



# Schachter Monthly

By Ephraim Schachter • Feb 03, 2026

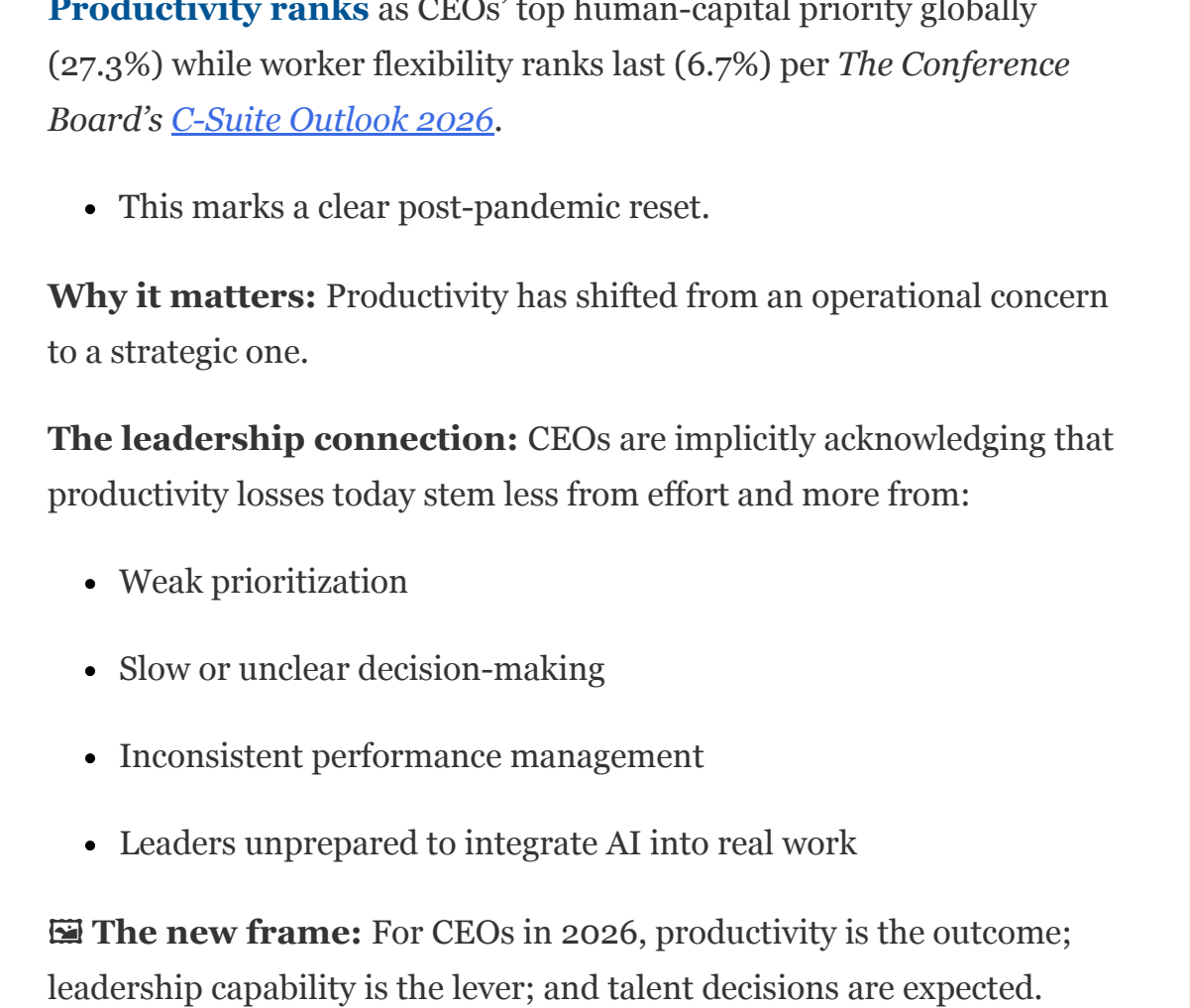
Smart Brevity® count: 4.5 mins...1254 words

✳️ **Happy February! Productivity** is the new executive zeitgeist. Read on below.

