

From Burnout to Breakthrough:

Turn Inconsistent Leadership Into Sustainable Performance

FranklinCovey

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Is Good Leadership Good Enough?

Most leaders are good at their jobs. They work hard, care about their team members, and do their best to deliver results. In fact, a 2025 FranklinCovey Institute study found that half of the leaders in our sample were rated above average or better by their teams and their bosses.

But are these "good" leaders good enough to deliver the sustained high performance organizations need from their teams today?

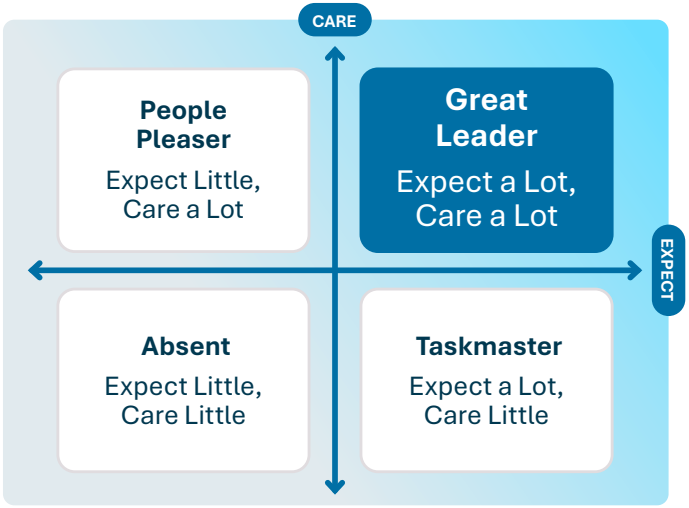
A closer look at the data suggests they might not be. The FranklinCovey study scored leaders along two axes: how much they expect of their team members and how much they care about them. The "good" leaders who represent half of the sample received average ratings for expectations and caring—and only 30% of them were rated by their own bosses as being exceptional at delivering results.

In contrast, leaders who both "Expect a Lot" and "Care a Lot"—representing just 13% of the leaders in the sample—produce dramatically different outcomes. Compared to those "good" leaders, they are **2.5 times as likely** to be judged by their bosses as "exceptional" at delivering results. Their team members are also nearly **twice as likely** to experience the highest level of engagement, which the study calls Creative Excitement.



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The research makes clear that the dual focus of expecting and caring makes the difference. High standards without care (the Taskmaster persona) risk burnout and disengagement; care without high standards (People Pleasers) breeds inconsistency and confusion.

Leaders are the leverage point. The small percentage of leaders who both expect a lot and care a lot accounts for a disproportionate share of engagement and results; they deliver these outsized outcomes while protecting their teams' energy.

The most important finding of the research, for every organization, is that great *leadership can be taught*. It is a repeatable set of practices that can be developed and deepened over time. Equipping leaders to embrace these practices with intention is a critical lever for driving consistent performance and avoid burnout—especially for organizations operating in disruptive and volatile times.

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Your Leaders Are Working Harder Than Ever.

Why Aren't Results More Consistent?

FranklinCovey's research has identified three persistent default behaviors that undermine leadership development and hold individuals and their organizations back:



1. **The Deep-End Syndrome.** Most new leaders are high performers promoted for their technical excellence. Bringing front-line experience into a management role can be a huge advantage. But when the job shifts from doing the work to leading people—the make-or-break competency for most managers and executives—they're often left to improvise, learning through trial and error with limited coaching or structure. Thrown in at the deep end of the swimming pool, they are expected to swim, but may struggle to keep their heads above water.

2. **The Confidence Plateau.** After a few years in their role, many leaders hit a plateau and start to rely on instinct and personality. Rather than take stock of their strengths and struggles, they carry yesterday's playbook forward. In the worst cases, they quietly adopt a defensive posture—aware of what they don't know but reluctant to admit it, and themselves at risk of disengagement or burnout.

3. **The Finished-Learning Fallacy.** It's easy, especially after a string of successes or a few quarters of solid performance, for a leader to assume they've got it locked up. The most experienced executives will be inclined to think that their personal development years are behind them. In fact, an organization's top leaders, by definition, are the most prone to complacency—and their success is the most critical.

When people leadership isn't effective, the impact shows up quickly in missed commitments, rework, burnout, and preventable attrition. Without a consistent leadership approach, execution isn't consistent, either. Some people and teams hit it out of the park, while others struggle to even get started. Work keeps rolling up to a few go-to people, slowing everything down, creating uneven outcomes, and generating disengagement. The result is turnover and burnout, culminating in the loss of the organization's best people.

