



# The Roundtable Report on High Potential Leaders

Revealing the Perspectives of  
Your Best And Brightest

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Welcome to The Roundtable Report on High Potential Leaders

## A Message from The Roundtable's Founder and President Glain Roberts-McCabe



We are pleased to share the inaugural edition of *The Roundtable Report on High Potential Leaders*.

Since 2007, The Roundtable has focused our efforts on supporting the development of high potential leaders: those productivity powerhouses who deliver more than their peers, embody your organization's values and raise the bar on performance.

We have written extensively about our work, but this is the first time we've conducted our own original research to share some insight on the inner narrative of these high value employees.

With Korn Ferry predicting a **global labour shortage of 85 million people by 2030**, combined with the expense and risks of hiring and training new leaders, retaining and growing your best and brightest for the long term is a non-negotiable.

After more than twenty years in this space, what we know for sure is that your high potential and high performing leaders are committed to doing their very best. The pressure these folks put on themselves often far exceeds the pressures placed on them by their managers. As a result, they are often reluctant to share their fears or ask for help. Our goal with The Roundtable Report on High Potential Leaders is to bring their voices to you, their senior leaders and the talent teams that support them.

We also know that leading today is far too complex for even the most talented leaders to navigate on their own. Moving forward, the real differentiator for organizations will be the ability to not only tap into the strengths and talents of individual high potential leaders but also understanding how to unleash the collective impact that happens when your best and brightest learn how to leverage each other's strengths and talents. It's time to move beyond individual heroics and harness the collective potential that exists across our organizations.

The Roundtable Report will give you a view of what's on the minds of your most valuable employees and will provide guideposts to inform your 2025 talent plans.

Leadership doesn't have to be lonely. It's time to embrace our collective strengths and capabilities to meet the demands of today's new world of work.

Let's cultivate leadership together.



Glain Roberts-McCabe  
Founder and President, The Roundtable





## We Aren't Your Typical Leadership Development Company

For close to two decades, we have worked with companies across sectors, sizes and industries as they have undertaken their biggest challenges, changes and transformations. As pioneers in group and team coaching, we have built systems to help organizations navigate key transition points by unlocking the power of collective impact from their high potential leaders to inspire performance and deliver measurable bottom-line results.

Whether you use a formal talent process or not, it's not hard to spot a high potential leader — they always stand out. These results-driven key players often advance quickly. They are curious, committed to continuous growth and constantly looking to raise the bar — for themselves and those around them.

We know high potential leaders are the linchpins of their companies. Research from McKinsey shows **high potentials are 400% more productive** than average performers, and as much as 800% more productive with complex knowledge tasks.

They don't just deliver what's asked of them, they elevate the entire organization.

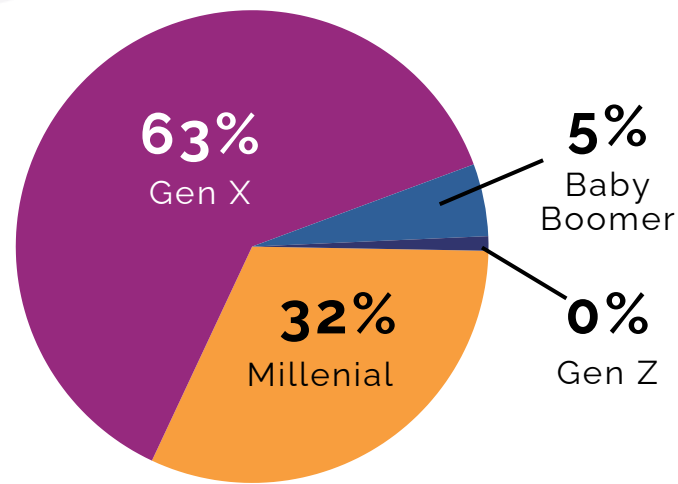
**At The Roundtable**, we know firsthand that when you bring leaders like this together in peer-based programs, you reap the benefits that come with tapping into their collective energy and wisdom.