🏆 **Let's be great leaders!** Here are some straightforward insights and actionable tools & tips.

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## 1 big thing: Productivity #1 for CEOs



**Productivity ranks** as CEOs' top human-capital priority globally (27.3%) while worker flexibility ranks last (6.7%) per *The Conference Board's C-Suite Outlook 2026*.

- This marks a clear post-pandemic reset.

**Why it matters:** Productivity has shifted from an operational concern to a strategic one.

**The leadership connection:** CEOs are implicitly acknowledging that productivity losses today stem less from effort and more from:

- Weak prioritization
- Slow or unclear decision-making
- Inconsistent performance management
- Leaders unprepared to integrate AI into real work

🗋️ **The new frame:** For CEOs in 2026, productivity is the outcome; leadership capability is the lever; and talent decisions are expected.

🎯 **My POV:** What leaders and Talent teams should do next:

### 1. Build your org's capacity for Productivity.

Shift your Talent approach from broad programs to capability-weighted investment decisions. This isn't about engagement scores. Invest *more* in the people, roles, and skills that disproportionately move productivity, speed, and value.

### 2. Make leadership development about trade-offs, not polish.

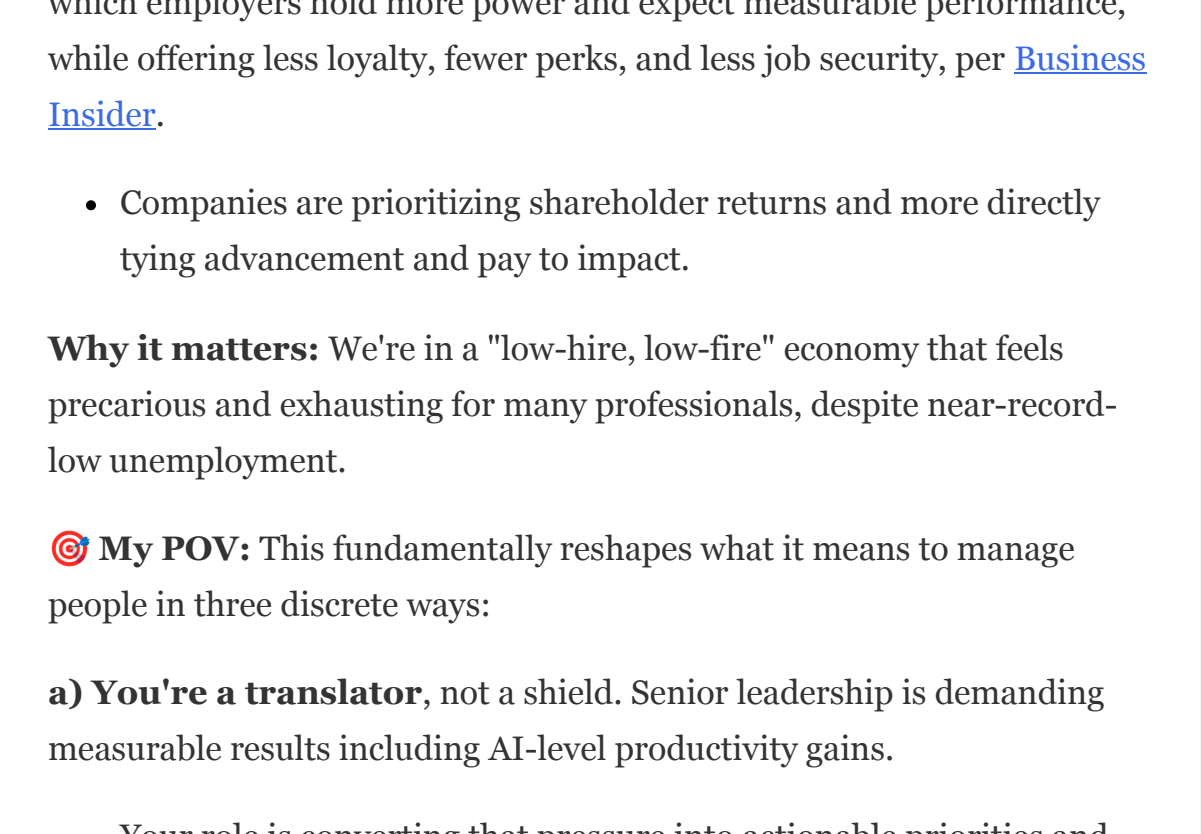
Train leaders to (a) set sharper priorities amid overload, (b) say no credibly, (c) translate strategy into fewer, clearer demands, and (d) hold performance standards steady while rewards flatten. Tough message, I know.