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Disruptive Times Call for Consistent Leadership



A dynamic and volatile world increases the demand for consistent leadership. Today's environment, from changing markets to shifting technology, is turbulent in ways that seem almost designed to knock leaders off balance and undercut mission and purpose.

AI is creating uncertainty in the future leadership pool. White-collar professionals—the people who organizations most often count on to fill leadership roles—must navigate growing ambiguity about the technology's impact on their work. FranklinCovey Institute's AI General Attitudes Survey found that 70% of knowledge workers believe AI and technology are evolving faster than their culture can adapt. It also highlights a mismatch between confidence and readiness: Some 72% say they know how to use AI better than most of their peers, and nearly 60% report their organizations are already in the adoption or innovation stages. Yet two-thirds describe AI as minimally or no longer disruptive, suggesting many underestimate the scale of change ahead.

When the next generation of leaders is caught between self-assuredness and uncertainty, their capacity to provide confident and consistent leadership—to convincingly weigh against the gravitational pull of burnout—diminishes.

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AI has also raised the bar for competitive innovation by accelerating the pace of organizational change. Even with today's heavy focus on AI, **SHRM reports** that 46% of CHROs rank leadership and manager development as their top priority, well ahead of AI adoption at 28%. This suggests HR leaders recognize that AI is ultimately a management challenge that requires human-centered leadership to navigate successfully.

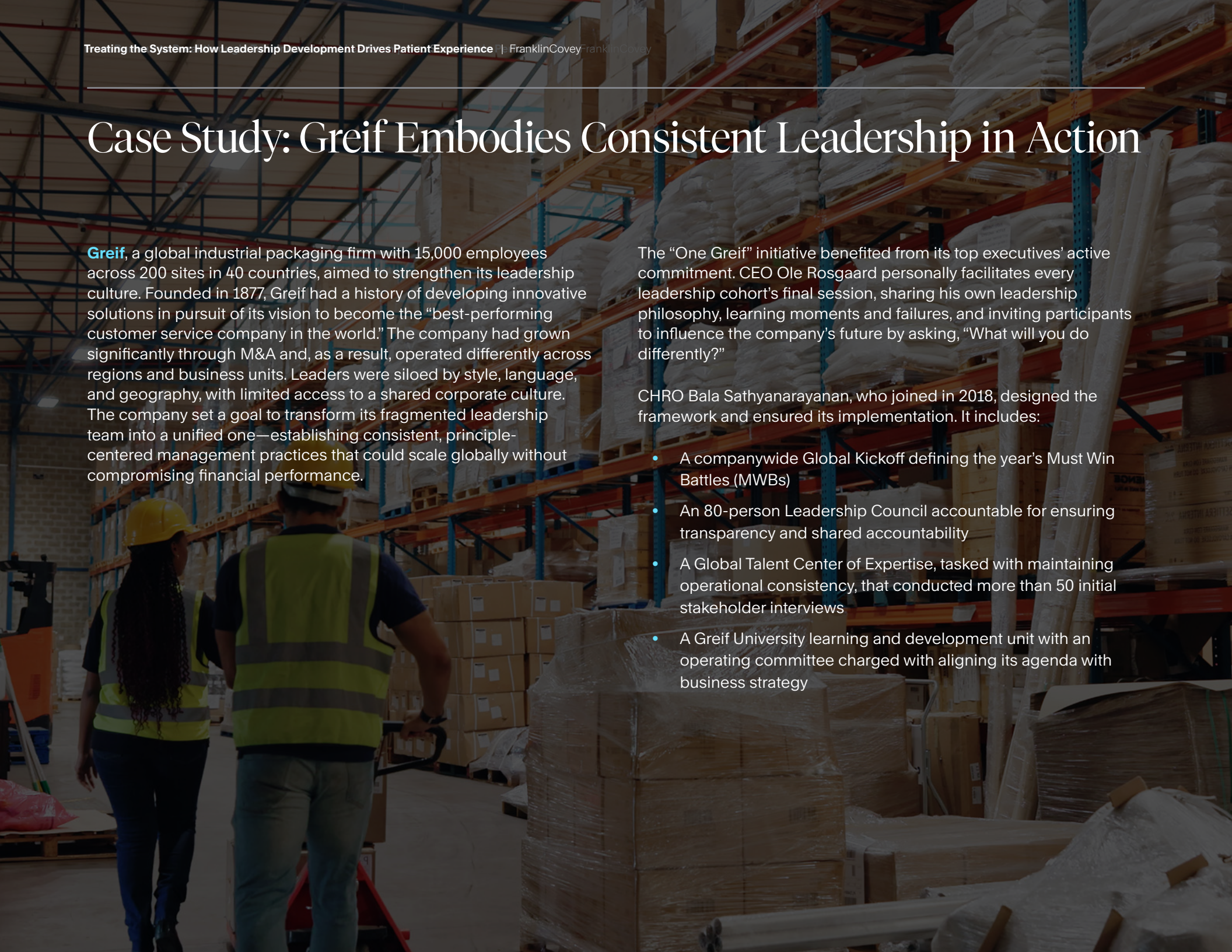
The most successful adopters will be those with leaders who can mobilize teams to adopt new workflows, run disciplined experiments, and translate lessons into new ways of working. Innovation at scale requires leaders who can coach, delegate, and create clarity amid ambiguity.