Our interest in continuing to nurture, develop and support the rising stars in organizations is what led us to invest in research to understand the needs and challenges of these valuable employees.

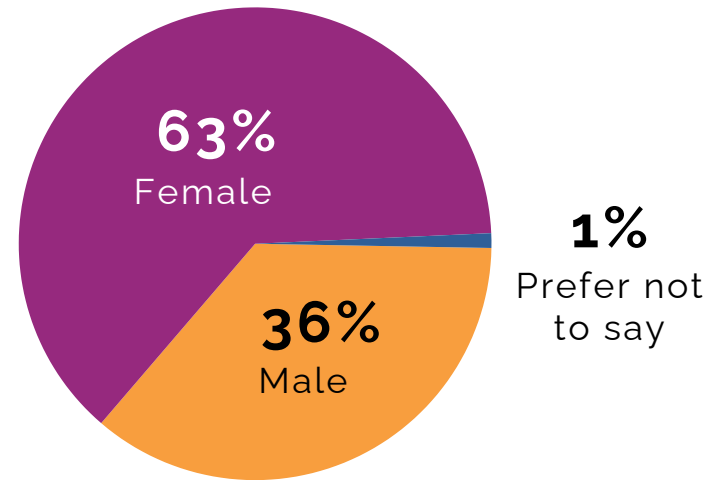
# Survey Demographics

We analyzed responses from 262 high potential leaders in Canada and the U.S. and collected responses from June 1–28, 2024. Survey participants were pulled from The Roundtable community — including current participants and alumni — **who represent top talent leaders in their organizations.**