### 3. Drive productivity without breaking trust.

With fewer promotions and flatter pay growth, trust comes from clarity, fairness, and transparency. I know I'm asking for some serious upskilling for most managers to deliver here.

**The bottom line:** treat your talent like capital: allocate towards productivity, not just activity.

## 2. The New Reality: Managing in a Stalled Labor Market



⚠️ **The U.S. workplace** has entered a harsher "sink-or-swim" phase in which employers hold more power and expect measurable performance, while offering less loyalty, fewer perks, and less job security, per [Business Insider](#).

- Companies are prioritizing shareholder returns and more directly tying advancement and pay to impact.

**Why it matters:** We're in a "low-hire, low-fire" economy that feels precarious and exhausting for many professionals, despite near-record-low unemployment.

🎯 **My POV:** This fundamentally reshapes what it means to manage people in three discrete ways:

**a) You're a translator,** not a shield. Senior leadership is demanding measurable results including AI-level productivity gains.

- Your role is converting that pressure into actionable priorities and honest performance conversations, typically without additional headcount or budget.

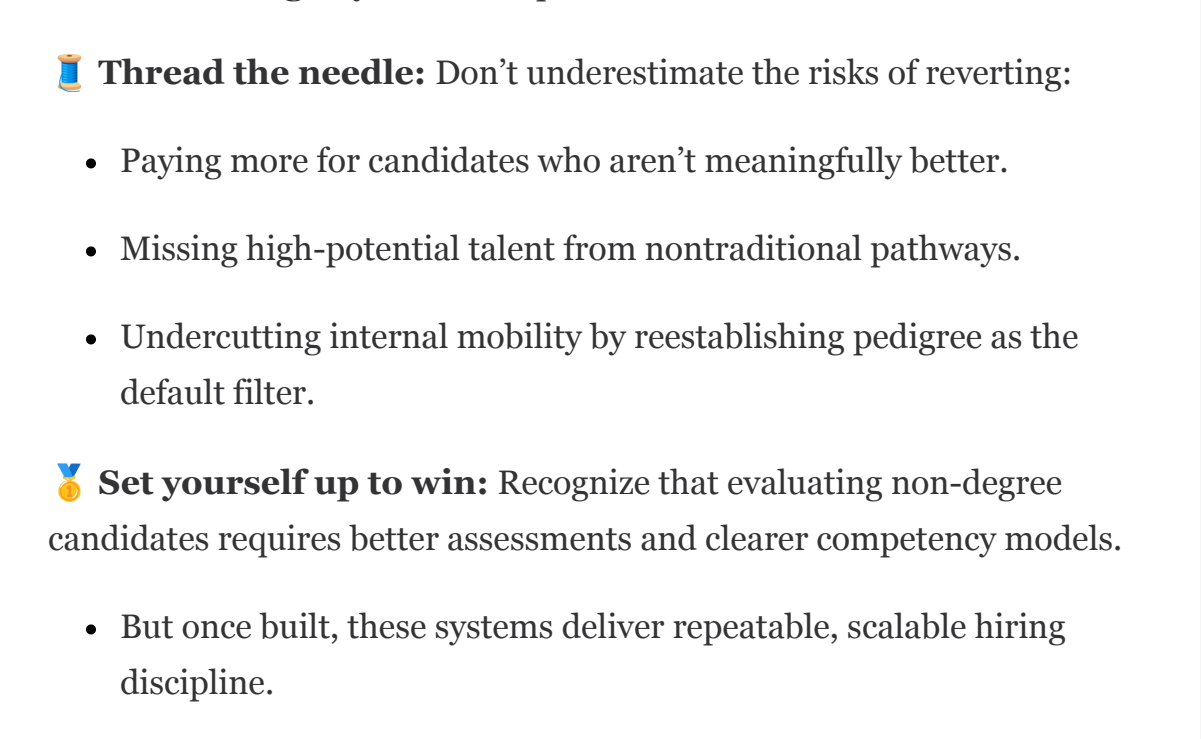
**b) Development becomes strategic triage.** With promotions scarce and compensation flattened, you'll have to make harder choices about where to invest your coaching energy, i.e., in people who demonstrate adaptability and scalable impact.

