

Schachter Monthly

By Ephraim Schachter • Apr 05, 2022

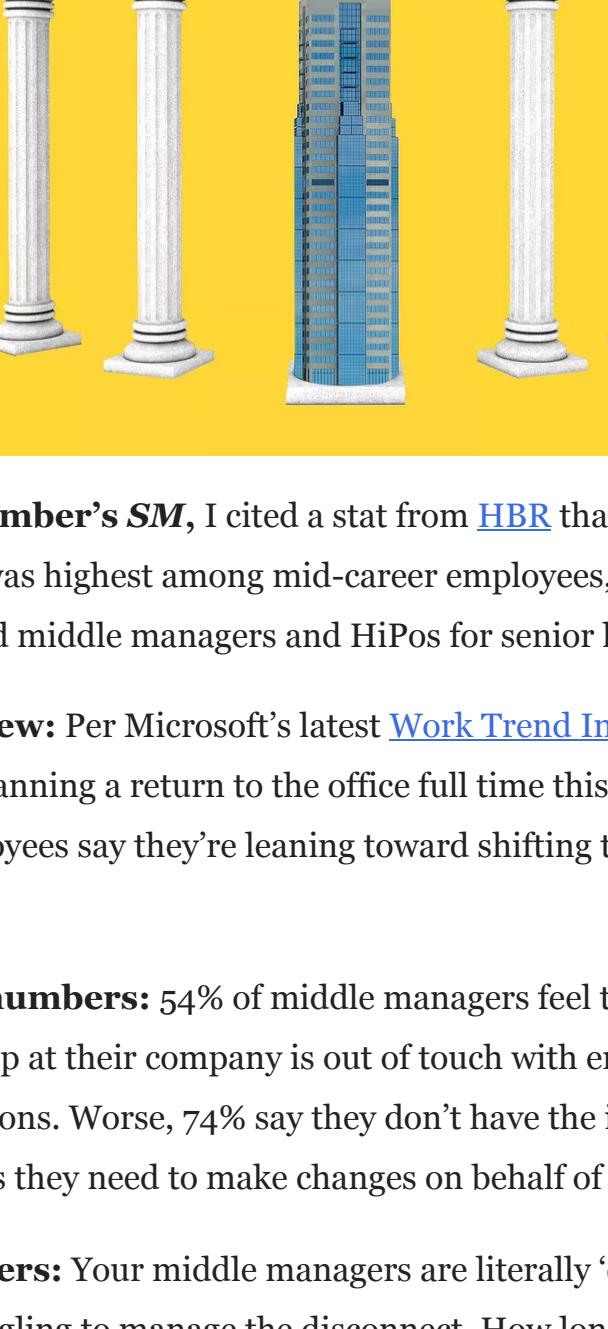
Smart Brevity™ count: 4.5 mins... 1184 words

🕒 **Happy April** to my senior leaders in Business, HR, Academia and Nonprofits! Here are this month's insights and actionable tools & tips.

🕒 **Situational awareness:** It's *back to the office* in earnest for many. This issue plumbs that topic.

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1 big thing: Leaders are needed back in the office



⚡ **What's new:** With the pandemic receding, organizations are laboring to formulate hybrid and remote policies and practices going forward. While optimizing for productivity and humanity for most of the workforce favors flexibility, senior leaders are needed back in the office.

- **Why it matters:** For the past two years, your workers have delivered on agility, strength and courage. It's time to provide them some well-earned relief.

✓ **Visibility of senior leaders signals stability**, calm and confidence best, say hundreds of participants in my Executive Presence seminars.

- People want to be well-led.

📘 **Case in point:** President Zelensky and Kyiv Mayor Klitschko of Ukraine. Contrast their visual presence in the seat of government and on the street with last year's abdication of Afghanistan's Ghani.

