

Bradford's Exchange

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The Leverage of Frontline Managers

ECIA member companies range in size from less than 10 employees to over 100,000. What they all have in common is the authorized sale of electronic components. What they all want to do is sell *more* electronic components! How can companies ensure that those 10 or 100,000 employees are selling as effectively as possible? On which employees should companies put their focus and investment? There is a strong argument that significant leverage exists by investing in frontline managers. Roughly 50-60% of a company's managers are frontline managers, supervising individual contributors (or sales reps in a sales organization) and these frontline managers oversee up to 80% of a company's workforce ([HBR May 2011](#)).

Eighty percent! Companies rely on frontline managers to make sure 80% of the workforce is working effectively toward the company objectives. And further, according to [Gallup \(2015\)](#), managers account for 70% of employee engagement. Therefore, the greatest factor by far, of a company's workforce engagement, is not the CEO, is not the company's vision, is not the compelling nature of the company's products. It is the manager. The frontline manager. For 80% of the workforce.

Given that statistic, companies should be highly focused on ensuring they have the right people in these important managerial roles. In the same research, Gallup found that only 10% of people have a high level of management capability. These 10% are skilled at engaging both customers and employees, retaining top talent and sustaining high performing cultures.

An additional 20% of people have some management capability, that can be bolstered by coaching and development. This is a critical area of investment, that is overlooked or under resourced by many companies, despite the ability to triple the number of effective managers in their workforces.

According to [Forbes \(2018\)](#), engagement is the emotional attachment of the employee to the company and its goals. Effective frontline managers enhance employee engagement by providing career growth, recognition, and trust. [Towers Watson \(2009\)](#) indicated that recognition of employee performance by the manager can increase engagement by almost 60%.

Frontline sales managers often wear two hats: "Closers" who visit customers with sales reps to advance the sale, and "Managers" who direct, coach, mentor and develop sales reps to be more effective in selling. What powerful faces of the company are they!

With this high degree of influence, it is so important that they affiliate with senior management. They should be champions for the vision and goals of the executive leadership team. Many frontline managers, however, see themselves as "We" and the executive team as "They". Only by affiliating themselves with company leadership and realizing that "We are They", can they provide credibility of the company's direction to their employees and their customers.

ECIA provides several development opportunities for managers. The relationships built and strengthened through our various events and committees can forge mentorships and idea sharing, while building leadership skills. Educational events such as our Executive Conference or frequent webinars provide timely insights into best management practices. As an example, on March 29 ECIA will be hosting a webinar by Skip Weisman, on Creating A Championship Company Culture (please fill out [this survey](#) to help Skip customize his messaging!)

By investing in and strengthening the skills of frontline managers, through coaching and developing, and working to ensure they are aligned with senior management and company strategy, companies can dramatically enhance their productivity through better leadership of the 80% of company employees that are on the frontline.