



IMPERATIVE

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE

MANAGER-TO-MANAGER COACHING

Leverage the power of peer coaching to help people managers thrive and develop the leaders of the future.

INTRODUCTION

Managers face increasingly complex challenges as the workplace and world changes. Given the outsized impact of managers on organizations, it is an imperative to find a solution that develops and supports them. That solution has been elusive until now.

Breakthroughs in technology and neuroscience have enabled a new solution to emerge which will finally meet the need.

Sustained manager-to-manager peer coaching is now being used by companies from Zillow to Boston Scientific to empower managers to support and learn from each other. It is driving behavior change, creating coaching cultures and making sure every manager has the support and development they deserve.



OVERVIEW

- The Evolving Role of Managers in the New Workplace
- Why Traditional Manager Development Falls Short
- The Breakthrough: Manager-to-Manager Coaching
- Building a Manager-to-Manager Coaching Program
- Peer Coaching vs. Mentoring
- Case Study: Zillow

It's such an outstanding gift from our employer to not only be given the opportunity, but really encouraged to engage and connect with our peers. A great testament to our culture, development and how committed our senior leadership and executive team are to really reinforcing our value behaviors. Companies often talk about how they want their culture to be, but neglect the opportunity to invest in the infrastructure to make that possible.

Manager, Manufacturing



“As more organizations build remote or hybrid work into their long-term strategies, the very role of the manager is being redefined.”²



29% of L&D leaders report managers can effectively lead remote/virtual teams³

Managers are the unsung heroes of the business world.

They’re “the quietly diligent ones who sharpen, modify and turn a conceptual high-level strategy into something truly brilliant,” the dean of a top business school declared¹. It is our managers who define our culture and the experience and growth of the majority of employees. And, they are our pipeline to executive leadership.

With every passing year, **the role of a manager is becoming more challenging**. The speed of change, evolving technology, and a chaotic outside world all directly impact managers and what we expect from them.

*Many of us grew up with this mental model of what a manager is from our parents, which was, ‘Oh, they just give the orders.’ **Now, you’re a mentor, you’re a coach, you have to set vision and strategy and give feedback. There’s just so many things for managers to do, and that’s complex.***



CORINA KOLBE

VP of Learning and Development

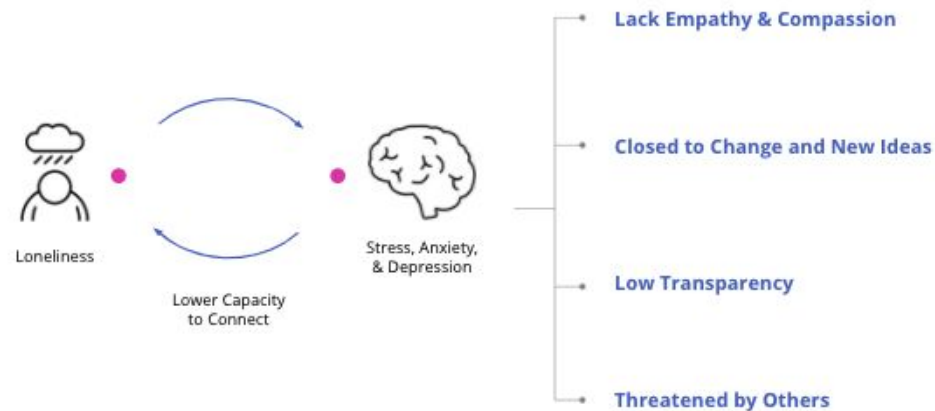




61% of Americans reported being lonely before the pandemic.⁵

What amplifies this challenge is **the isolation managers experience**. “The loneliest place of all may be middle management,” a study⁴ found. With pressures coming at them from both above and below, managers constantly have to manage up as well as down, and feel they have nowhere to turn for support that feels safe and accessible.

The loneliness this isolation creates has a well documented, negative impact on people’s mindsets. **Loneliness leads to stress, anxiety, and depression**. When we are in that state, it’s harder to connect with other people -- which then just makes us more isolated.



Loneliness has a direct impact on how managers show up for their teams. They are less empathetic and compassionate. They are more likely to be closed to new ideas and change. They start to operate out of a scarcity mindset. Fear then causes them to feel threatened by others; they stop being transparent and authentic.

Addressing this vicious cycle is an imperative for any organization.

The impact? Not only are managers the most likely to be unhappy at work⁶, but **this problem causes turnover, lost team productivity, stagnation, and difficulty attracting top talent.** And as we all know now, Gallup⁷ has demonstrated that “one in two employees have left a job to get away from a manager.”

