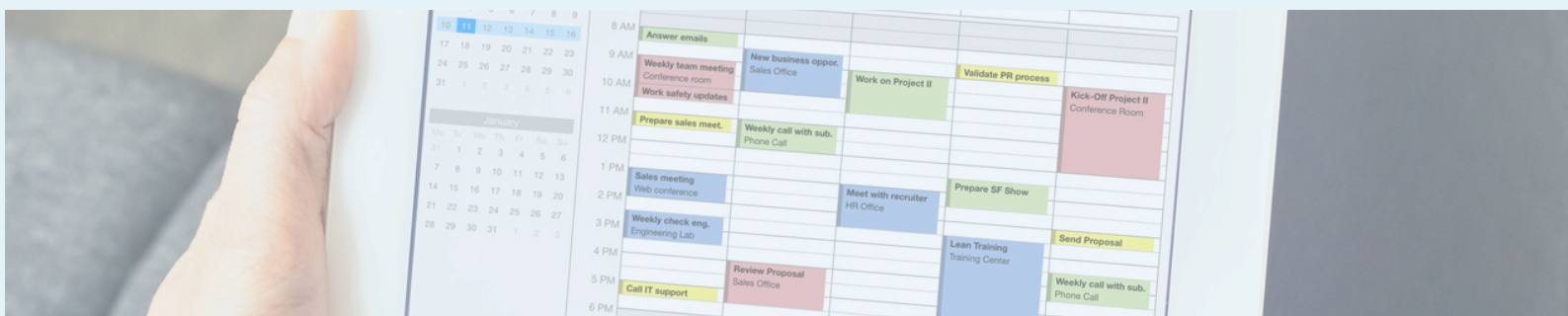
8 COACHING AND DEVELOPING OTHERS

✓ ENCOURAGE QUESTIONS BEFORE ANSWERS

Instead of immediately fixing issues, leaders should ask, "What do you think we should do?" This shifts ownership back to the employee and strengthens their decision-making skills.

✓ BUILD CONFIDENCE THROUGH TRUST

When leaders allow employees to make decisions and learn from their mistakes, they develop faster. Instead of stepping in, leaders should say, "Try it this way, and let's review together after."

✓ RECOGNISE GROWTH, NOT JUST RESULTS

Instead of only celebrating final outcomes, leaders should acknowledge when employees demonstrate problem-solving skills, initiative, and growth in decision-making.

✓ DEVELOP LEADERS, NOT FOLLOWERS

A high-performing team is one that functions well without constant input from leadership. Leaders who invest in developing their people ultimately create more time and better results for themselves and the business.

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Lisa struggled to grow her team because she gave them all the answers instead of coaching them to think for themselves. Every time a problem arose, her team came to her for solutions, and she would immediately tell them what to do. Over time, her team became dependent on her, and she felt overwhelmed by constant firefighting.

THE HR CHALLENGE

Many new leaders default to being problem-solvers instead of coaches. They think it's their job to provide solutions, but in reality, this disempowers the team and limits growth. A leader's job is not to do the work for their team—it's to develop their team's ability to do it themselves.

DECISION-MAKING UNDER UNCERTAINTY

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Rachel was a highly skilled technical consultant before being promoted to team leader. She was used to making decisions based on detailed data and extensive research. Now, as a leader, she struggled when faced with situations that required quick judgment without all the information. She hesitated, second-guessed herself, and slowed down her team's progress.

THE HR CHALLENGE

Technical experts are used to having complete information before making decisions, but leadership often requires acting with uncertainty. New leaders struggle when they can't rely solely on data and must instead use judgment, intuition, and experience.

REFRAME DECISION-MAKING

Instead of striving for 100% certainty, leaders should aim for progress over perfection. A useful question is, "What's the best decision I can make with the information I have right now?"

ENCOURAGE CALCULATED RISKS

Leaders should feel comfortable making informed, thoughtful decisions without waiting for absolute clarity. The key is to act, assess, and adjust as needed.

TRUST THE TEAM'S EXPERTISE

Instead of trying to figure everything out alone, leaders should seek input from their team, ask "What do you think?" and empower others to contribute to decision-making.

LEARN FROM MISTAKES, DON'T FEAR THEM

Not every decision will be perfect, but leaders who make timely decisions and adjust as they go will be far more effective than those who delay and miss opportunities.

10 MANAGING UPWARDS

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

James was promoted to operations manager and focused all his energy on managing his team. But he neglected to engage with senior leadership, assuming they would see his good work. When a major project required executive buy-in, he struggled to get support because he hadn't built relationships or communicated his team's value effectively.

THE HR CHALLENGE

Many new leaders focus only on their direct reports and fail to realise that managing upwards is just as important as managing downwards. If they don't engage with senior leaders, communicate effectively, and advocate for their team, they risk missing opportunities and lacking support.

