



Professional &
Executive Development
HARVARD DIVISION OF
CONTINUING EDUCATION



Improving Leadership Skills for Emerging Leaders

Strengthening management and strategy skills is key for emerging leaders who need to thrive in today's fast-changing world.

By [Melissa Russell](#)

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How do you become a manager others want to follow?

People have pursued the answer for thousands of years.

Jon Fay explains that troops followed Alexander the Great because he created the sense that he was invincible., No matter what outlandish thing he asked his soldiers to do, if they stuck with him, he convinced them that they would be victorious.

Now, history-changing strategic leaders are few and far between. But leading has always been about influencing and motivating people to come along with you on a journey.

“You can go back thousands of years and people go through the same transitions,” Fay says. “You have to master your skills. You have to master your team. You have to master the business or the organization, and then at some point, you take it to the next level.”

Laurie Pascal sees it this way: “If you don’t have the people, nothing happens.”

Both Fay and Pascal teach leadership courses at Harvard’s Division of Continuing Education Professional & Executive Programs.

Meet Our Experts

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[Learn more about Jon](#)



[Learn more about Laurie](#)

“Leadership is a lifelong journey, an opportunity to continuously grow and learn and improve and become more effective,” Pascal says “Leading one group of people is not exactly the same as leading another group of people. The basic tools are the same, but understanding the environment, the culture, and the nuances of what it takes to move in and move up are key.”

In today’s rapidly evolving business landscape, leaders must inspire, engage, and leverage technology to build team cohesion and connection. Professionals who want to grow into effective leaders must also develop core management skills to drive organizational goals, foster innovation, build trust, and adapt to change.

Just as in ancient times, those who master these skills can achieve long-term organizational success.

Core Management Skills for Emerging Leaders

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wielding authority — they are
g decisions. Leaders must ensure
ectives, encourage creative

thinking and problem-solving, recognize uncertainties and challenges, and adapt to change.

Leadership development skills

Communication and negotiation

Strategic thinking and decision-making

Emotional intelligence

Adaptability and managing change

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These essential skills enable leaders to share ideas clearly, listen actively, make informed decisions, build strong and collaborative relationships, identify challenges, and adjust strategies in response to changing circumstances and in alignment with organizational goals.

Developing communication and negotiation skills

Clear and effective communication as a manager is essential for effective leadership. Leaders must articulate vision and strategy to inspire and foster collaboration and to ensure goals and expectations are understood by everyone.

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depend on:

Clarity and precision: Ensuring messages are clear and easily understood

Active listening: Paying attention to verbal and nonverbal cues

Adaptability: Tailoring communication styles to different audiences and situations

Empathy: Understanding the perspectives of others

Persuasiveness: Influencing others to take action

Explore Communication programs

The importance of negotiation skills for managers is equal to those of communication skills. Leaders must develop the ability to negotiate effectively for conflict resolution, employing effective communication skills to establish trust and articulate the benefits of a particular stance or proposal.

The 4 stages of negotiation:

1. **Preparation:** Understanding your goals and the goals of the other party
2. **Opening:** Clearly expressing your objectives and listening to others' goals and concerns
3. **Bargaining:** Exploring possible solutions and finding compromise

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nsuring it is clear and

Effective leaders apply negotiation skills to identify and reframe conflict in terms of shared goals.

Improving strategic thinking and decision-making

Effective management is about more than solving problems. It is about anticipating what is on the horizon and what subsequent impacts and opportunities may be. The ability to think strategically with long-term vision is crucial for solving complex problems.

Strategic thinking involves analyzing complex situations, examining differing viewpoints, and anticipating a variety of challenges. Good leaders with well-developed strategic thinking, according to Pascal, can separate the critical and urgent from the merely important.

“Scanning the environment is a strategic skill,” she says. “What’s going on in the outside universe and the inside universe that is going to make a difference and allow you to be effective? What do you have to shift in how you’re viewing the world or in what actions you are taking to be more effective?”

Fay says strategic thinking is intuitive — a mindset more than a hard skill.

“The more you work up business leadership, you have to start looking at multidimensional problems,” he says. “You have to fuse intuitive, analytical thinking and deal with numbers and people at the same time. That’s what’s hard about real strategic leadership: It is a multi-dimensional challenge.”

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g skills by allocating time for
perceptions, and staying informed

The ability to see the big picture and anticipate future challenges is key to informed decision making. Developing strategic thinking will help managers build trust and make confident decisions.

The importance of emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is simply the recognition of the feelings and motivations of others and using that understanding to adapt to different situations and circumstances. It plays a significant role in enhancing productivity in the workplace.

An empathetic leader who notices when a team member is stressed and offers support encourages a positive workplace culture and enhances collaboration. Improving emotional intelligence involves understanding personal strengths and weaknesses, understanding non-verbal skills, and improving communication skills.