WHERE TRADITIONAL MANAGER DEVELOPMENT FALLS SHORT

Companies keep applying the same solution and expecting a different result.

Companies invest millions of dollars per year training and supporting managers. They use online learning, instructor-led training, assessments, coaching, and 360 feedback. All of these have value, but they don't ultimately make the impact organizations need.

These programs fall short of their desired impact for three core reasons.

- 1 They don't create regular space for reflection.**

The skills managers need are mostly human skills, not technical skills. Human skills are primarily developed through building self-awareness and reflecting on recent experiences. Managers have challenges and learning opportunities every day—these are the moments learning and support must be built around.

2 They don't address the psychological and emotional side of management.

The hardest parts of being a manager are emotional and psychological. They are about our identity, our relationships, and our fears. To grow to be a great manager you need a very safe and consistent place to process your experience, normalize it, and gain courage to move forward.

3 They don't address the social isolation at the root of the issue.

Coaches and trainers don't build strong, ongoing, two-way relationships that managers need to thrive and maintain the right mindset. Managers need consistent, positive, and vulnerable relationships with high levels of empathy.



MANAGER-TO-MANAGER COACHING HARNESSES THE POWER OF PEERS

Science, technology, and greater appreciation for psychology have enabled a breakthrough in the field.

Unlike mentoring or traditional coaching, peer coaching brings together two people at the same level in an organization's hierarchy to engage in a thoughtful, meaningful, effective, and action-oriented conversation. Neither person is the "teacher" or "student." Instead, through Imperative's guided prompts and structured format, participants *help each other process their biggest challenges and find their own solutions.*

1

Peer coaching creates regular space for reflection.

In peer coaching conversations, managers are able to take a step back from their work to reflect on their experiences and challenges. Research has found that time spent reflecting leads to a 19% jump in someone's likelihood to be a top performer.⁸

Because my peer coach was another manager, I was able to share work experiences with someone who gets it, which was incredibly helpful. We never get the chance to reflect as managers. Peer coaching gave me the space to do that while also building a new trusted peer relationship in the organization.

Manager, Operations



2 Peer coaching addresses the psychological and emotional side of management.

Managers support each other in processing the emotional rollercoaster of people management, normalize their challenges, and help them remain positive and constructive.

“It allowed us to express how we feel about things. We were able to be frustrated together, and I think that’s valuable. I think sometimes we over-index towards action in work. And I think it’s just as important to know when *not* to take action, especially when it’s an emotional thing. Sometimes just naming it and sitting in it for a second, resolves it enough to let you move on.”

Manager, Sales



3 Peer coaching addresses the social isolation which is at the root of the issue.

Managers engage in consistent, positive, and vulnerable conversations - the three ingredients of meaningful connection.⁹ Research⁷ shows that these relationships are often even more important than the nature of the work itself in helping people feel job satisfaction¹⁰.

“It was really helpful to have someone that’s at the same level going through similar career developments, challenges, and having those conversations on what we’re trying to do and bouncing it back and forth off each other. It made me realize I’m not alone.”

Manager, Engineering



PEER COACHING VS. MENTORING

Peer coaching is fundamentally different from mentoring. **Mentoring is about knowledge transfer.** Someone has knowledge to impart to someone else. **Peer coaching is built based on process and isn't dependent on knowledge.** The value comes from going through a process with another human being. It's about validating and activating knowledge about yourself.

Peer coaching enables everyone in an organization to engage in social learning. Peer coaching doesn't require screening for knowledge and mentoring skills nor is it limited by a scarcity of people with specific knowledge or experience. Lastly, it doesn't reinforce hierarchy and dependence on senior employees.



MENTORING



PEER
COACHING

CULTIVATING CRITICAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS

Managers need different support at each stage in their development. Peer coaching is the throughline that supports them as they reinforce and apply basic functional management skills, create space to put their work in context, learn how to influence diverse stakeholders, and become leaders as they align their work and lives with their purpose.

APPLYING MANAGER-TO-MANAGER COACHING
BY DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE



What's difficult with leadership programs is just that they're just massive. And you do the program for five or eight hours or whatever, and you go home, and you apply one or two things. By the end of the second week, it's like it's in your rearview mirror. Imperative helps you continue to apply what you learn over time so you really make the most of it.



Manager, Operations

BUILDING A LEARNING AND SUPPORT NETWORK

Build a community of practice for managers that not only shares best practices but provides the emotional support unique to their situation.