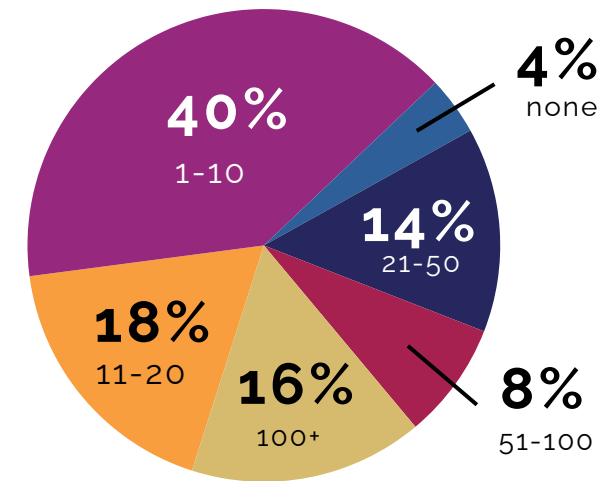
**GENERATION**



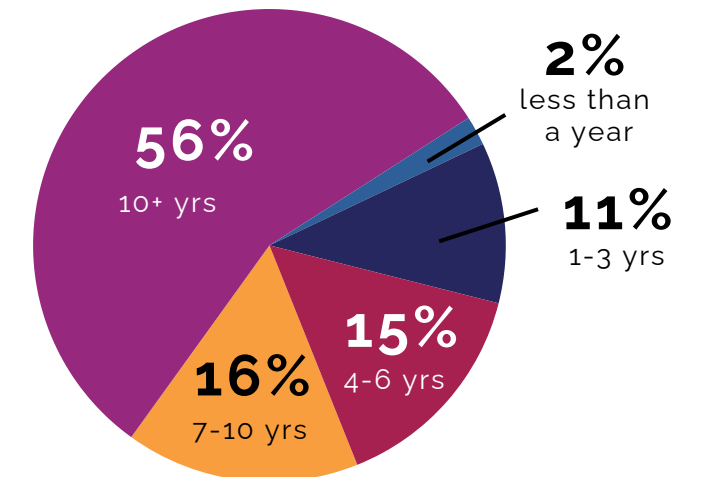
**GENDER**



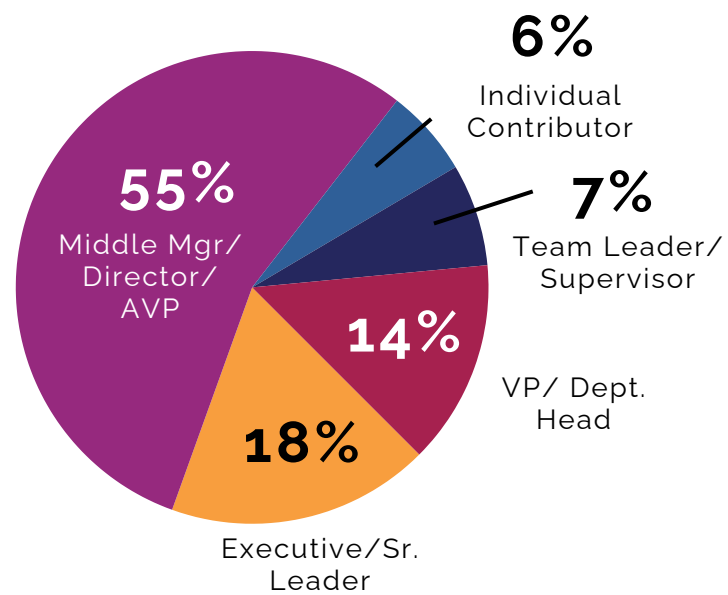
**HOW MANY YOU LEAD**



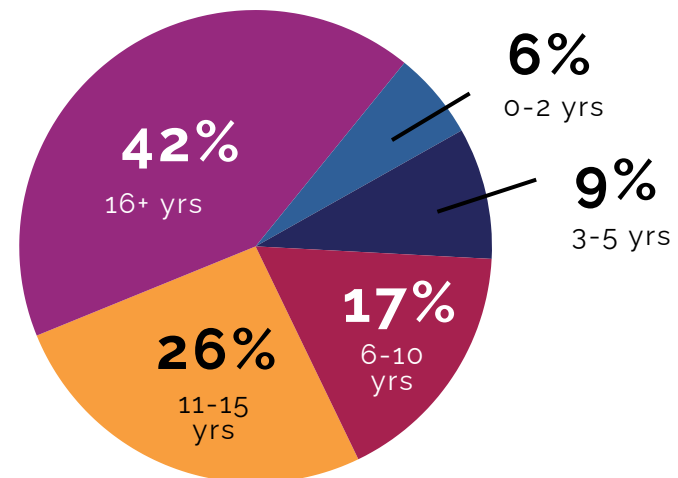
**ORG TENURE**



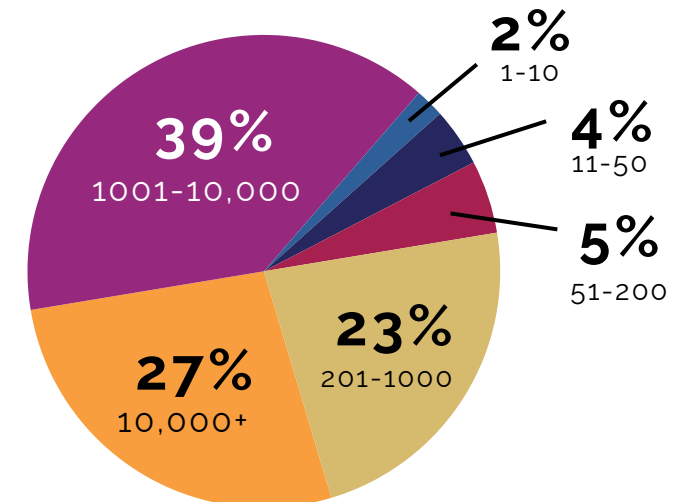
**LEVEL**



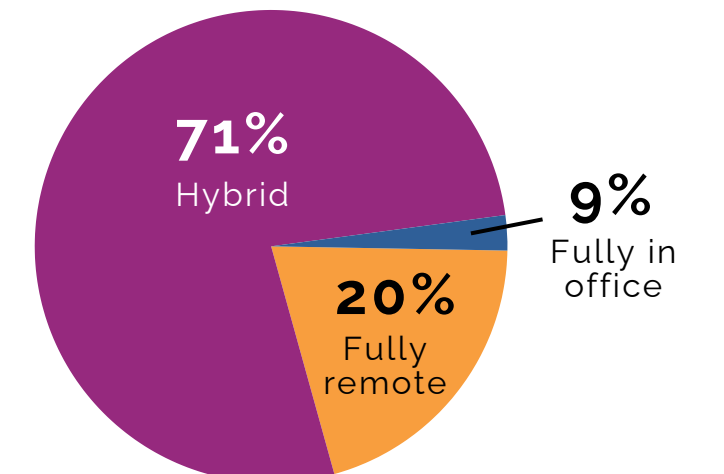
**PEOPLE MANAGEMENT YEARS**



**COMPANY SIZE**



**WORK ARRANGEMENT**



# Your High Potential Leaders are Invested

Your top leaders are known for their commitment to their work and organizations, which translates to strong engagement scores. Survey participants represent the engagement and job commitment levels we expect for star performers who are passionate about their work.