**c) You're the primary source of psychological safety.** When anxiety rises and risk-taking falls, managers become the frontline stabilizers of trust and engagement.

- Your transparency, credibility, and clear expectations now determine whether your team stays motivated or checks out.

**The bottom line:** Adjust to the new dimensions of your managerial role: a translator of executive pressure, an allocator of scarce development resources, and a stabilizer of team morale.

## 3. Skills-based hiring still makes sense



👉 **And while we're on the topic of Productivity,** let's talk about hiring ...

The [WSJ reports](#) that many employers are reverting to degree-first hiring as the market loosens.

- **What's happening:** With automation rising and org charts flattening, applicant supply is up so "the market allows it again."

**Why it matters:** It's a test of whether your organization will stick with a more equitable, accurate, and future-proof approach, or slip back into a familiar comfort zone.

🔍 **Zoom out:** Skills-based hiring is a strategic advantage, not a pandemic-era artifact. It expands your access to capable talent and improves predictive accuracy.

- **Larger, more diverse pools** than degree screens allow.
- **Better performance indicators:** Competency > credential.
- **Greater agility:** Skills adapt faster than formal education.

🧵 **Thread the needle:** Don't underestimate the risks of reverting:

- Paying more for candidates who aren't meaningfully better.
- Missing high-potential talent from nontraditional pathways.
- Undercutting internal mobility by reestablishing pedigree as the default filter.

🏆 **Set yourself up to win:** Recognize that evaluating non-degree candidates requires better assessments and clearer competency models.

- But once built, these systems deliver repeatable, scalable hiring discipline.

**The bottom line:** The labor market's shift is not a signal to abandon this improvement.

## 4. February pro tip: Coach for Productivity



**Want to get** your direct reports more **Productive**?

In [4 Simple Steps to Create a Results-Driven Employee](#), I offer the OAPD™ 'manager-as-coach' tool to elicit action out of your direct report, while providing meaningful guidance and support.

- 🏆 **It consistently performs** among the most streamed videos on [my website](#) with global views spanning six continents.

💡 **I have a theory** for its popularity: Managers don't always trust that their employees will take projects to the finish line and/or deliver a quality product.

**Why this matters:** These managers are in a bind: Take over and micromanage the work or 'empower' their direct report and suffer through a slow-moving, mutually damaging failure.

🔍 **Zoom out:** The higher order question is how to build a solid bench of talented high-performers.