- (Btw, charities supporting the Ukraine relief effort, [here](#))

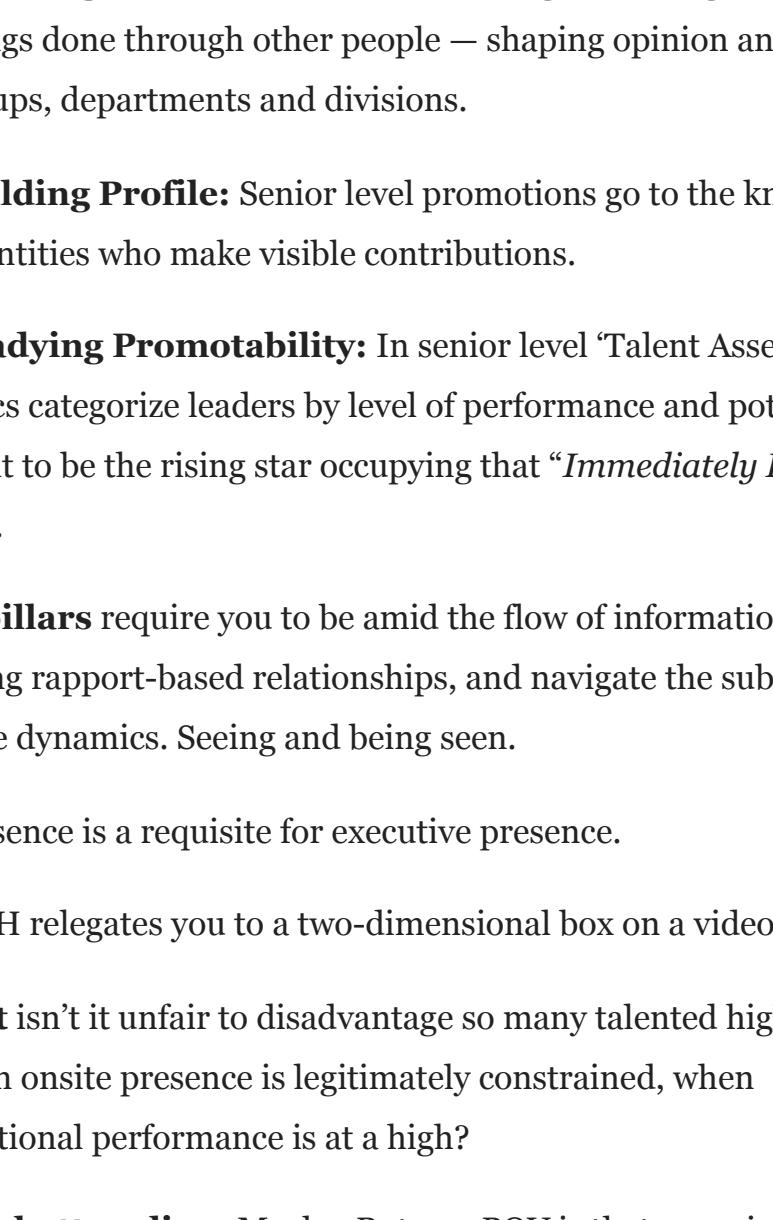
Large ships need deep rudders. With the [U.S. workforce expanding](#) for fifteen consecutive months, it's likely a significant number of your recent hires have never even imprinted on executive leadership.

- There was a grace period ... but, it's expired.

This doesn't require you to be onsite five days per week. You're in the best position to judge the appropriate intensity.

- Err on the side of physical presence. You're needed.

2. The center is still cracking



In last November's SM, I cited a stat from [HBR](#) that The Great Resignation was highest among mid-career employees, including your 40-45 year old middle managers and HiPos for senior leadership roles.

🔥 **What's new:** Per Microsoft's latest [Work Trend Index](#), many senior leaders are planning a return to the office full time this year while rank and file employees say they're leaning toward shifting to hybrid or remote work.

- **By the numbers:** 54% of middle managers feel that senior leadership at their company is out of touch with employee expectations. Worse, 74% say they don't have the influence or resources they need to make changes on behalf of their team.

Why it matters: Your middle managers are literally 'caught in the middle,' struggling to manage the disconnect. How long will they last?