On Imperative, managers are matched with another peer coaching partner every quarter for five guided one-hour coaching conversations over video. **Over the course of a year, they are matched with four other managers, creating a trusted network of peers.**

In one year, an organization with 1,000 managers will create 4,000 meaningful relationships through peer coaching.

These meaningful relationships provide different perspectives and support. Managers can pull insights from people with different experiences and overcome silos and biases.

“In this virtual world that we all have transitioned to, it felt like a way to create intimacy, trust and build deeper relationships between colleagues. This isn’t just about individual growth. This is about strengthening the fabric of an organization and its workforce.”



Manager, Finance

With support from their peers, managers can address almost every challenge.

As managers build their learning and support network they become less dependent on human resources and hierarchy and turn to each other for support. **The network becomes a self-sustaining living and breathing organism.**

It's very interesting - when you're not talking to someone who directly either reports to you or who you report to, how freely one can speak. You can almost freeform think. We combine to put something together that's really gold.



Manager, Zillow

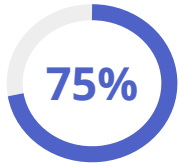
FOSTERING A COACHING CULTURE

Employers increasingly seek to build coaching cultures, where everyone is skilled at bringing out the best in each other. In a coaching culture, the core skills of a professional coach are developed in every employee.

Coaching skills are critical to the scalability of our company. It's key to us being able to hire all the people we need, develop them, and so on. Being a coach is a big focus at Zillow. Peer coaching has been phenomenal, because it puts into practice all the coaching skills we teach.

CORINA KOLBE

VP of Learning and Development at Zillow



75% of companies expect all their managers to coach direct reports.⁸

A coaching culture doesn't require certified coaches.

Coaching cultures are distinct from others because they exhibit these behaviors:

- **Employees are appreciated and valued** based on their potential and **unique experiences and perspectives**. They hold each other accountable for realizing their potential.
- People **refrain from giving advice** and solving other people's problems. Instead they help their colleagues **solve their own challenges** and offer empathetic stories to spark ideas.
- There is a **natural curiosity** to learn about each other. Conversations use open ended questions that allow people to explore and be creative.
- **Employees own their own fulfillment and success.**

Employers typically build a coaching culture by using paid coaches and by training managers on coaching skills. Peer coaching provides a more effective and organic model.

This is an opportunity where you have to sit and listen and the only way to really help this other individual is by asking questions. So that's a skill that some people don't utilize all the time. But this platform gives you that perfect way to do that where they listen and you listen. And then you're like, 'That really worked' as opposed to just always trying to be a direct manager... which I think people tend to do that, they tend to lean on the direct side and just tell people what to do.



Manager, Retail

Unlike traditional coaching, peer coaching quickly builds coaching skills that can be applied with direct reports.

Managers on the Imperative peer coaching platform require no training to begin coaching. The platform teaches them as they engage in coaching with another manager. They receive coaching questions, follow up questions, and tips in real time so they can operate as an effective coach within minutes. As they do more and more sessions, they start to build coaching skills through practice. These skills then begin to be applied in all their conversations with their teams, across the organization, and even at home with their families.

We have weekly manager calls for our region and I noticed that the environment overall on these calls was a lot more relaxed. And we were all able to really share our thoughts and we began even messaging each other, slacking each other, whenever there were challenges.



Manager, Manufacturing

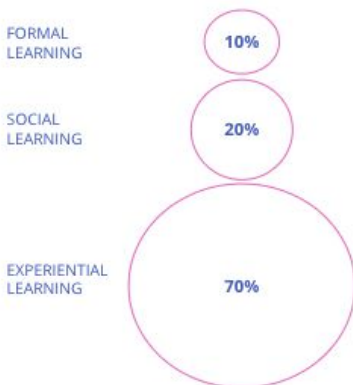
HOW MANAGERS FEEL BEFORE AND AFTER A PEER COACHING CONVERSATION



SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY DRIVES ACTION

We know that 10% of learning is from the classroom (online or offline), 20% is from social learning and 70% is from experiential learning.⁹ **Building off formal learning, peer coaching on Imperative operates at the intersection of social and experiential learning.**

Managers engage in social learning through their peer coaching conversations. At the end of each conversation, they each pledge one action to their partner. They coach each other to identify an imperative action that they believe will impact their success. They then commit to doing it before their next coaching conversation in two weeks.



By completing the committed action, their imperative, they engage in experiential learning. **They are learning by doing in the flow of their work.**

Peer coaching enables mass personalization -- meeting managers where they are that day.