Leaders in our survey reported high levels of commitment to their roles, with **77% rating their level of job engagement at 8 or higher (on a 1–10 scale)**.

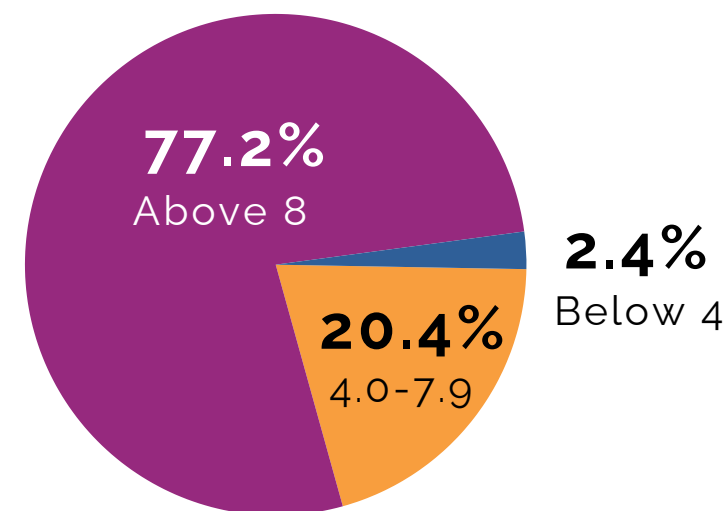
Leaders also indicated a strong commitment to their companies, with **62% rating their level of organization engagement at 8 or higher**.

Survey participants are also committed to staying with their organizations for the foreseeable future.

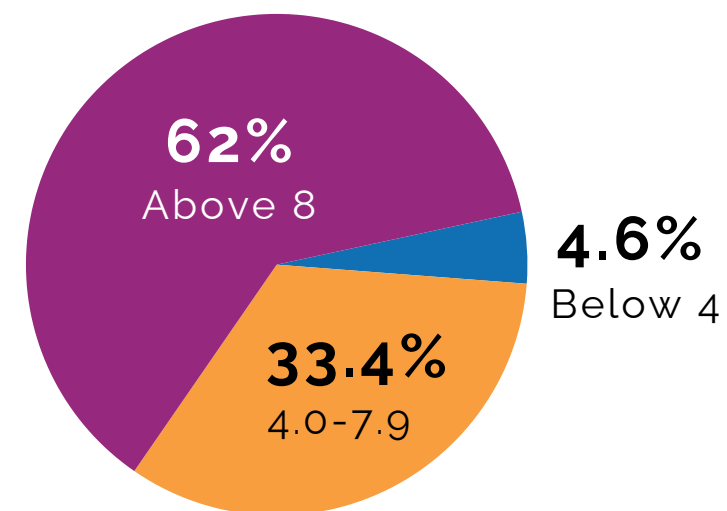
**Only 6% of surveyed leaders were actively looking for new roles** outside their organizations, and **52% indicated they plan to stay with their current employer for 2+ years**.

