

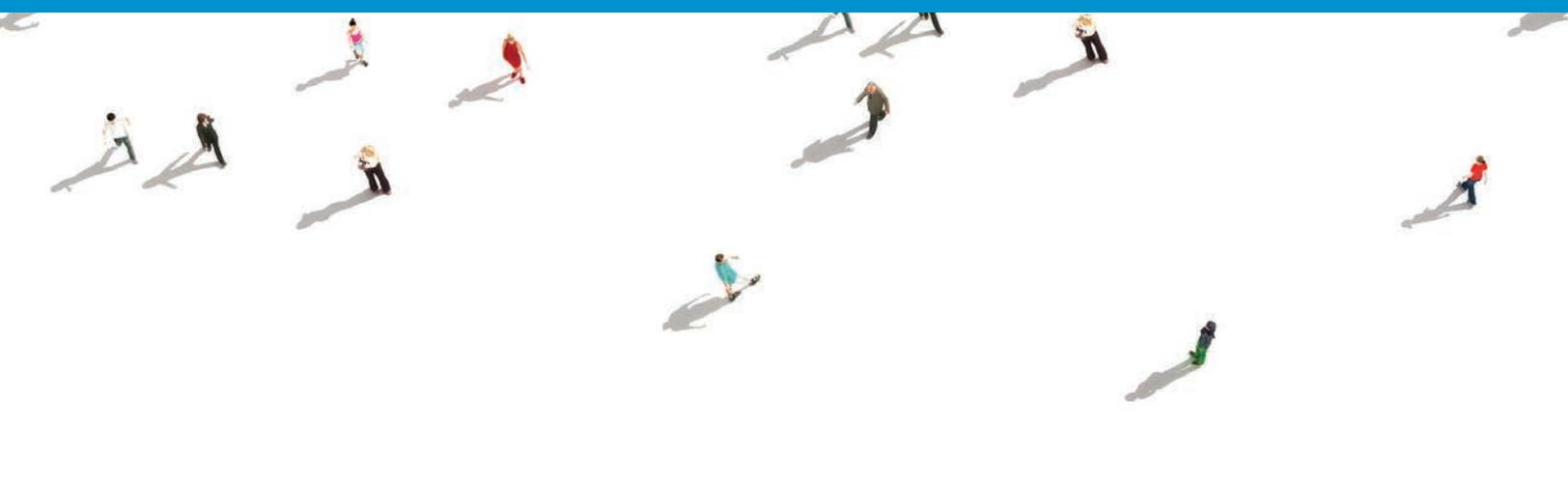
REPORT  
BRIEF



# Balancing Today and Tomorrow

*The Priorities and Challenges of Frontline and Leader of Leaders*

Supplement to the 2018 RESEARCH REPORT | TOMORROW'S LEADERS TODAY



*As part of our commitment to providing the latest research and insights to the market, GP Strategies® surveyed leaders across the globe in spring 2018 to find out what skills they need to be successful today and what they anticipate needing in the future. The aggregate results are available in the report, *Tomorrow's Leaders Today: What Leaders Need Right Now, and in the Future, to Be Successful*.*

*This report brief, *Balancing Today and Tomorrow: The Priorities and Challenges of Frontline and Leader of Leaders*, provides a closer look at key themes that emerged based on an individual's position in the organization (frontline leaders and leaders of leaders) and on how their position impacts their point of view and the skills they need to be successful.*



# COMMUNICATION is the most important skill for today and tomorrow. It is also the biggest development need.

Across all leaders, communicating effectively at all levels, building constructive relationships with team members, and coaching the team emerged as key actions.

Communicating effectively at all levels is a shared priority, but each level of leader is likely communicating different types of messages in different ways.

## Frontline Leader Communication

The leaders we heard from in our survey are struggling with the basics of communication. They need to clearly communicate individual and team goals. They are on the front line when performance is not what it needs to be, and we know they struggle with providing performance feedback. They are also the individuals who need to engage in career development conversations—something they often shy away from.

In addition to improving their communication with their teams, frontline leaders are also challenged to elevate their communication skills as they interact with their peers and the senior leaders. Through their communication, they need to demonstrate an organizational savvy they may have yet to develop. They need to influence others and demonstrate, in words and actions, that they are thinking not just about their teams, but also with an enterprise mindset. Arming leaders with both the skills and the confidence they need to communicate successfully is key.

## Leader of Leader Communication

While leaders of leaders also prioritized communication, their needs in this area are often a little different. Leaders of leaders are responsible for helping to set goals and develop strategy and then cascading that information throughout the organization. They need to do more than get information across; they need to communicate in a way that inspires. For leaders of leaders, it's about helping employees to see the long-term vision for the organization and how they are part of that vision.