- ⚠️ **Jumping ship is a real option:** [Pew](#) found 94% of those who quit a job in 2021 said it was *somewhat to very easy* to find a new job.

▢ **Our thought bubble:** It's time to nurture your vital center with direction and support.

- **Direction:** get crystal clear on your hybrid and remote work policies – irrespective of how flexible or restrictive. Own your choices and communicate them to the organization. Don't task your middle managers with the messaging.

- **Support:** Make their lives easier by optimizing for productivity and humanity.

⚠️ **The bottom line:** Make this easier for them before they opt out and leave.

3. Reboot your team

▢ **What they're saying:** my CXO clients tell me that two years of hybrid work with sporadic office attendance has left their SVP direct reports swimming in their own lanes, sometimes in different directions.

- Despite their talent, commitment, and hard work, they're siloed.

🧠 **Why it matters:** Your team isn't a collection of subject matter experts – it's a brain trust. It's on you to bring them together to think, create and problem-solve.

- **The bottom line:** If the whole of your team isn't greater than the sum of its parts, you've hired the wrong people or are mismanaging them.

My POV: Our (albeit, unsteady) emergence from the pandemic hands you the perfect opportunity for a team alignment event.

▢ **Reboot your team with a "Jumpstart,"** as if you were new to your role, to regain bearings and move forward in unison.

1. Reset expectations of the entire team around its new and existing strategic and operational goals.

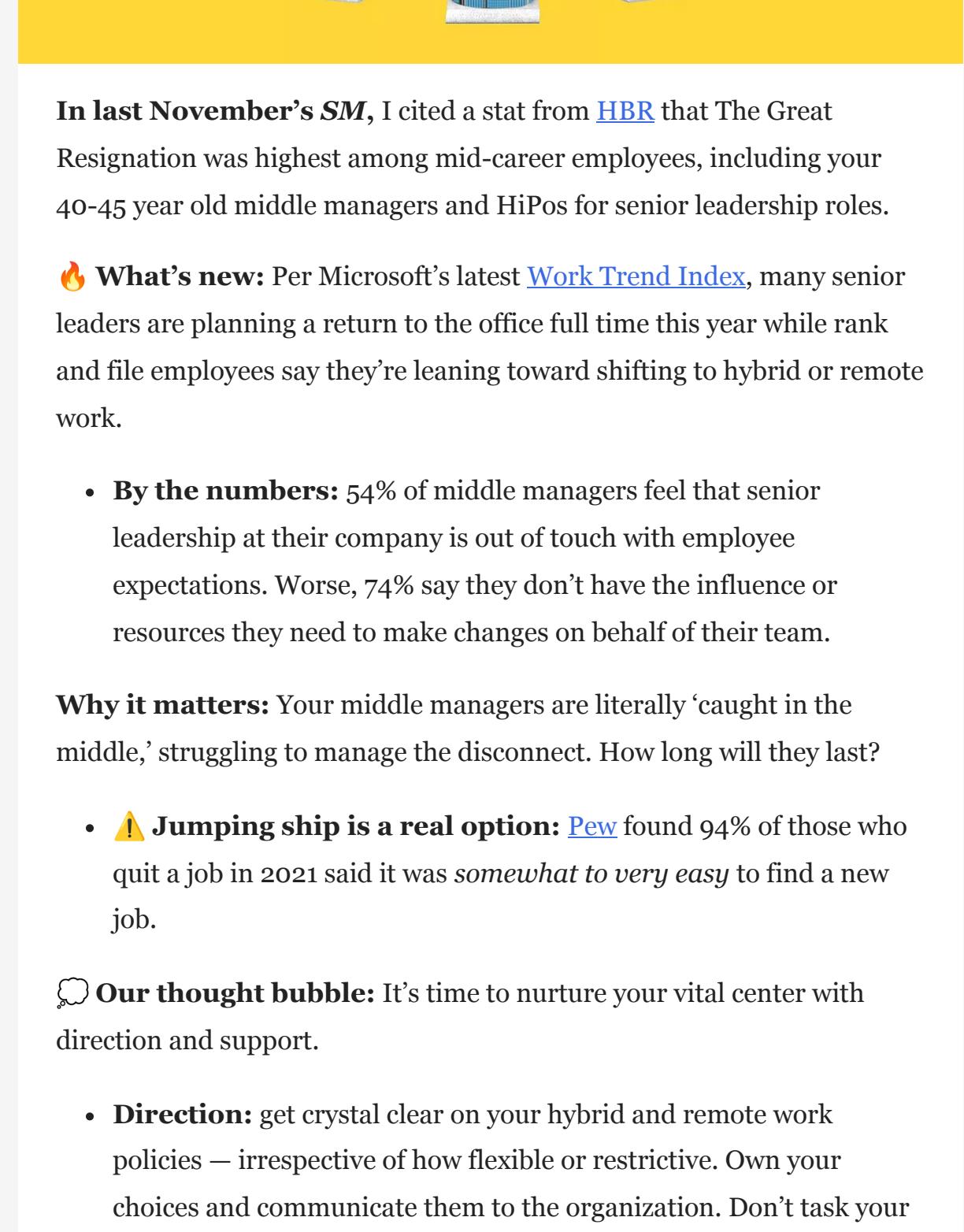
2. Facilitate negotiations around positional roles and their decision rights.

