

Not All Managers Are Leaders — But HR Can Help Them Bridge the Gap

HR Brew | Mikaela Cohen | February 19, 2025

“Managers are there to keep things under control...Leaders are there, to change things,” author and consultant Roger Gerard tells HR Brew.



Emily Parsons

Discover the true cost of employee turnover with Express Pro’s turnover calculator. Identify the costs of separation, replacement, and productivity loss to understand the full picture of turnover.

Raise your hand if you were promoted to management without any leadership training.

Most managers have probably had this experience, according to Roger Gerard, business consultant and author of *Lead With Purpose: Reignite Passion and Engagement for Professionals in Crisis*. It’s especially troubling since becoming a manager doesn’t automatically make someone a good leader. But HR can play a strategic role in helping train managers, and employees, to become effective leaders.

Gerard shared with HR Brew more about the insights discussed in his book.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What are some HR takeaways from your book?

Leadership and management are two entirely different things, and as you begin to understand that, you begin to understand why there is a large amount of confusion in the real world of business about what the proper leadership role is. Managers are there to keep things under control. It comes from the Latin word "model," which means to "handle." Leaders are there, to change things, to improve things, to make things more effective. And, when you give somebody a managerial title and then expect them to be a leader, you create a bit of schizophrenia. It's a counter-intuitive collision, and just because you're a manager, it doesn't make you a leader, and you don't necessarily need to be a manager to be a leader.

Professionals of all levels—whether they're in management, leadership, or practicing high professions—they're feeling alienated. They're not feeling valued. And so Lead With Purpose was all about, "How do we cause professionals today to feel valued as professionals in a society that's increasingly evaluating them?"

What role does HR play in helping these professionals?

In HR, you have divided loyalties. You want to be loyal to the workplace and employees...You want to be a caretaker of the culture and make sure that people live according to a certain set of values...The other side of the divided loyalty are the business issues. In every business, there is pressure to reduce costs, improve quality, and get things done more rapidly. Every business faces those pressures, and the HR person has to balance those pressures with the pressures of being the nurturer of the culture and the caretaker of the people in that culture.

Do you have advice for how HR can balance the divided loyalty?

That question creates a dilemma, and when you read Lead With Purpose, one of the things you'll see me say is, "In today's society, we are addicted to metrics." We can create 1,000 metrics, and 1,000 things, and the more metrics we have, perhaps the less attention we're paying to what matters most. I think the metrics in HR are pretty clear. There aren't a lot of them. You don't need a lot of metrics to know what's going on.

Metric number one is turnover, people coming in and then staying for any length of time. If you're hiring people and then hiring people for the same position six months later or a year later, something's wrong. If you're bringing people into the organization and they don't stay for a period of time, we need to find out why they're not staying...The second metric that you look at is all the safety metrics, and a lot of organizations don't pay attention to this. People get hurt on the job, and that hurt can be physical harm in a manufacturing facility or in a hospital setting, or it can be a psychological hurt. It can be people feeling abused or harassed in some way. But, as you look at what's happening with people in the organization, and what they report back to you, safety becomes a matter of concern.