**64%** of leaders across all levels ranked communication as the leadership skill that will be most critical for them to be successful as a leader in the future.

**COMMUNICATION** also ranked as the **#1 leadership topic** that could improve leaders' ability to achieve results.

**FRONTLINE LEADERS** expressed a slightly **higher need for support** with this important skill.

## STRATEGY is a big focus for leaders of leaders while frontline leaders are concerned with actions that support getting people to work well together today.

While coaching and developing the team was one of the highest ranked items across all levels of leader, for frontline leaders, this action had a greater weighting in terms of importance.

### Frontline leaders are focused on getting their team to work well together.

The frontline leader focus on coaching and developing teams came as no surprise given the fact that these are the leaders responsible for producing day-to-day results. Frontline leaders are the ones leading the vast majority of employees on a daily basis. Regardless of whether their team is creating products or delivering a service, their employees provide near-term value to the organization. When a leader can coach others effectively, they not only get results from them, but they also develop them. Done well, a leader-coach empowers the individuals and teams they lead to find their own best way of accomplishing a task or a challenge. By prioritizing coaching and developing the team as a critical action required for their success, frontline leaders were echoing what we heard in the write-in responses—that developing their people effectively and getting their teams to work well together are their highest priorities.



**FRONTLINE LEADERS** placed a higher weighting on the action of **coaching** and **developing** the team.

## Leaders of leaders placed a significantly higher value on the action of developing and executing strategy.

Leaders of leaders ensure the organization runs effectively today and create clear plans to take the organization forward. They are thinking about how to develop and execute strategy, take appropriate risks, and invest in the future. This is the level of the organization that is looking year over year to clear a path to a successful future. These are also the leaders that have the latitude, if not the mandate, to consider more out-of-the-box approaches to long-term growth. They need to think about both what's going on inside the walls of their organization and how competitors, new technology, consumer buying behaviors, and the future might impact their industry.

Without results today, there will be no future success. But without a strategy for the future, the path to future success is unclear. A focus on day-to-day operations for frontline leaders may just cause them to run into a wall. And if our leaders of leaders only gaze into the future, they could miss what it is they need to do to support it right now. This critical balance of acting and anticipating will create success today and ensure it for the future.



### LEADERS OF LEADERS...



placed a higher weighting on **developing and executing strategy** as key to their success.



identified **innovation** as a skill that will be critical for them to be successful leaders in the future.



indicated they need the organization to **invest more in resources** to accomplish their objectives.

## To be personally **READY FOR THE FUTURE**, leaders are looking at themselves and at what the broader organization can provide.

When we asked leaders what they need to be future ready, new knowledge and a more supportive organizational culture rose to the top of the list. However, as we looked at the data across the frontline and leader-of-leader levels, differences emerged between these two groups.

### Frontline leaders placed a higher priority on culture and knowledge.

The frontline leaders we surveyed ranked a more supportive organizational culture/environment as the most important aspect they need to help them be future ready. Frontline leaders know they are more effective when they are leading against the backdrop of a culture that reinforces what they are trying to accomplish. When senior leaders share their vision, are clear about the company's mission, and role-model core behaviors with authenticity, they create an environment of support for the work of frontline leadership.

Reviews of write-in comments give some insight into precisely what leaders meant when they selected knowledge as something they need to be future ready. For many, “staying in the know and remaining competitive” are top of mind. Leaders are also concerned with making sure their groups have the most current information. Still others are concerned with keeping up with technology. The range of comments represents the many knowledge gaps leaders are trying to fill—or stay ahead of.

### Leaders of leaders need a personal shift in their mindset and improved leadership skills.

Leaders of leaders are looking to self-improvement to get them future ready. As the group on the cutting edge of where the organization is going, it's not surprising that they are prioritizing their own development and the mental shift they will need to make. Being ready to take the organization into the future for leaders of leaders means getting themselves ready for that journey as well. Leaders of leaders know a focus on their own mindset and skills is a necessary first step.



**FRONTLINE LEADERS** ranked a more supportive organizational culture/environment and knowledge as the most important thing they personally need to be future ready.

**LEADERS OF LEADERS** prioritized a shift in mindset and leadership skills as most critical.

## LEADERS OF LEADERS feel slightly more positive about their roles than frontline leaders.

While overall results showed that the majority of leaders view their role favorably, leaders of leaders feel more positive about their role than frontline leaders. In fact, they reported feeling 10% more energized, 7% more optimistic, and 5% more motivated than frontline leaders.