3. Review and negotiate team processes for agenda setting, meeting structure and information flow.

4. Guide your team to adopt new, or reaffirm existing, interactional protocols.

▢ **Go deeper:** My [Team Optimizer Checklist](#) identifies the 21 points to optimize your team (opt-in required).

4. Career Corner: Come back to the office



☒ **What's new:** Since U.S. corporate profits [rose 25%](#) in 2021 with much of the senior leader corps working from home, most argue that hybrid and remote work is here to stay.

- **Why it matters:** Your organization's successful results during the pandemic might lull you into thinking that the 'rules' of career advancement have adapted to this shift. IMO, they haven't.

▢ **My POV:** Leaders aspiring to be CXOs need to return to the office. Irrespective of company policy, it's simply too hard to advance your career from home.

▢ **The three pillars** of executive advancement are unlikely to change:

1. **Wielding Influence:** Execs are looking for colleagues who can get things done through other people – shaping opinion and mobilizing groups, departments and divisions.

2. **Building Profile:** Senior level promotions go to the known quantities who make visible contributions.

3. **Readying Promotability:** In senior level Talent Assessments, execs categorize leaders by level of performance and potential. You want to be the rising star occupying that "Immediately Promotable" box.

These pillars require you to be amid the flow of information, build ever increasing rapport-based relationships, and navigate the subtleties of executive dynamics. Seeing and being seen.