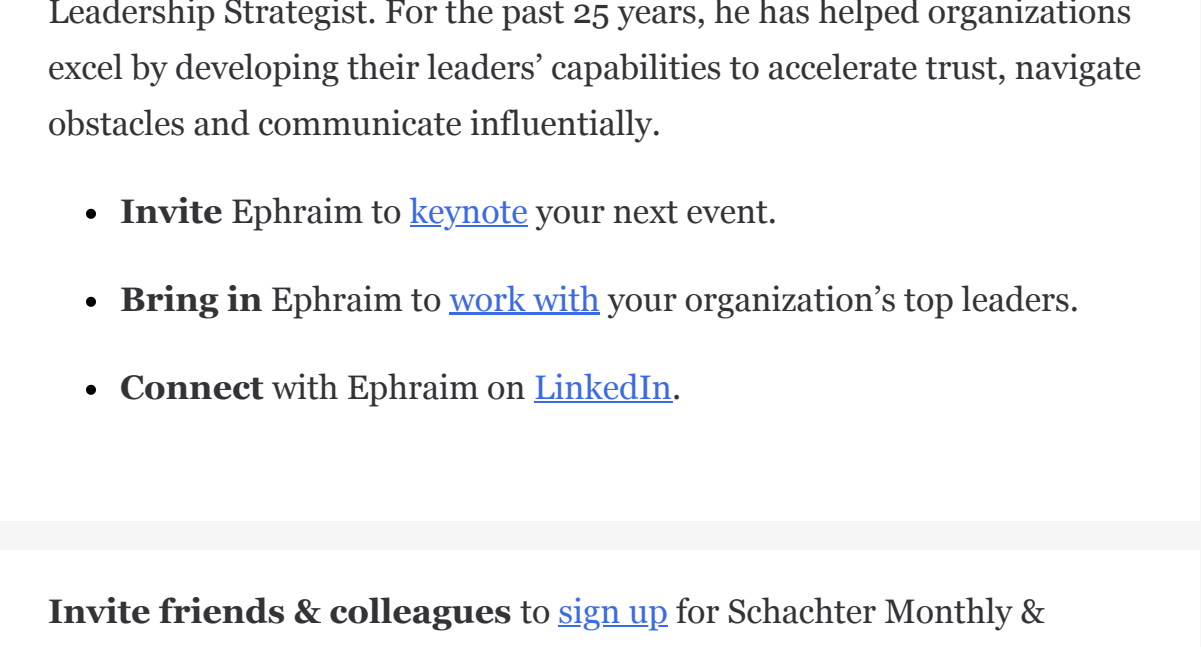
- **The wrong way:** Many leaders pay intermittent attention to the strength of their team, viewing individuals' success as their own responsibility.

🔍 **Zoom in:** The right way is to select well, mobilize and calibrate performance. Keep it simple by focusing on these 3 phases of management:

1. Setting clear expectations;
2. Overseeing effective implementation (FYI, [OAPD™](#) fits here); and
3. Promoting accountability with both positive and negative feedback.

🎁 **Bonus benefits:** Mastering these 3 phases promotes transparency, autonomy and meritocracy in your organization.

## 5. Career Corner: How starched is your white collar?



**Many mid career white-collar** professionals should reconsider blue-collar or hands-on roles amid layoffs, stagnant wages, and job-search frustration, per a provocative [WSJ piece](#).

**Why it matters:** While office workers often overlook these paths, blue-collar industries are struggling with labor shortages and often offer accelerated growth, leadership pathways, and economic mobility.

**I know, I know ...** this can emotionally land like an ego-bruising status-dropper for lots of us. Not to mention, a perceived loss of professional identity.

🍷 **Let's take a deep breath** and let it go. Now have that glass of wine.

💭 **My thought bubble:** There may be some good reasons to consider the shift:

- **Comparable earning potential** and better work-life balance: Some blue-collar roles are less vulnerable to AI disruption and can offer competitive pay and schedules.
- **Faster paths to high income:** In PE-backed or tech-enabled blue-collar firms, employees can reach six-figure salaries quickly. Sometimes, within a few years rather than decades.
- **Transferable white-collar skills:** Communication, management, and tech skills are highly valued in trades and operational roles, where professionalism and reliability are differentiators.

**Broader labor-market context:** Gen Z is increasingly entering blue-collar jobs due to college debt concerns and AI risks, while older professionals are slower to pivot.

**Bottom line:** Career changes are increasingly nonlinear and clinging to professional labels or sunk costs can limit opportunity. Get unsentimental and whiteboard the pro's and con's.

## 6. 👉 Go deeper



**Ephraim Schachter** is an award-winning C-Suite Coach and Leadership Strategist. For the past 25 years, he has helped organizations excel by developing their leaders' capabilities to accelerate trust, navigate obstacles and communicate influentially.

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💡 **Parting wisdom:** "Success in management requires learning as fast as the world is changing." Warren Bennis

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