Frontline leaders reported feeling more tired, anxious, and stressed than leaders of leaders.

### Frontline leader pressures

Given the daily pressures they feel to provide results, it's perhaps not a surprise that frontline leaders reported an uptick in feelings of stress and anxiety.

All leaders are responsible for delivering on results—but it's frontline leaders who feel more direct pressure on performing immediately, providing their people with feedback, and getting their teams to work well together. They are the first to deal with customer issues, employee challenges, and task management—each issue is enough to cause anxiety, but in combination, they can make a frontline leader feel particularly stressed. Add to that the dynamics of a changing workplace and shifting priorities, and the results are not surprising.

### Leader of leaders pressures

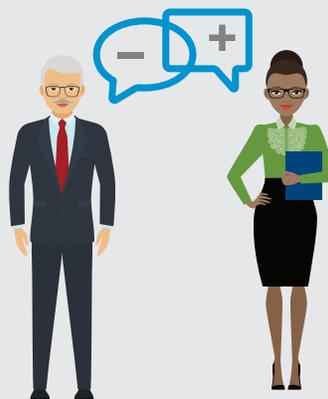
Leaders of leaders ride out the ebb and flow. Those typically in higher-level positions are able to take a longer-term view of their goals and may be less impacted by the pressures of the day to day. Their perspective allows them to adapt to the near-term challenges and successes, allowing them to take a longer-term view of the inevitable ups and downs.

**FRONTLINE LEADERS** face feelings of **greater negativity**. Frontline leaders are:

**15%** more tired

**16%** more anxious

**12%** more stressed



**LEADERS OF LEADERS** are slightly **more positive** than frontline leaders:

**10%** more energized

**7%** more optimistic

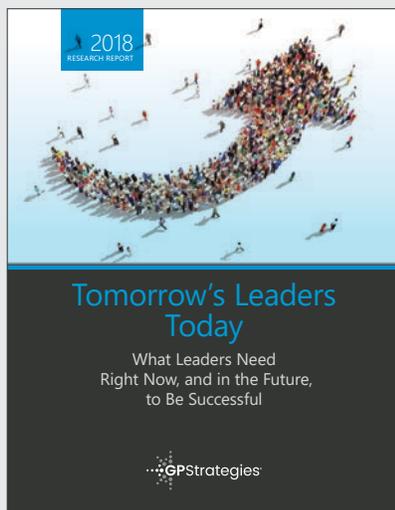
**5%** more motivated

## Summary

Across all levels, leaders are grappling with what it means to be a leader and how they can best support the teams of people for which they are responsible. We heard from our leaders that:

- Communication remains an elemental leadership skill and an area in which all levels of leaders say they can improve.
- They are focused on where they need to be—leaders of leaders are helping to drive strategy while frontline leaders need to get work done today.
- Personal readiness for the future can be assured through organizational support as well as individual change.
- While both take the responsibilities of their roles seriously, leaders of leaders have a slightly more positive outlook.

Frontline leaders and leaders of leaders share many common priorities. From the need for strong communication and collaboration to the prioritization of teamwork, these leaders are sending a clear message about what is pivotal to their success. But in looking more specifically at some of the nuances of each leadership level's priorities, we can take away important messages about the focus of their roles and make informed choices about what to put in place for them to be successful.



For more insights on what actions, skills, and mindset leaders need most to be successful today and in the future, download a copy of the **2018 Research Report: Tomorrow's Leaders Today**.



**DOWNLOAD Research Report**

[gpstrategies.com/research/tomorrows-leaders-today](http://gpstrategies.com/research/tomorrows-leaders-today)

*This report was conducted in the spring of 2018 and is based on responses collected from approximately 1,500 leaders, across multiple industries, from global, international, and national organizations.*

## ABOUT GP STRATEGIES

Founded in 1966, GP Strategies delivers performance improvement programs that strategically align with your unique business objectives and differentiate your global workforce, leaders, and salespeople to ensure business excellence. Our sole focus is performance improvement, and everything we do, from technical and compliance training to process improvement and human capital technology integration, is focused on helping your organization deliver meaningful results.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Leah leads Strategy and Planning for GP Strategies. She researches, writes, and speaks on the topic of leadership. Her work informs the organization's product development and learner experience efforts. Leah has over 17 years of experience in marketing, strategy, and product development. She has a Master of Arts degree in Organizational Psychology from Columbia University and a Bachelor of Arts in English and Sociology from Boston College.

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