Increased volatility—whether in the global marketplace or in the culture at large—makes the work of mission alignment harder. We live in an era of high distraction. Against this backdrop, **Glassdoor's 2026 work trends data** identifies a widening trust deficit, with mentions of "misalignment" in employee reviews jumping 149% in a single year, alongside significant rises in "disconnect" (+24%) and "distrust" (+26%). Meanwhile, **Gallup reports** that managers account for 70% of the variance in team engagement. In an environment of rolling layoffs, return-to-office adjustment, and geopolitical uncertainty, companies face greater pressure to center their mission and align people around it. Ultimately, that alignment happens—or doesn't—in the daily interactions between leaders and their teams.



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Case Study: Greif Embodies Consistent Leadership in Action



Greif, a global industrial packaging firm with 15,000 employees across 200 sites in 40 countries, aimed to strengthen its leadership culture. Founded in 1877, Greif had a history of developing innovative solutions in pursuit of its vision to become the "best-performing customer service company in the world." The company had grown significantly through M&A and, as a result, operated differently across regions and business units. Leaders were siloed by style, language, and geography, with limited access to a shared corporate culture. The company set a goal to transform its fragmented leadership team into a unified one—establishing consistent, principle-centered management practices that could scale globally without compromising financial performance.

The "One Greif" initiative benefited from its top executives' active commitment. CEO Ole Rosgaard personally facilitates every leadership cohort's final session, sharing his own leadership philosophy, learning moments and failures, and inviting participants to influence the company's future by asking, "What will you do differently?"

CHRO Bala Sathyanarayanan, who joined in 2018, designed the framework and ensured its implementation. It includes:

- A companywide Global Kickoff defining the year's Must Win Battles (MWBs)
- An 80-person Leadership Council accountable for ensuring transparency and shared accountability
- A Global Talent Center of Expertise, tasked with maintaining operational consistency, that conducted more than 50 initial stakeholder interviews
- A Greif University learning and development unit with an operating committee charged with aligning its agenda with business strategy

One Greif leadership component, called “Lead to Last,” guides 30-participant cohorts through a 12-week, blended-learning journey organized by leadership level, including “first level” and “high potential,” and reinforces the same core practices throughout. Throughout 2024, more than 1,000 of Greif's 1,350 people leaders and high-potential colleagues self-registered for this leadership learning journey.