High potential leaders don't run away from the challenges that they uncover. They are committed to helping close the gaps and be a part of the solution.

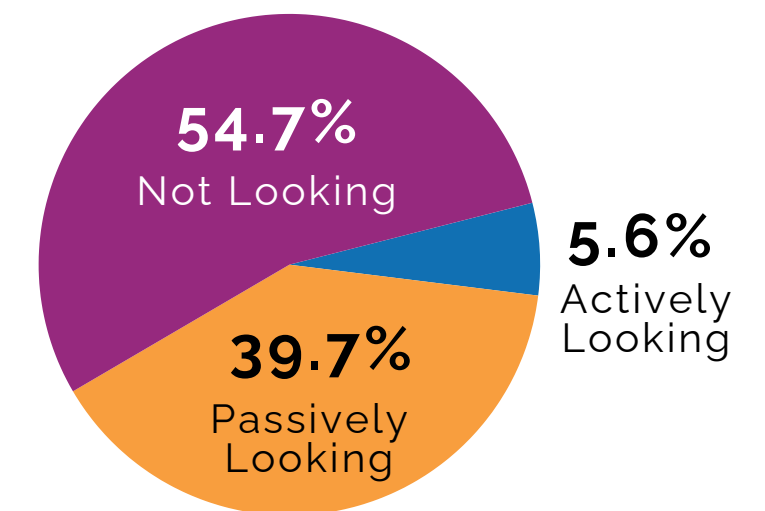
LEVEL OF JOB ENGAGEMENT



LEVEL OF ORGANIZATION ENGAGEMENT



CURRENTLY JOB SEEKING OR NOT



# Key Findings

ACROSS OUR ANALYSIS, HERE'S WHAT STOOD OUT

**High potential leaders are concerned about their ability to deliver results.**



**92% of leaders had at least one of these challenges as their top three concerns:**



- **Leading through unprecedented change and uncertainty**



- **Delivering on organizational objectives**



- **Improving cross-functional collaboration and communication**

Here's what else we found...

They need **more transparency, information and visibility** from their C-Suite leaders, which will help them be more agile and adaptive.

They **feel the strain of balancing priorities** and are worried about fatigue and burnout.

They want **C-Suite leadership to invest time and resources to improve workplace culture.**



# Your High Potential Leaders' Top Challenges

Your strongest leaders are wired to deliver results, and their top concerns reflect their role as operational executors (58% of survey respondents were middle managers, directors or AVPs). Their concerns tend to reflect their critical roles as the operational backbones of their organizations.

We asked survey respondents to rank their top three challenges from a list provided, covering topics ranging from organizational change to team dynamics and performance.

These challenges were consistent even when we adjusted for levels of engagement or job seeking, so we can trust they are universal across the group.

## Let's dive in!





## Challenge #1

# Leading Through Change and Uncertainty

Leaders are feeling the intensity of higher levels of change, stemming from a range of factors from the economy to the introduction and optimization of AI, as well as new work arrangements with remote and hybrid structures. We no longer “manage” change as a single program; in most organizations, leaders and teams face unparalleled levels of continuous and fluctuating change.

Top leaders know how to deliver results for their teams and organizations, but the level of volatility and ambiguity — both inside and outside the organization is unprecedented — and getting in their way. Leading through unprecedented change ranked among the top three challenges for 60% of leaders, with impact increasing alongside team size. Among leaders with large teams (21-50 direct reports), 73% identified it as a top challenge.