They complete the cycle at their next conversation with their peer coaching partner. At the start of the follow up conversation they check in with each other on their commitments. **Due largely to social accountability, peer coaches report 80% of their pledged actions are completed.** The managers then debrief their experiential learning experience to reflect on what they learned.

91% of the time, managers report the actions they completed had a direct impact on their success.

What peer coaching does is meet people where they are. It is incredibly powerful as a way to foster connection and is a lovely way to create a scalable solution for us, offering connection and providing growth to our managers.

CODE *for*
AMERICA

ZERYN SARPANGAL
Chief Financial & People Officer



im·per·a·tive

/ə'm'perədiv/

Noun: an essential thing.

WHAT'S YOUR IMPERATIVE?

So much of our time is spent on work that doesn't make an impact. We often feel like we are on autopilot, just responding to stimuli. Being busy isn't the same as being effective or productive or fulfilled.

At the end of each peer coaching conversation, managers identify their ONE imperative to complete before the next conversation. They prioritize what truly matters.

This is the most important coaching question.

POWERING PEER COACHING WITH PURPOSE

Imperative uses the science of purpose to inspire managers and to tap intrinsic motivation to drive change.

Peer coaching is an essential part of building a sense of meaning and purpose at work. That's because purpose is not as simple as a company's mission statement. Instead, it's unique to every individual.

Imperative co-founder Aaron Hurst, author of *The Purpose Economy*, explains that everyone has *purpose drivers*. **We're all "wired" to feel a sense of purpose based on whom we impact, why we work, and how we lead.** These drivers typically don't change as people switch jobs or roles. They're more like a personal "North Star."

The Imperative platform is designed to help each manager identify their purpose drivers and connect the drivers to their work. This creates more productive workers and more successful organizations. A McKinsey study found that of 100 variables, purpose has the greatest impact on employee motivation -- even more than compensation. And working with Imperative, LinkedIn found that their purpose-oriented employees are:

- 54% more likely to stay at a company for 5-plus years
- 30% more likely to be high performers
- 69% more likely to be promoters on the eNPS scale measuring engagement and loyalty¹¹

Personal purpose helps me strive to be better, to be the best supervisor that I can be.



Manager, Retail

When managers specifically connect with their sense of purpose, the benefits amplify throughout the organization. Imperative research has found that employees at all levels are far more likely to report feeling fulfilled when they perceive that their manager has a purpose mindset and sees work as being about more than money and status. They're also more likely to remain at a company for ten years, and become net promoters on the eNPS scale -- far ahead of their counterparts.¹²



Imperative's purpose profile articulated my purpose better than I've ever been able to do.

Manager, Finance

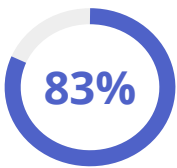
IMPACT OF PERCEPTION OF MANAGER MINDSET

MANAGER PERCEIVED TO HAVE PURPOSE MINDSET		MANAGER PERCEIVED TO NOT HAVE PURPOSE MINDSET
66%	FULFILLED	28%
30%	10+ YEAR EXPECTED TENURE	20%
+10	eNPS	-50

EASY TO IMPLEMENT AND SCALE

Imperative's SaaS platform makes it easy to launch and manage peer coaching at scale. With wrap-around support, it's a complete solution for your manager development team.

- Dynamic peer matching
- Purpose profile
- Embedded personalized guides
- Conversation scheduling
- Action setting and tracking
- Analytics



83% of Imperative actions that are pledged are completed.

Manager-to-manager coaching with Imperative is also designed to easily add on to existing programs and events, making it hassle-free. It is typically introduced to managers as part of an existing manager training program to amplify and apply the learning. From there, managers are launched into the learning and support network on Imperative.

We were just paired wonderfully. Our conversations are informative, insightful, emotional, and productive.

Manager, Customer Service



PEER COACHING ON IMPERATIVE



1 HOUR

Online, guided,
meaningful 1:1 peer
conversations



4 QUESTIONS

Peers answer four
coaching questions
per conversation.



5 SESSIONS

Pairs meet for 5
conversations
(every 2 weeks)



4 PARTNERS

Switch partners
every quarter

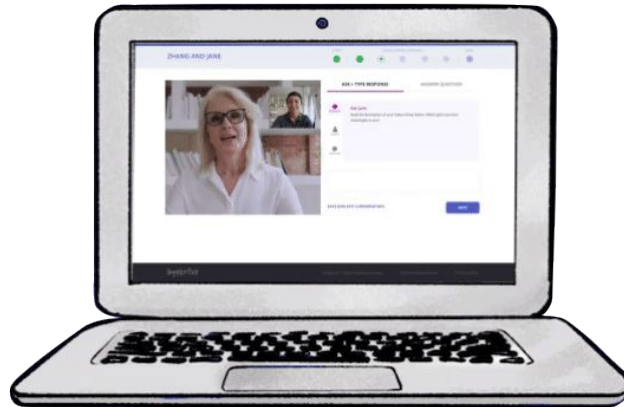
People think it has to be more complicated to work as well as this does. Peer coaching is so simple and just works.

