Schachter Monthly

By Ephraim Schachter • Sep 15, 2026

Smart Brevity® count: 5 mins...1311 words

🍎 **September is here**. Hope you and yours had a terrific summer!

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

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1 big thing: Fewer managers, same management work

Corporate America is targeting the "micro-team" manager.

Cases in point: Uber plans to reduce teams with only one or two direct reports by nearly half as part of a restructuring expected to eliminate 20% of its managers.

- Intel has reduced its management layers from 12 to six.
- Google, Coinbase and Axon have also moved against small-team management roles, per The Wall Street Journal.

Why it matters: While flatter organizations can reduce bureaucracy, accelerate decisions and clarify accountability, eliminating managers does not eliminate management work.

- Instead it transfers that work to fewer people ... often without removing their individual responsibilities.

🔭 **Zoom out:** Span of control is an incomplete measure. It rarely captures the complexity of the work, cross-functional responsibilities, employee experience levels or the amount of coaching a team requires.

🎯 **My POV:** Leaders should distinguish between unnecessary hierarchy and valuable managerial proximity.

Before eliminating a management role, ask:

1. **Who will coach the employees?**
   Development, feedback and career conversations require time and attention.
2. **Who will detect problems early?**
   Managers often identify disengagement, conflict and performance deterioration before those issues appear in organizational data.
3. **What work will come off the remaining managers' plates?**
   A "player-coach" with a larger team cannot maintain the same individual workload and still manage effectively.
4. **How will new managers be developed?**
   Removing smaller supervisory assignments may also eliminate the proving ground where future leaders first learn to manage.

The bottom line: Removing management layers may improve efficiency. But removing managers without redesigning their work will weaken the coaching, accountability and connection that performance depends on.

2. Can your culture be too nice?

Some organizations prize harmony so highly that employees avoid difficult conversations, tolerate weak performance and hesitate to challenge flawed decisions.

- **Organizational "niceness"** becomes harmful when leaders prioritize comfort over candor, accountability and results, per Ron Ashkenas and Gali Cooks in HBR.

Why it matters: Leaders sometimes confuse psychological safety with freedom from discomfort.

Psychological safety means employees can question decisions, acknowledge mistakes and raise concerns without fear of humiliation or retaliation. It does not mean that colleagues should avoid disagreement or that managers should soften expectations until they become unclear.

🎯 **My POV:** A healthy culture should feel safe enough for people to say what needs to be said.

That requires leaders to distinguish between:

1. **Candor and bluntness.**
   Candor addresses the issue directly. Bluntness adds unnecessary threat.
2. **Support and protection.**
   Support helps people meet demanding expectations. Protection removes the expectations.
3. **Harmony and trust.**
   Harmony may reflect strong relationships … or widespread avoidance! Trust is demonstrated when people can disagree without damaging those relationships.

🔭 **Zoom out:** Excessive niceness is not harmless. It delays decisions, allows performance problems to grow and forces colleagues to compensate for issues no one will address directly.

- **Or worse:** The consequences surface, but later, larger and with a sting.

The bottom line: Harmony is not evidence of a healthy culture. Sometimes it is evidence that people have stopped telling one another what needs to be said.

3. Preparing transformation-ready CHROs

While first-time CHROs accounted for 60% of appointments in 2025 and were generally promoted internally, larger companies recruited experienced CHROs from outside, often to support a significant transformation mandate, per Russell Reynolds Associates Global CHRO Turnover Index.

- **When a new CEO** arrives or the company faces major disruption, boards may favor someone who has already managed transformation at scale.

Why it matters: The pattern suggests that many internal HR pipelines produce strong functional leaders, but not enough executives with demonstrated experience leading enterprise change.

🎯 **My POV:** If companies repeatedly look outside for transformation-ready CHROs, the problem may not be the internal candidates. It may be the experiences they were never given.