60%

say leading through unprecedented change and uncertainty is one of their top three challenges

Harvard Business Review also found that leaders are experiencing **five times the volume of change initiatives** (involvement in ten active projects on average per year, up from two in 2016). Their research noted a corresponding increase in “agility fatigue”, and a drop in employee willingness to support change projects.

As your leaders continue to undergo yet another strategic pivot or added assignment, the risk of burnout and detrimental impact on morale increases.



## Challenge #2

# Delivering on Organizational Objectives

Strong leaders know what they need to do — **76% say they are clear about what's expected of them** — but are concerned about their ability to deliver on strategic goals set by senior leadership.

Your mid-level leaders are typically tasked with implementing plans to meet strategic objectives, and **48% of them are worried they can't deliver.**

This challenge isn't only about being able to meet objectives or targets, it's also a big source of motivation for your top performers, as **49% of leaders indicate "driving organizational success" as a top leadership motivation.** If they don't feel they can deliver, their levels of engagement may be impacted.

Coupled with unprecedented change, overly ambitious goals that feel out of reach may drive impatience and frustration in your high performers who like to win and deliver results.

**48%**

are worried they **can't deliver organizational objectives**





### Challenge #3

## Improving Cross-Functional Collaboration and Communication

As the work world becomes more complex, cross-functional collaboration isn't a nice to have, it's an essential ingredient for better decision-making, innovation, cost reduction and more. High potential leaders know that influencing beyond their immediate team or function is critical to delivering results, but 48% struggle with how to work effectively across the organization.

The structure of work conditions may be contributing to the challenge. Collaboration challenges and "silos" predate 2020 when working from home became the norm, but flexible and hybrid work environments are causing some leaders to struggle with adapting their behaviours to this new reality. We see leaders stumbling as they attempt to break-free from overly relying on 'management by walking around'. The key to collaboration in hybrid workplaces lies in fostering trust and building relationships. It's not about where people work -- it's about how they work together.

48%

say enhancing cross-functional communication and collaboration is a challenge

As senior leaders, this highlights the importance of providing the opportunities, resources and tools needed for your high value employees to build trusting relationships with others. As catalysts within their organization, they'll create a ripple effect that drives better collaboration, communication and innovation across the entire organization.



## Their Expectations for the C-Level

We asked these high value leaders to share what they needed more of from their senior executives to solve their challenges. We noticed some unique themes based on whether the leaders were actively job-seeking or not.

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January 2025

## Expectation #1

# Walk Your Cultural Talk

Your top leaders are working to improve their team culture but need their senior leaders to lead the way with greater empathy and authenticity. They are looking for you to invest more time and effort to hold people accountable to your workplace values and address cultural misalignment quickly and consistently.

Leaders also want to see support for inclusion, empathy and diversity, which they expressed as critical to helping them achieve their goals and retain high performing individuals on their teams. This need was even more pronounced for leaders who are job seeking.



**“More diversity (of thought, of colour, of gender).”**

## Expectation #2

# Build trust through transparency

Your key leaders want straight talk — more open, honest and frequent conversations with their executive team. They want to hear more about what's on your mind — from the “why” behind changing strategic priorities to the rationale for decisions — so they can update their teams and course correct where needed. For leaders who are looking to leave their roles, transparency was an even more significant issue, and their responses reflect a deep distrust of senior leadership, underscoring what we already know to be true about the connection between transparency and trust.



**“More clarity and details on the day-to-day work they accomplish and the responsibilities they handle.”**

### Expectation #3

## Help Us Grow

Your best and brightest want to understand what opportunities exist for them and are looking for your support to build the skills to reach these milestones. They want more investment in upskilling and succession planning and acknowledgement of their contributions.

Leaders asked for more decisive action in addressing performance issues, holding people accountable and leading by example. Job-seeking leaders are twice as likely to indicate that career development is a leadership challenge.