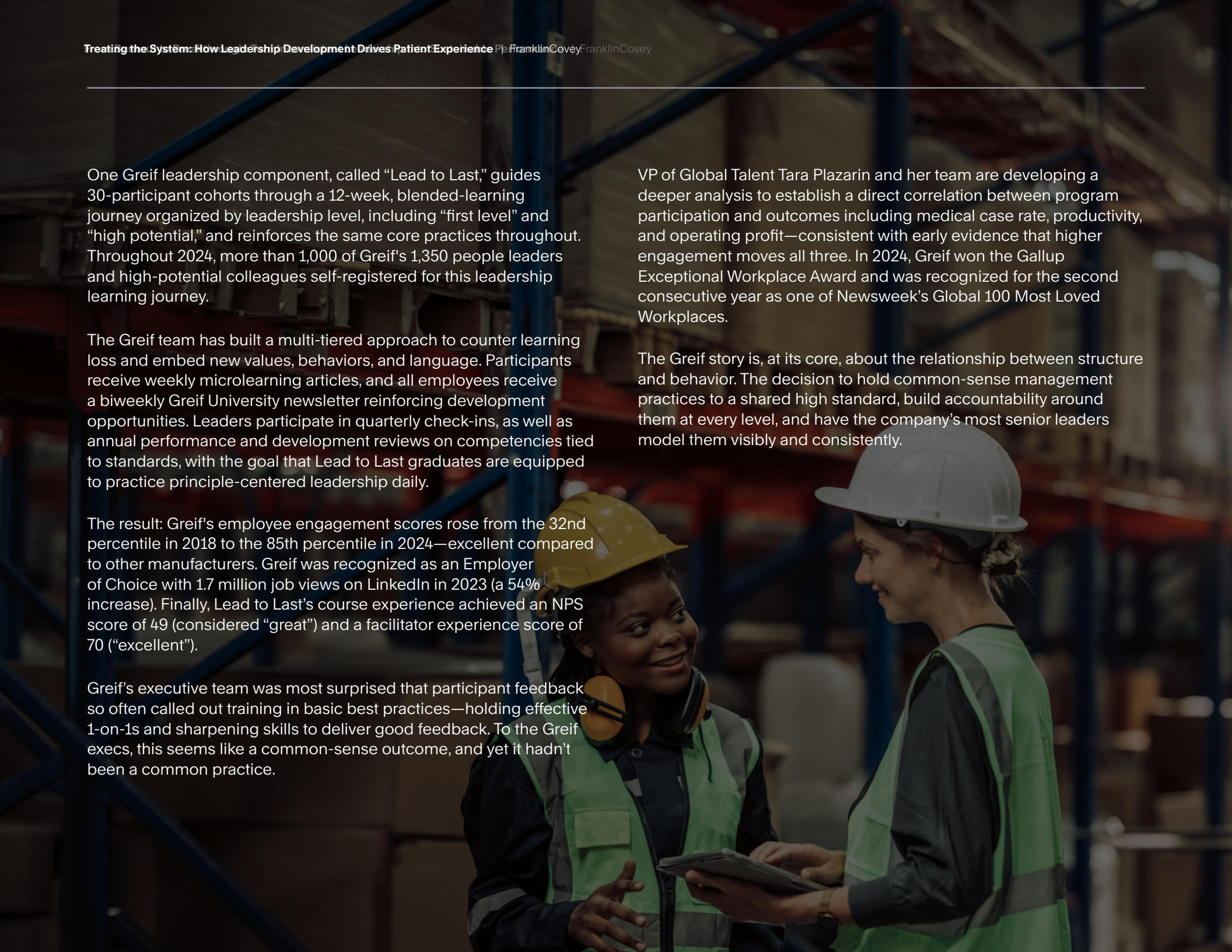
The Greif team has built a multi-tiered approach to counter learning loss and embed new values, behaviors, and language. Participants receive weekly microlearning articles, and all employees receive a biweekly Greif University newsletter reinforcing development opportunities. Leaders participate in quarterly check-ins, as well as annual performance and development reviews on competencies tied to standards, with the goal that Lead to Last graduates are equipped to practice principle-centered leadership daily.

The result: Greif's employee engagement scores rose from the 32nd percentile in 2018 to the 85th percentile in 2024—excellent compared to other manufacturers. Greif was recognized as an Employer of Choice with 1.7 million job views on LinkedIn in 2023 (a 54% increase). Finally, Lead to Last’s course experience achieved an NPS score of 49 (considered “great”) and a facilitator experience score of 70 (“excellent”).

Greif’s executive team was most surprised that participant feedback so often called out training in basic best practices—holding effective 1-on-1s and sharpening skills to deliver good feedback. To the Greif execs, this seems like a common-sense outcome, and yet it hadn’t been a common practice.

VP of Global Talent Tara Plazarin and her team are developing a deeper analysis to establish a direct correlation between program participation and outcomes including medical case rate, productivity, and operating profit—consistent with early evidence that higher engagement moves all three. In 2024, Greif won the Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award and was recognized for the second consecutive year as one of Newsweek’s Global 100 Most Loved Workplaces.

The Greif story is, at its core, about the relationship between structure and behavior. The decision to hold common-sense management practices to a shared high standard, build accountability around them at every level, and have the company’s most senior leaders model them visibly and consistently.



The "How" Behind Great Leadership



The FranklinCovey Institute survey found these "Expect a Lot, Care a Lot" leaders who excel in both performance and engagement also revealed something else. These leaders weren't doing anything revolutionary. They simply practiced a small number of foundational behaviors with unusual consistency. The difference wasn't what they knew. It was what they did—daily and weekly, in the moments that shape how people experience leadership.

