



How to Transition From Manager to Executive

Moving from managing the work to leading the organization

Written by Jenna Ghisolfo, Founder

Still Standing in Heels Consulting

The skills that make you a successful manager can earn you the opportunity to become an executive. But becoming an effective executive requires you to lead differently.

The Promotion Is More Than a New Title

For many professionals, becoming an executive feels like the natural next step after years of successfully managing teams, projects, deadlines, budgets, and day-to-day operations. Yet the transition can be surprisingly difficult. The expectations change. The conversations change. The decisions become more complex. And suddenly, being the person who can solve every problem is no longer the most valuable thing you bring to the organization.

Managers are often rewarded for execution. Executives are expected to create direction. Managers make sure today's work gets done. Executives must also anticipate what the organization will need six months, two years, or five years from now.

The transition requires more than learning a few new leadership techniques. It requires a shift in how you think about your role, your time, your team, and your responsibility to the organization.

1. Stop Measuring Your Value by How Much You Personally Do

One of the hardest adjustments for high-performing managers is letting go of the belief that being busy means being valuable. Managers often reach leadership positions because they are dependable problem-solvers. They know the details, jump in when something goes wrong, and can usually get the work across the finish line.

At the executive level, constantly stepping into the work can become a limitation. Your value increasingly comes from setting priorities, removing barriers, developing leaders, allocating resources, making decisions, and ensuring the right people are positioned to execute.

Your goal is no longer to be the person everyone needs in order to get something done. Your goal is to build an organization that can perform effectively without requiring your involvement in every decision.

2. Move From Operational Thinking to Strategic Thinking

Managers naturally focus on immediate priorities: What needs to happen today? Who owns this task? Why is the deadline slipping? Executives must expand the lens.

Strategic leadership means asking different questions. Where is the organization going? What risks are emerging? What opportunities are we missing? What should we stop doing? Where should resources be invested? What will our customers, employees, stakeholders, or industry need next?

Strong executives learn to move comfortably between the present and the future without becoming disconnected from either.

3. Learn to Lead Through Other Leaders

As your responsibility grows, you cannot personally manage every employee. You must learn to lead managers, directors, department heads, and other senior professionals who are responsible for leading their own teams.

That requires clear expectations, trust, accountability, coaching, and the ability to resist taking over when someone approaches a problem differently than you would. Developing capable leaders beneath you is not giving up control. It is one of the clearest signs that you are becoming an executive.

4. Strengthen Your Executive Presence

Executive presence is not about having the loudest voice in the room, dressing a certain way, or pretending to have every answer. It is the combination of credibility, confidence, communication, judgment, composure, and consistency that causes people to trust your leadership.

Executives are watched closely, particularly during uncertainty. How you communicate a difficult decision, respond to criticism, handle disagreement, ask questions, manage your emotions, and conduct yourself when the answer is not obvious all influence how others experience your leadership.

5. Become Comfortable Making Decisions With Incomplete Information

Managers often have the ability to gather detailed information before making a decision. Executives do not always have that luxury. Senior leadership frequently involves ambiguity, competing priorities, incomplete data, and decisions where every option carries some level of risk.

The goal is not to become impulsive. It is to become disciplined about evaluating the information available, seeking the right perspectives, understanding the risks, making the decision, and adjusting when new information emerges.

6. Understand the Business Beyond Your Department

A strong manager may know their department exceptionally well. A strong executive must understand how that department fits into the entire organization.

Learn how the organization makes money, spends money, serves customers or constituents, measures performance, manages risk, attracts talent, and delivers on its mission. Understand the priorities and pressures facing other departments. Executive decisions often require balancing what is best for one team against what is best for the organization as a whole.

7. Build Relationships Before You Need Them

Executive leadership is highly relational. Your effectiveness will depend not only on the people who report to you, but also on peers, board members, clients, community partners, vendors, investors, stakeholders, and other leaders across the organization.

Do not wait for a crisis to begin building those relationships. Develop credibility by listening, following through, understanding other perspectives, and becoming someone others can work with even when you disagree.

8. Get Comfortable With Difficult Conversations

At the executive level, avoiding difficult conversations becomes increasingly expensive. You may need to address an underperforming leader, challenge a peer, communicate an unpopular decision, push back on a board member, restructure a team, or tell someone that a strategy they strongly support is not working.

You do not need to become confrontational. You do need to become comfortable being clear. Executives who can address difficult issues respectfully and early prevent small problems from becoming organizational problems.

9. Protect Your Time for Executive-Level Work

If every hour of your calendar is consumed by meetings, approvals, emails, and problems that someone else could solve, you will struggle to perform at the executive level.

Examine your calendar as a leadership tool. Identify what truly requires your involvement, what can be delegated, what can be eliminated, and where you need protected time for strategy, planning, relationship-building, reflection, and major decisions.

10. Shift From Having the Answers to Asking Better Questions

New executives sometimes feel pressure to prove that they deserve the role by having an immediate answer for everything. The strongest executives understand that their job is not to be the smartest person in every conversation.

Questions such as "What are we missing?", "What happens if we do nothing?", "What does success look like?", "Who else should be involved?", and "What problem are we actually trying to solve?" can create better thinking throughout an organization.

11. Develop a Leadership Point of View

As you move into executive leadership, people need to understand what you stand for. What are your expectations? How do you make decisions? What behaviors will you tolerate - and what behaviors will you not? How do you define accountability? What kind of culture do you want to create?

Your leadership philosophy does not need to be a slogan. It needs to be visible in the decisions you make and the way you consistently lead.

12. Find a Place Where You Can Be Challenged

The higher leaders move in an organization, the harder it can become to receive candid feedback. Employees may hesitate to challenge you. Peers may have competing interests. And some decisions are not appropriate to work through with the people you lead.

A trusted mentor, executive coach, or outside advisor can provide a confidential environment to test ideas, examine blind spots, prepare for difficult conversations, and challenge your assumptions. Executives need support too - but the right support should make your thinking stronger, not simply agree with you.

The Biggest Mindset Shift

Perhaps the most important transition is moving from **"How can I get this done?"** to **"How do I create the conditions for this organization and its people to succeed?"**

That shift changes how you delegate, how you communicate, how you develop people, how you spend your time, and how you make decisions. It is the difference between managing activity and leading impact.

How Still Standing in Heels Consulting Can Help

Still Standing in Heels Consulting works with emerging executives, senior leaders, business owners, and organizations to help leaders successfully navigate the transition into higher levels of responsibility. Executive development can be customized around the real challenges a leader is facing, including executive presence, strategic thinking, delegation, communication, difficult conversations, team leadership, decision-making, confidence, accountability, and organizational influence.

Support can include one-on-one executive coaching, leadership development programs, customized corporate training, board and executive leadership training, half-day or full-day workshops, and executive retreats.

**You were promoted because of what you have already proven you can do.
Your next level of leadership will be defined by what you learn to do differently.**

**Still Standing in Heels Consulting
Executive Coaching | Leadership Development | Corporate Training**

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