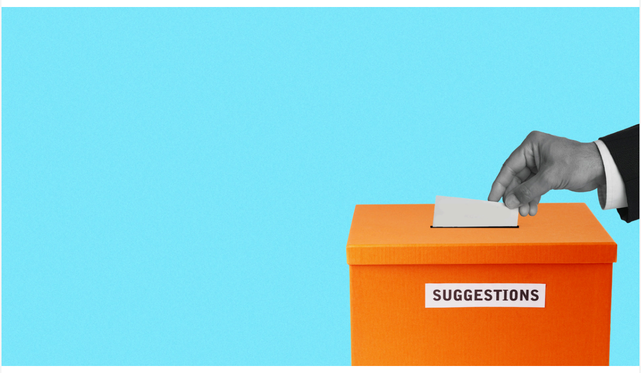
Preparing an internal successor requires more than progressively larger HR assignments. High-potential HR leaders need meaningful exposure to:

1. Enterprise strategy and operating decisions
2. Technology-enabled transformation
3. Workforce economics and productivity
4. Board and investor-level communication
5. Business responsibility outside the HR function

🔭 **Zoom out:** CHRO succession cannot begin when a vacancy becomes likely. By then, there is little time to close the experience gaps that make an external candidate appear safer.

The bottom line: Companies cannot expect internal HR leaders to become enterprise change leaders unless they deliberately give them enterprise-level work.

4. September pro tip: Avoid the authenticity penalty



Leaders who change too quickly after receiving employee feedback are seen as less authentic, not more, per new research from Stanford and the University of South Florida.

- **Huh?** You took the feedback seriously and changed your behavior and that may have been the wrong move?

Why it matters: Rapid shifts, especially on hard-to-change behaviors like listening, read as performative.

- **Employees think:** too good to be true.

This is nuts, right? Well, let's look deeper …

💨 **The *pace* of change** is itself the signal, per the research.

- When you over-correct visibly and immediately, you don't look responsive. You look like you're managing perceptions. Others might perceive a disconnect.
- Gradual change, communicated with intention, reads as genuine growth.

💭 **My take as a coach:** My clients take feedback seriously and want to demonstrate it. Fast. So, what to do?

🔑 **The key** is going to be consistency.

- When you get hard feedback, don't get tempted by a "quick hit" to perform the fix. Work the fix. Communicate what you heard, what you're sitting with, and what you intend to do. Then change at the pace real change actually takes.
- Your team is watching the process, not just the outcome.

The bottom line: Responding to feedback well isn't just about what you change. It's about how you change it.

👉 **Go deeper:** My take on *5 Steps to Turn Around Misperceptions About You*, here.

5. Career Corner: Get connecting

💼 **You updated your resume**.

- You're checking LinkedIn and the job boards.
- You're applying.
- And nothing is moving.

Wrong approach.

- Most senior roles are never posted.
- They're filled through relationships and conversations that happen before a vacancy is public.
- **The execs** who find the best opportunities fastest aren't the ones with the strongest resumes. They're the ones in the right conversations.

Why it matters: Senior leaders who begin their search outreach before formal separation consistently outperform those who wait, per Right Management.

The article's intent is to convince HR leaders and organizations to restructure executive outplacement programs so that transition coaching begins during an executive's notice or advisory period.

- But, whether using outplacement or not, the early weeks, when networks are freshest and positioning is most malleable, are disproportionately valuable.

🎯 **My POV:** Your network wants to help. They just need to know you're in motion.

- **The instinct** to wait until everything is ready costs you the window when you have the most momentum.

🗓️ **Plan of action:** Stop applying. Start connecting.

1. Develop a target list of organizations you'd genuinely want to join.
2. Set up conversations with people who know where things are moving before they're posted. You know who they are.
3. And, of course, if your organization offers outplacement support, take it now. Not after your last day.

The bottom line: The hidden job market isn't hidden. Connect early.

6. More from Ephraim

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.

- **Invite** Ephraim to keynote your next event.
- **Bring in** Ephraim to work with your organization's top leaders.
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💡 **Parting wisdom:** *"Example is not the main thing in influencing others. It is the only thing."* — Albert Schweitzer

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