Those behaviors cluster around a handful of areas that are deceptively simple to describe but difficult to sustain: creating clarity, coaching instead of directing, delegating with real ownership, making feedback a habit, managing energy, and showing up consistently in 1-on-1s. None of these is a new or radical idea. Many of them require direct, high-touch connection and communication, which collectively work to reduce isolation and alienation. And the research suggests that leaders who practice all of them together produce superior results.

For leaders and leaders of leaders who know these practices already, ask yourself: *Do I, and do my staff, use them consistently?* If not, there's a knowing-doing gap that, if closed, can become a performance multiplier.

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Start with Clarity

In FranklinCovey Institute research, only 27% of employees report full role clarity at work. This makes the most basic leadership act—ensuring people know why their work matters and what "great" looks like—also the most neglected. High-performing leaders connect goals and roles to purpose, ensuring everyone knows the organization's "why" beyond revenues and profits. When these leaders set expectations, they ensure that they're specific and measurable.

At Greif, CEO Ole Rosgaard and CHRO Bala Sathyanarayanan made alignment around the company's purpose their starting point. They built a systemic accountability framework to connect this to every leader's day-to-day work. As Sathyanarayanan describes it, "Success in a global organization is about alignment. Aligning our global colleagues, roles and responsibilities to our company goals and priorities, toward the organization's purpose of serving our customers."

Try this:
In your next team meeting, invite your team to participate in a gut check on your organization's purpose. Ask each person to complete this sentence: "Our team exists to [what we do] for [who we serve] so they can [the impact of our work]." Compare the answers. If they're different, that's your clarity gap.



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Coach, Don't Solve

The instinct of most leaders is to be the person with the answers. Decisiveness feels productive and the team seems to appreciate, or even demand, it. But solving problems for people doesn't build their capacity to solve problems on their own. The leaders who produce the strongest engagement and performance shift from "It's my job to have all the answers" to something harder: asking thought-provoking questions, listening with genuine intent, and helping people work through challenges themselves.

ASICS North America built this kind of coaching culture through their ASICS Academy, designing leadership development programs for everyone from individual contributors to the executive team. Participants spent up to five hours per month on leadership development, ensuring engagement increased and was sustained, culminating in a 95% retention rate. The approach created a common coaching language across the organization and a consistent expectation that leaders at every level would develop their people, not just direct them.

Try this:
The next time a team member brings you a problem, resist the urge to solve it. Instead, ask: "What have you tried so far?" followed by "What options do you see?" and finally, "Which one do you want to try first?" Track how often you default to telling versus coaching over the next week.

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Delegate to Grow

Leaders may hold onto tasks or responsibilities because they think, "I can do it better or faster myself." In doing so, they create two problems at once: They bottleneck their own capacity, and they stall the growth of the people around them. The leaders who get delegation right assign real ownership and "stretch" work. The level of support they provide is calibrated to each person's skill and readiness. The goal isn't to lighten the leader's load. It's to systematically build a team that can carry more.

Taylor Corporation, a brand-building design and printing services provider, saw this dynamic play out through their Frontline Leader Certification, which focused on the 75% of their leaders who were frontline managers—the leaders who directly managed 84% of all Taylor employees. One key strategy they used was the "manager teach-back." As participants went through the program, they returned to their managers and taught them what they'd learned. This step represents delegation in action. The exercise required frontline leaders to take ownership of spreading new practices upward, reinforcing their managers' confidence that they could be trusted with higher-value work.

Try this:
Identify one task you do regularly that someone on your team could own. Before you hand it off, assess their skills and interest in taking it on. Then decide how much support they need, ranging from a months-long "apprenticeship" with side-by-side collaboration to the simple approval of a plan they submit. Check in after a week to discuss how it's going—not the work per se, but the transfer of ownership and the leadership it asks of them.



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Make Feedback Continuous

Most leaders give feedback only when something goes wrong. But treating feedback as a correction tool misses its real power. Feedback is an acceleration engine. Frequent, specific feedback—positive and constructive, flowing up and down the org chart—builds trust, reinforces behaviors that drive results, and helps people course-correct before small issues become big ones. FranklinCovey research shows that employees who receive more frequent feedback are twice as likely to reach the highest level of engagement.

Greif's embrace of the "servant leadership" philosophy depends on feedback flowing in every direction. The company's leaders model this personally, hosting roundtable discussions with employee groups to listen, connect, and understand where leadership needs to improve. As Sathyanarayanan puts it, "We want to communicate clearly to them that we are there for them, so they know they have the highest level of support." For Greif, feedback is a continuous system.