**“Focus on the development of current and future leaders.”**

### Expectation #4

## Reduce Chaos and Rework

With the burden of never-ending change clearly weighing on these leaders they are looking for executive teams who offer clearly defined strategies and resist impulse changes or knee-jerk reactions. They're asking for well-thought-out decisions to reduce the burgeoning levels of change, stress and overwhelm. Leaders asked for stronger prioritization to help their teams stay focused on the right tasks and make measurable progress.



**“Stick to a decision for long enough to see if it's working.”**



## Taboo Topics: What They Struggle to Tell You

We know key players hesitate to share their challenges with their leaders, typically because they want to present a strong and capable image. We asked them, **“What work-related challenges do you find the most difficult to discuss with your manager?”**

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January 2025





## Requests for New Opportunities or Job Advancement

High potential leaders are hesitant to talk about their personal career aspirations or ask for new opportunities because they worry, they'll be viewed as uncommitted to their current role. They are often reluctant to share their interests because they don't want to limit their future options or be seen as someone who's "not a team player" if they express a lack of interest in specific career moves.

To add to the challenge is the reality that most managers are inadequately prepared for career conversations and aren't themselves plugged into wider opportunities within their organizations. A fuzzy career path and a manager who is ill-equipped to provide alternatives and development options often leads to high potentials exiting organizations when they should really stay.



## Their Own Burnout and Fatigue

Top leaders struggle with the continued expectation that they do more with less but don't know how to raise their concerns about overwhelm or fatigue without risking being labelled as not capable or committed. They hesitate to discuss the levels of stress they are experiencing as demands and targets continue to change or increase, resources are constrained, and budgets are tightened.

High performers are known for having a high capacity and ability to handle significant levels of stress. If they're reaching a breaking point, you can be sure that there are bigger capacity issues at play in your organization.

Watch out for key talent who start to turn down extra assignments, stay unusually quiet during meetings or stop advocating for things they used to be passionate about. These could all be indicators of disengagement and burnout and require a speedy conversation.



## Lack of Consequences for Underperformers

High performing leaders push to be clear on what's expected for themselves and their teams, but don't know how to raise frustrations when these standards are not upheld consistently by senior leadership. High potential and high performing leaders can be easily frustrated by underperformance, so clarifying expectations is critical and holding people accountable to performance standards is key.

This also means you may need to help your high performer recognize that not everyone will operate at the same level of pace and capacity as they themselves operate. Sometimes, to reduce frustration in top performers, you may need to coach them to lower their own (overly) high standards just a little.

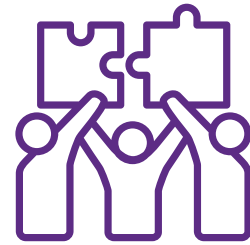


## Recognition & Feedback Matters

Leaders expressed hesitation to talk about pay increases or recognition, citing fears of being perceived as complaining or being tone-deaf, particularly if the organization is facing financial challenges. They also indicated some suspicion that senior leaders had more flexibility on pay decisions than they admit, particularly if compensation and advancement decisions aren't explained.

And don't forget: they crave feedback. An annual performance review simply isn't enough. Your best and brightest want to know where they stand and how they can continue to improve.

Job-seekers had stronger feelings of being under-compensated and under-recognized than non-job seekers.



## Workplace Culture Gaps

Raising concerns about organizational culture issues that are impacting their ability to meet targets can sometimes be a struggle for your key leadership talent. This is particularly true if they don't see senior leaders investing time or budget to make culture improvements a priority.

Your high performers are highly attuned to the actions that get rewarded and quick to lose trust when senior leaders send out contradictory messages.



Frustration spikes even more with senior leaders who readily dismiss concerns voiced over back-to-work mandates with a “let them quit” perspective, as it fails to acknowledge the very real pressures middle managers face to retain talent and deliver results. The burden of recruiting and training adds to their already full work plates and creates increased pressures that feel avoidable and unnecessary.