✓ PROACTIVE COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Leaders shouldn't wait for their boss to check in. Instead, they should provide regular updates on their team's work, challenges, and wins. A simple way to do this is by sending a concise weekly or monthly report in a format the Boss appreciates.

✓ ASK FOR INPUT AND INVOLVE SENIOR LEADERS STRATEGICALLY

Instead of seeing executives as distant decision-makers, leaders should engage them by asking, "What's important to you in this project?" or "How can my team contribute to your goals?"

✓ FRAME CHALLENGES AS OPPORTUNITIES

Senior leaders don't want to hear just about problems; they want solutions. Leaders should present challenges alongside potential solutions, showing they are problem-solvers, not problem-bringers.

✓ BUILD TRUST THROUGH TRANSPARENCY

If things aren't going well, leaders should communicate openly and professionally—not hide issues. Senior leaders value honesty and a proactive approach.

OVERCOMING IMPOSTER SYNDROME

SUSAN JUDD

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Anita, a talented software engineer, was promoted to team lead but felt out of her depth. She doubted her leadership abilities, feared making mistakes, and constantly worried that others would see her as unqualified. Even though her manager had full confidence in her, she kept questioning whether she deserved the role.

THE HR CHALLENGE

Many new leaders experience imposter syndrome—the fear that they aren't truly qualified for their role and will be "found out." This lack of confidence can lead to hesitation, overcompensation, or an inability to make decisions.

✓ REFRAME LEADERSHIP AS LEARNING, NOT PROVING

Leaders don't need to have all the answers—they need to ask good questions, stay curious, and commit to growth. Encourage them to replace "I don't know if I can do this" with "I'm learning how to do this."

✓ CELEBRATE WINS AND GROWTH MOMENTS

Encourage new leaders to track their progress and recognise their successes, even small ones. Over time, they will see clear evidence of their competence.

✓ ENCOURAGE MENTORS AND PEER SUPPORT

Leaders who feel like imposters often believe they are the only ones struggling. Connecting them with mentors or leadership peer groups can normalise their experience and help them gain perspective.

✓ TRUST IS BUILT THROUGH ACTION

Leaders should act with confidence even when they may not feel it yet. The more they engage with leadership challenges, the more their belief in themselves will grow.

SUSAN JUDD

ENCOURAGE LEADERS TO SET BOUNDARIES

A leader who works excessive hours and constantly fixes team mistakes is not empowering their people. Teach them that their team's growth depends on their ability to step back and let others take ownership.

REFRAME LEADERSHIP AS SUSTAINABLE, NOT SACRIFICIAL

Encourage new leaders to track their progress and recognise their successes, even small ones. Over time, they will see clear evidence of their competence.

FOSTER A CULTURE OF SHARED OWNERSHIP

New leaders should involve their team in problem-solving and decision-making rather than feeling they must carry the entire burden themselves.

WORKPLACE SCENARIO

Newly promoted project manager Liam worked long hours, often stepping in to correct his team's work. His stress levels were high, and his team felt disengaged because they weren't given responsibility for their own work.

THE HR CHALLENGE

New leaders often feel like they have to be "always on" to prove themselves. However, when leaders take on too much, they set an unsustainable example for their team.

TURNING *Technical Experts* INTO *Confident Leaders*

Transitioning from a highly skilled technical role to an effective leadership position is not automatic—it requires new skills, mindset shifts, and the confidence to lead teams instead of just tasks.

As we've seen, new and emerging leaders face 12 common challenges, from letting go of technical work and developing a leadership mindset to handling conflict, managing time, and making decisions under uncertainty. These challenges can create frustration—not just for the leader, but for HR managers, business owners, and teams who depend on them to succeed.

The key to solving these issues isn't just more experience—it's structured leadership development. When organizations invest in equipping their new leaders with the right tools, coaching, and strategies, they reduce leadership bottlenecks, increase engagement, and create high-performing teams that don't rely on constant intervention.

Empower Your Leaders
& Get Your Time Back

If you're a HR Manager or Senior Leader leading an organisation with 50-500 employees, you don't have time to constantly fix leadership issues. Instead, the best investment you can make is in equipping your new leaders with the skills they need—before they struggle.

✓ **Want to stop leadership struggles before they start?**

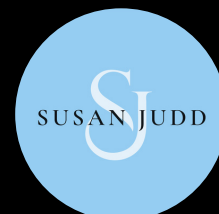✓ **Need a practical toolkit for your Emerging Leaders?**

✓ **Looking to save time by reducing leadership headaches?**

That's exactly what Susan Judd & Dare to Care is here to help with

Book a **FREE** Consultation to discuss how we can develop confident, capable leaders in your organisation.

Let's turn your technical experts into high-performing leaders—so you can focus on what really matters.

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