

THE UNDERMANAGEMENT EPIDEMIC 2019

Why Is One-on-One Guidance, Support, and Coaching So Often Missing Today?



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Undermanagement can be difficult to identify. After all, everyone at work is surrounded by metrics and meetings all the time. It may seem like management is ever-present. But **what is missing in most workplaces is the human element of management:** managers providing direct reports with the guidance, direction, support and coaching that they need to succeed.

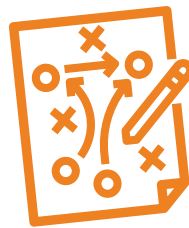
The reality is that it keeps getting harder to manage people. The vast majority of managers are still struggling to provide employees with the high-structure, high-substance coaching they need. When managers fail to provide that structured leadership, person-to-person, it exacerbates the very factors that make it hard to manage people in the first place. As a result, too many managers are stuck in a vicious cycle of undermanagement. But most don't even realize it.

The undermanagement epidemic persists. And it is hiding in plain sight in nearly every workplace.

KEY FINDING #1: IT'S GETTING HARDER TO MANAGE PEOPLE TODAY

It's always been hard to manage people. Managers have always been stuck in the middle between the employer and the employee, trying to negotiate their competing needs and expectations. But today, managers are telling us that it is harder than ever before.

Why? There are five powerful trends in the workplace today making it harder than ever to manage people:



The intensity, complexity, and pace of work is increasing for everyone, regardless of the person's role or the size of the organization.

Hiring and retention challenges mean most organizations are understaffed in key departments, placing additional pressure on employees and managers in those departments.

As organizations have removed unnecessary layers of management, the managers who are left are responsible for larger and larger teams. There is an increased likelihood that managers are responsible for employees working in remote locations, or on different schedules.

Managers are under more pressure to increase productivity and quality from their teams. Today, that means getting more work out of fewer employees, while utilizing fewer resources.

More work is handled in interdependent working relationships and cross-functional teams. Managers and their employees are responsible for managing more relationships and moving parts than ever before. Most employees are answering to short-term project leaders in addition to their primary manager.

KEY FINDING #2: MANAGERS ARE STRUGGLING IN SEVEN KEY AREAS

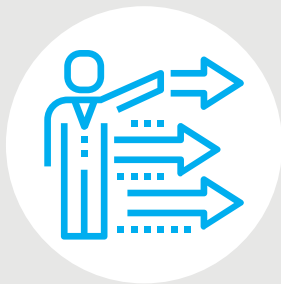
Managers are not just struggling to adapt to these larger workplace trends. There are also seven common leadership challenges managers tell us they face:

1	Delegating new tasks, responsibilities, and projects to team members
2	On-boarding and up-to-speed training for new team members
3	Providing employees with troubleshooting and feedback that is both timely and effective
4	Helping employees meet and exceed goals and deadlines
5	Recognizing and rewarding above-and-beyond performance
6	Helping employees meet work-life balance needs
7	Implementing effective performance improvement plans, particularly with low performers, and terminating those low performers resistant to improvement

THE UNDERMANAGEMENT EPIDEMIC, REVISITED

RainmakerThinking has been tracking workplace issues since 1993, basing our findings on analysis of the most recent data from our ongoing interviews, focus groups, surveys, consulting, and training sessions. These have included, to date, more than 500,000 business leaders, managers, and employees from more than 400 different organizations. Our ongoing research shows that undermanagement is a perennial issue. But what exactly is undermanagement, and why is it so persistent and pervasive?

We define undermanagement as the failure of managers, leaders, and supervisors to provide employees with regular **high-structure, high-substance** guidance, direction, support, and coaching. When managers fail to conduct regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings with every direct report, as often as necessary, they cannot ensure that employees:



- Clearly understand broad performance requirements and specific expectations for all concrete tasks, responsibilities, and projects
- Have the support, guidance, and resources necessary to meet those goals and expectations
- Have a fair and accurate record of their ongoing performance
- Receive timely performance feedback
- Are empowered to anticipate and solve problems
- Are rewarded in proportion to the performance they demonstrate, not just the numbers beyond their direct control

Since we've been tracking the issue, the data has been remarkably consistent:

Nine out of ten managers – regardless of level or industry – fail to practice leadership fundamentals regularly and consistently, falling into a state of undermanagement most or all of the time.

Most new leaders and managers in the private sector are promoted with **no significant leadership training**.

The number one challenge managers cite is time. Managers say it is very hard to make enough time to manage their people, while also meeting all of their other non-management responsibilities. In today's environment, this challenge is cited more than ever.

The irony is that, ultimately, **undermanagement is far more time consuming** than consistently practicing the fundamentals of management.

UNDERMANAGEMENT IS THE NUMBER ONE CAUSE OF PREVENTABLE PROBLEMS IN THE WORKPLACE

Customer service issues? Conflict between employees? Performance problems? Low morale?