Try this:
Next week, give one piece of specific positive feedback to a team member using this formula: "I noticed [what they did]. The impact was [why it mattered]. Keep doing [that behavior] because [how it helps the team]." Notice how they respond and probe accordingly. Are they excited to put your counsel into action, or do they seem deflated?

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Protect and Generate Energy

Energy is a strategic asset, and the best leaders treat it that way. Rather than pushing through exhaustion as a badge of commitment, they actively spot and eliminate everyday occurrences that drain and distract them—the avalanche of interruptions that devour Monday mornings, the been-there, done-that vibe of a weekly staff meeting. More importantly, great leaders reframe leadership itself as a source of energy and the active antithesis of jadedness and burnout. When leaders connect their daily work to a sense of contribution and purpose, they sustain themselves and generate energy for the people around them.

What stands out about the Greif story is the palpable energy both Rosgaard and Sathyanarayanan bring to their leadership. Sathyanarayanan describes himself as a "Relator"—someone who draws energy from connecting with people and returns that energy to the organization through personal recognition and visible participation. Though they sit atop a 15,000-employee corporation, both leaders invest time personally hosting roundtables and check-ins with employee groups across the globe. For Rosgaard and Sathyanarayanan, these are not obligations; they're fuel.

Try this:
In your next team meeting, ask: "What's one thing that drains your energy every week that we could eliminate or reduce?" Write down every answer. Pick one and fix it within 30 days. Then ask again.



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Make 1-on-1s the Multiplier

Everything above—clarity, coaching, delegation, feedback, energy—converges in a single practice: the 1-on-1. When leaders bring these behaviors into individualized, consistent conversations with each team member, the 1-on-1 becomes the highest-leverage meeting on their calendar. Be mindful of what the 1-on-1 is not. It's not a project-by-project status check. It's also not a friendly bonding session. It is a purposeful act of leadership—a conversation designed to exchange feedback, strengthen the professional relationship, build shared accountability, and drive sustained results. FranklinCovey research shows that leaders who run effective 1-on-1s are twice as more likely to have highly engaged teams.

At Taylor Corporation, the most surprising outcome of their leadership development program was the increase in 1-on-1s. Leaders who had previously treated these as optional began holding them consistently, enabling them to shift their content from task review to meaningful conversation. As one participant put it, "It feels good that the company is investing in me and values what I do!" Taylor set a baseline Net Promoter Score goal of 60 for its first year. They finished at 70.

Try this:
Before your next 1-on-1, choose one of the areas above to focus the conversation. Is there a delegation opportunity to discuss? Feedback to give or seek? A conversation about what is draining energy? Preparing with intention transforms 1-on-1s from status updates into leadership conversations.

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Drive Leadership Excellence to Unlock Consistent Performance

The biggest obstacle to leadership development may be the common assumption that leadership is an inherent quality—something people either have or lack. That belief, whether conscious or unconscious, too often shapes how organizations identify and invest in their teams. It also shapes how individuals see themselves, as they quietly back down from opportunities they're entirely capable of fulfilling or rush into a corner office without seeking support.

Even high-performing companies must recognize the risk they take on—demotivation, disengagement, burnout—when they let leadership happen organically, without intention or consistency, without preparation or sustained support.

Leadership can be learned and, for organizations, it can be taught. Moreover, it strengthens with intentional practice. The activities described in this guide—1-on-1s, coaching, expectation-setting, feedback, delegation, self-renewal—are common practices of management, a language spoken throughout corporate life. What distinguishes the leaders who produce exceptional results is the consistency and care with which they apply these tools.

As the most trusted leadership company in the world, FranklinCovey's organizational performance partnerships help companies bridge critical leadership gaps and unleash outstanding results. FranklinCovey's **6 Critical Practices for Leading a Team®** has evolved to meet today's challenging realities and equip every leader—from first-time manager to senior executive—with the core people skills they need to lead teams effectively, build connection, and achieve measurable outcomes. By balancing high expectations with genuine care, we help leaders build the behaviors that shape trust, engagement, and performance, so organizations accomplish more through their people—not at their expense.

Our best-in-class learning solutions—available Live-Online, On Demand, or Live In-Person—are designed to enrich leadership skills at every level and future-proof your organization for what's to come. For additional information about how we can help your leaders achieve breakthrough results, email us at **info@leadershipresources.my**

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