Leaders who are actively job-seeking are more likely to mention a lack of psychological safety or gaps in DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging) initiatives that contribute to their disillusionment in the mandate of the organization and their own future career opportunities.

# Increase Your Collective Leadership Capacity: Three Critical Actions for the C-Suite

At [The Roundtable](#), we encourage leaders to focus on small, incremental changes, create a community of support and build collective strength.

Read on for **three ways** to ensure you're giving your top leaders the support they need to stay engaged and performing at top levels.

The Roundtable Report on High Potential Leaders



## Critical Action #1

# Deepen Your Leadership Skills and Self-Awareness

We can't emphasize this enough: your strongest leaders are investing in building their skills and self-awareness, and they need you to do the same.

Your efforts to ask more questions, be open to change in how you think or act, and continue to build strong and empathetic leadership skills will be key to retaining your top leaders.



Ramp up your personal leadership impact with our action planning method Get Surgical Process™. **Book your free consultation today.**

## Critical Action #2

# Share More Information, More Often

Your top performers want to feel in step with your thoughts and decisions to better guide and support their teams. Whether it's having better conversations in your one-on-one meetings or providing more detail in division-wide team meetings, sharing more of what's on your mind will keep your leaders and teams in sync with your priorities and better able to meet the changing needs of your business. Research shows that when senior leaders display vulnerability, it increases trust and engagement on their teams. **According to Gallup**, teams with leaders who display vulnerability saw a 25% increase in employee engagement levels and, it's safe to say, higher engagement is good for productivity.

### Critical Action #3

## Create Learning Communities Across Your Leadership Teams

Help leaders improve their impact by leveraging peer and team-based coaching programs. The future of leadership is in the collective, and our learning programming needs to build from individual self-insight and development to collective development. Build programming that cultivates collaboration, innovation, alignment and accountability by bringing leaders together in small cohorts to drive real change and impact.



**[Book a complimentary session](#)** with a member of our team today and explore how you can increase alignment, accountability and adaptability in your high potential leadership development programming.



**[Download our Ultimate Guide to Group Coaching](#)** to get key tips and ideas for creating your own programs or boosting the effectiveness of your existing leadership development offerings.

## About The Roundtable

The Roundtable is an award-winning leadership development pioneer in group and team coaching and leadership development programs for high potential leaders. We help leaders successfully navigate change, disruption and growth by teaching and empowering them to coach each other and align their development to key strategic and workplace culture priorities. Quite simply, we are the group and team coaching authority.

You can learn more about The Roundtable and our programs on [our website](#), or reach out to talk to us about ways we can help you build exceptional leaders, exceptional teams and exceptional culture by unleashing collective impact.

## Let's Connect!

We want to hear from you!  
Please reach out with your feedback or questions:



You can find links to our leadership resources, including blog articles, upcoming CEO webinars and book summaries in our monthly newsletter [The Roundtable RECAP](#).

*Thank you to all the talented leaders who participated in this survey and shared their candid thoughts with us. We wish you all continued success. Keep making a difference.*

# About the Authors



## Andrew (Drew) Rand, PhD

Drew is President of **Rand Consulting Group** and has over fifteen years of experience in the fields of leadership and organizational assessment and development. He has worked as an organizational consultant and as part of an internal learning and talent development team for a global corporation. His major areas of interest are leadership selection and development, executive coaching and organizational development.



## Ashley Michael, ACC

Ashley is a Senior Coach at The Roundtable. Ashley provides coaching and advisory support to clients across industries, levels and sectors with a specific focus on emerging high potential talent.



## Glain Roberts-McCabe, CTDP, PCC

Glain is Founder and President of The Roundtable. She has spent over thirty-five years in executive leadership roles and the past twenty-five years focused exclusively on working with high potential leaders as a program developer, coach and strategic advisor.

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