

How HR Can Help Managers Avoid Common Leadership Issues

HR Brew | Mikaela Cohen | May 16, 2024



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“[Leaders] are expected to provide the answers, or they expect themselves to provide the answers, but actually, answers are to be discovered together, through a series of failures,” says author Yeo Chuen Chuen.

Nobody’s perfect, amirite? Even leaders have room for improvement.

After spending years training leaders, Yeo Chuen Chuen, founder of leadership firm ACESENCE Agile Leadership, realized many face similar challenges while trying to meet business and people needs. That’s why she decided to write *Leaders People Love: The agile leader’s guide to creating great workplaces and happy employees*, published in late 2023.

Yeo shared key insights from her book with HR Brew.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What do you hope HR pros learn from your book?

When I started coaching, the more I speak to leaders, the more I realize that there are common issues...Like, number one, how do we lead with a strengths-first mindset? Meaning, when we meet people, we do not label them. Because assumptions, stereotypes, labeling, all these [things] make people feel distrusted, disempowered...How do you create buy-in alignment through leadership storytelling? So, that's another one that has come up as a very required need for leaders to increase communication effectiveness.

What are other examples of issues that leaders often share?

Leaders often lead with the mindset that they have to be the experts...They have to have all the answers...and that's why the leaders are so stressed out. Like, I have no idea where the business is [going], how it's going to look in the future, because we are seeing entire industries being destroyed...So, in a situation where they are expected to provide the answers, or they expect themselves to provide the answers, but actually answers are to be discovered together, through a series of failures.

A second one is the perceived increase in work volume. Globally, we are seeing [a] talent crunch in the aging population. We need employees with skills, but they're not ready, because let's [take]generative AI: How many experts can we really find? So, there's a mismatch right now. But for businesses to survive, to be innovative, they need to work faster...the work has become more complex. So, high in volume, high in complexity, but not enough talent to go around. So, now the leaders I work with, if they are not careful, they fall into the reactive trap...But, actually, the solution is not to only optimize and increase productivity, it has to do with the quality of thinking.

Is training managers to be better leaders HR's responsibility?

It's everybody's responsibility, not just for HR...I tend to think it's the law of attraction. I tend to attract people who are very interested to find out what the best potential looks like, so this spirit of lifelong learning becomes very strong. If we give the responsibility of growing ourselves to other people, it doesn't make sense to me...I think there are employees who still think that it is HR's job to grow the people. So then, that is coming from a blaming culture, which is not productive.

So, for HR, what I can say is training people is not only HR's problem, but it can be led by HR. But it also means for HR professionals, they have to elevate themselves to become HR business partners...and business partners, meaning they not only know or understand human resource issues, they have to understand the priorities of the business. They need to be able to talk business. That's what I mean, like understanding what the bottom lines are [and] consumer behavior.