They can all be traced to undermanagement. There are **eight direct costs** of undermanagement:

1	Unnecessary problems occur
2	Small, manageable problems escalate into bigger, less-manageable problems
3	Resources are squandered
4	People go in the wrong direction for days, weeks, or months on their basic tasks before anybody realizes it
5	Low performers hide out and collect paychecks
6	Mediocre performers start to think that they are the high performers
7	High performers get frustrated and think about leaving
8	Managers do tasks that should have been delegated to someone else

MOST MANAGERS ARE NOT OPTIMIZING THEIR MANAGEMENT TIME

Most managers already spend a lot of time managing, but they are not getting the results they and their organizations need. Why? At first glance, these managers appear to be managing, yet still see problems crop up on a regular basis.

Our research shows that while there is plenty of leadership communication going on, most of it is simply not very good. Typical methods of communication, and their associated problems, include:



Monitoring email – important information slips through the cracks



Being in meetings together – doesn't focus on individual performance



Touching base – tends toward too much non-work-related conversation



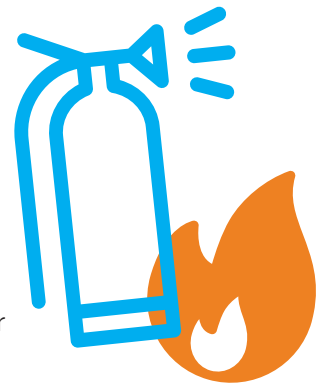
"Let me know if you need me" – invites constant interruptions

None of this is high-structure or high-substance! But this is what most management relationships look like. We call it **"managing on autopilot."** Managing on autopilot lets managers think they are managing while problems hide below the surface.

UNDERMANAGEMENT LEADS DIRECTLY TO FIREFIGHTING, THE MOST TIME-CONSUMING ACTIVITY OF ALL

Managers who are convinced they don't have time to manage almost always spend lots of time managing people anyway. That's because whenever a manager avoids spending time up front making sure things go right, then things almost always go wrong. Small problems pile up and grow until they become so big that they cannot be ignored. By that point, the manager has no choice but to chase down the problems and solve them.

These managers run around solving problems that never had to happen, getting big problems under control that should have been solved easily, recouping squandered resources, dealing with long-standing performance problems, and feeling even more pressed for time. In all likelihood, they will go right back to managing on autopilot, and the next time they'll make time for more engaged management is the next time there is another big problem to chase down and solve.



We call this **"managing in firefighting mode."** Sadly, the vast majority of managers spend an inordinate percentage of their management time in firefighting mode, solving one urgent problem after another – usually problems that could have been avoided with better planning, or identified and solved more easily at an earlier point.

As any manager will tell you, firefighting is part of the job. It's very hard to break the cycle because when there is an urgent problem, it simply must be addressed. Things do go wrong – fires occur. If you are the manager, you are in charge, which means it's up to you to lead the firefight. But it's usually difficult, time-consuming work. By the time you are done, you are way behind on all of the other work you were supposed to be doing.

WHY SO MANY MANAGERS GET CAUGHT IN THE VICIOUS CYCLE

The vast majority of managers do their managing more or less on autopilot until something goes wrong, which it almost always does. Then communication becomes more heated and urgent, which may work in the moment, but doesn't address the larger issue.

Managers tell us all the time, "Everything is going just fine. It's just that we have a lot of fires to put out and that makes it very hard to get into a good routine. Whenever you get into a good routine, pretty soon there is another fire."

What they don't realize is that they are stuck in a vicious cycle of undermanagement:



BREAK THE CYCLE: FOCUS ON THE FUNDAMENTALS

How do you break the vicious cycle of undermanagement? In nearly every one of the thousands of cases we've studied, there is a straightforward solution: a commitment to learning and practicing the fundamentals of leadership. That means regularly scheduled, high-substance, high-structure one-on-one meetings between managers and their direct reports, so that leaders can stay on top of what's happening and help their employees plan and prioritize for the best outcome.

We've been thrilled – and our clients even more so—by the tremendous impact of back-to-fundamentals training. We've watched how consistently practicing the fundamentals of management has **dramatically improved the effectiveness and bottom-line results of managers at all levels**, in organizations of all shapes and sizes:

1	Errors are identified sooner, before they get out of control
2	Resource planning improves and waste goes down
3	People follow best practices and standard operating procedures at a higher level, reducing the need for rework
4	Turnover among low performers increases
5	Unplanned turnover among average and high performers decreases
6	Productivity, quality, and employee morale increase
7	Managers improve their ability to delegate tasks and responsibilities appropriately

Beyond these specific improvements, the overall culture of the organization is lifted up. Relationships between managers and their direct reports are grounded in real support and coaching. When employees know that their manager is committed to a high-substance, high-structure relationship, they know they can rely on them for the guidance and direction they need to be their best at work. When they see the boss coming to talk with them, it's not only because something's broken or something's on fire. When a highly-engaged leader communicates with their employees, it's to help them succeed.

Does your organization suffer from an epidemic of undermanagement? Your leaders could benefit from **RainmakerThinking's** back-to-fundamentals approach.


First, we change managers' thinking by debunking the most common management myths that prevent leaders from giving employees what they need. Then, we provide a step-by-step guide with actionable tools and techniques that really work.

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE](#)

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