Qualities of emotional intelligence

Self-awareness: Recognizing one's own emotions to direct responses to others.

Self-regulation: Maintaining professionalism in challenging circumstances.

Motivation: Driving leaders to achieve goals.

Empathy: How leaders connect with colleagues, foster strong relationships and collaboration, and boost teamwork.

Social skills: How one interacts with others.

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According to the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Survey 2025, "Emotional intelligence is projected to be among the top skills required in the business world. It is essential to successful workplace dynamics."

Managing organizational change

In this uncertain world, change is a given and can make or break a company. Leaders must articulate their vision, inspire participation, and guide their team through tumultuous and stressful events. Successful leaders also need to improve communication and decision-making skills to be successful in times of change, both expected and unexpected.

How to manage organizational change

Recognize the change: Take time to understand what is going on

Communicate accurately: Make sure everyone understands what is going on and how they can move effectively through the change

Lead with introspection: Recognize change can be difficult and help others navigate the change

Register for [Strategies for Leading Successful Change Initiatives](#)

Harvard Division of Continuing Education's Professional & Executive Development program, [Essential Management Skills](#), teaches actionable

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, including creating leadership opportunities, and drive long-term

How Emerging Leaders Can Improve Their Management Skills

To identify needed leadership development skills, explore the variety of tools and resources available to learn more about yourself how to achieve your goals.

Tools & Resources

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Self-assessment tools: The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, DiSC Personality Assessment, and Emotional Intelligence assessments help to understand strengths, weaknesses, and leadership style — and will help managers with goal setting.

Leadership development programs: Training programs offering courses in communication, decision-making, and team building, such as the Professional & Executive Development program Essential Management Skills, provide specific knowledge and practical insights into effective leadership practices.

Feedback tools: Seek feedback from peers, team members, and mentors through anonymous surveys or Google Forms.

Networking and mentorship: Investigate professional organizations to learn from experienced leaders, attend networking events, and engage in mentor relationships to seek advice and gain knowledge.

Time management tools: Practice prioritizing tasks using time-blocking and task-tracking tools to stay organized and focused.

Books and podcasts: Dedicate time each week to reading or listening to leadership-focused content.

Assess your leadership style

Assess your strengths and weaknesses

Leadership starts with self-awareness. An honest appraisal of one's strengths and

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development and improvement

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When weighing one's own strengths and weaknesses, Pascal says, "Begin by asking, to what degree do we manage ourselves effectively or engage in relationships effectively? Where are we relatively strong with well-developed skills, and where do we go? What are opportunities for improvement? Where do you want to be? Where do you need to be spending time?"

Harvard's week-long [Essential Management Skills for Emerging Leaders](#) was created with the understanding that self-reflection is the first step to improvement. That's why the program begins with a self-assessment that will set you on the path toward uncovering your strengths and upskilling emotional intelligence, improving negotiation and presentation skills, and creating an action plan to implement your leadership goals.

Develop an improvement action plan

Once you have assessed your strengths and weaknesses, map a plan for targeted improvement to boost your strengths and fill in gaps in experience and skills.

This may include taking management courses, either online or in person, seeking feedback from others, and building and maintaining a [network](#) for coaching, support, and guidance that will connect you to potential mentors and to organizations where you can continue to pursue personal growth and success.

Embrace lifelong learning

Leadership is a journey, and the best way to remain relevant is to be a lifelong learner. Leaders who regularly update their skills and knowledge become models for fellow team members, encouraging them to continue to grow professionally and personally.

Pascal says, "The idea of continuous learning and continuous development and continually trying is an important trait of leaders. Organizations that are continuous learning organizations tend to be more effective than those that

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participate in courses or workshops that
keep you up-to-date by reading books

and industry blogs, and listening to podcasts on the latest market trends, strategies and technologies to keep skills relevant and adaptable.

Discover Harvard's Essential Management Skills for Emerging Leaders Program

Harvard DCE's Professional & Executive Development program Essential Management Skills for Emerging Leaders helps new managers quickly acquire the skills needed to lead. Through engaging lectures, case studies and interactive exercises taught by cross-functional instructors, students gain mastery of core business concepts and skills needed to develop leadership needed in today's organizations.

Pascal says, "One of the things that DCE does well is bring in people who have done it. They have the advantage of real world experience. That's one of the key values of coming to this kind of learning opportunity, learning from everyone." Finding your style as a leader can be intimidating. Harvard's Professional & Executive Development instructors will help you identify your communication style, communicate as a manager, improve your interpersonal skills, hone your personal leadership style, and create an action plan for implementing it.

Explore all Harvard Professional &
Executive Development programs



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Feb 24, 2025

Blog

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About the Author

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Melissa Russell is an award-winning journalist and editor living in the Boston area. She has written for many news outlets as well as for websites, trade publications and other platforms.

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