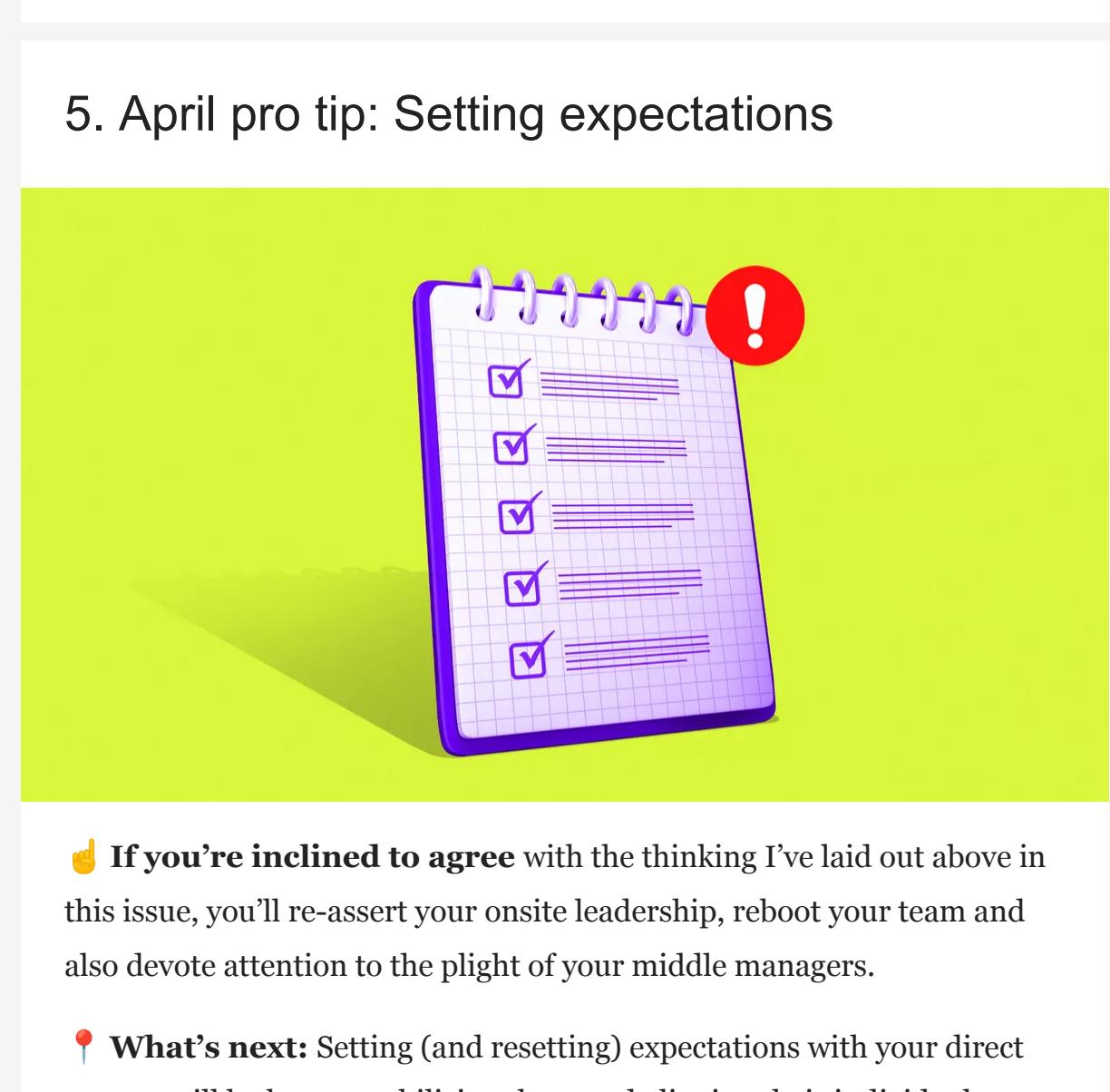
- Presence is a requisite for executive presence.

- WFH relegates you to a two-dimensional box on a videoconference.

Yes, but isn't it unfair to disadvantage so many talented high performers for whom onsite presence is legitimately constrained, when organizational performance is at a high?

- **The bottom line:** Maybe. But, my POV is that organizational dynamics will follow traditional patterns of human behavior.

5. April pro tip: Setting expectations



▢ **If you're inclined to agree** with the thinking I've laid out above in this issue, you'll re-assert your onsite leadership, reboot your team and also devote attention to the plight of your middle managers.

▢ **What's next:** Setting (and resetting) expectations with your direct reports will be key to mobilizing them and aligning their individual contributions to the effort.

- **Tight expectations** promote transparency, autonomy and meritocracy among your lieutenants; and

- **Loose expectations** lead to confusion, misfires and provoke you to micromanage.

Build and reinforce individual relationships and morale while optimizing performance.

▢ **Clearly address these 5 questions** to set clear, concise and actionable expectations for every initiative:

1. **Objectives:** What are we trying to accomplish?

2. **Big Picture:** How does this work fit into the larger strategy?

3. **Resources:** What support (financial, human, technical) do you have to get the work done?

4. **Oversight:** How will I manage you?

5. **Accountability:** What are the positive or negative consequences for your work product?

▢ **Schedule more one-on-one** and group time to review expectations frequently. At least for the next few months.

▢ **Spread the word:** Invite your *friends and colleagues* to [sign up](#) for Schachter Monthly.

- 🌸 See you in May!

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