**Boston
Scientific**

KARI MURPHY
Director of HR



Each quarter, Imperative organizes kickoff events in which peer coaches meet their new partners. This creates energy to maintain high engagement.



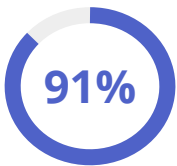
HOW HELPFUL WAS YOUR CONVERSATION?



Seeing this data is so encouraging and really is significant. There's such good evidence here and it's really exciting to see.



BRIAN GRIFFITH
Executive Chairman



Managers report that 91% of the pledged actions they complete through peer coaching impact their success.

Imperative provides **data and analytics** each step of the way so leaders can see the impact peer coaching is having on the organization. What is the current fulfillment level of your employees? What are their intrinsic motivations? What types of actions are they taking? How many new meaningful relationships have been formed? These figures and more provide **not only the insights to recognize the ROI, but also anonymous, aggregated insights about your people and culture.** This builds ongoing executive buy-in, reinforcing the value.

Peer coaching on Imperative is the solution to help managers tackle their challenges, so they can develop into the best leaders – and human beings – they can be.



MANAGER-TO-MANAGER CASE STUDY

Managers define the culture, experience, and performance of their teams. But now, they're also facing extreme complexity and increased challenges. Zillow leadership identified four areas where managers working from home needed additional support and training:

Cultural Consistency. Zillow created a Leadership Blueprint to define the expectation of managers leading teams. How do you promote consistent values adoption to create a common experience for all employees?

Zillow linked the Leadership Blueprint to the peer coaching conversations to bring them to life and enable managers to support each other in living them.

Human Skill Development. Managing remote teams requires exceptional human skills, from listening to goal-setting, to feedback, to conflict resolution. How do you create a social and experiential learning program to continuously develop these skills?

Zillow connected peer coaching to their core manager training programs to increase the adoption of the skills needed to effectively lead virtual teams.





I'll tell you what I found was valuable, which was the ability to connect one-on-one in a candid way with a peer that was remote from me. They're not somebody I work with every day or interact with directly. But we're both Zillow so we had this baseline of shared experience. The distance freed us up to be quite candid. That was awesome.

Manager, Zillow





Inclusion. Zillow has a diverse workforce and it was a priority to proactively consider the positive and negative impact of work from home on inclusion. How do you build an inclusive, virtual workplace?



Peer coaching conversations on Imperative were designed to match managers with four other managers each year to build strong relationships across the organization while developing empathy and understanding for different experiences.

Wellbeing. Social isolation directly impacts the wellbeing of people working from home and can have a large impact on physical and mental health. How do you not only help managers care for themselves but also for their teams?



Zillow used peer coaching to prevent social isolation and enable managers to identify personal goals to care for themselves, in addition to supporting the wellbeing of their teams.

After having peer coaching conversations, employees reported having more trusting relationships, powerful conversations, increasing their engagement and role clarity, owning their personal career growth, and building their active listening skills.

Overwhelmingly, employees reported a desire to continue peer coaching, as it is a “time multiplier” in their week.

Now my peer coach is a great friend of mine. Every time I have a question I call him, and he calls me. This came out only because of the platform. Otherwise I wouldn't talk to him much, and now we are really close friends.

Manager, Finance

SOURCES

¹[Unsung Heroes - Christoph Lock Dean](#)

²[How Remote Work is Creating a New Role for Managers - HR Executive.com](#)

³[The Massive and Rapid Shift to Remote Work - i4CP](#)

⁴[University of Western Sydney Study - Dr. Melissa Parris](#)

⁵[Combating Loneliness Study - Cigna](#)

⁶[Why Middle Managers Are So Unhappy - Jack Zenger](#)

⁷[Gallup's State of the American Manager report - Gallup](#)

⁸[Making Experience Count: The Role of Reflection in Individual Learning - Harvard Business School](#)

⁹[The Business of Friendship - Shasta Nelson](#)

¹⁰[Social Relationships Matter in Job Satisfaction - APA](#)

¹¹[Purpose Trumps Cash - Imperative](#)

¹²[Workforce Purpose Index - Imperative](#)