

AVION CONSULTING

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

What AI Can't Teach Your Most Promising Hires

A reflection on what separates technical excellence from leadership readiness, and why the gap is showing up faster in an AI-native workplace.

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Every technology company I talk with right now is racing to prove its people can keep pace with the tools. Fewer are asking whether their people know how to lead once they get there.

I see this most clearly in the early-career cohort. Many are first-generation professionals, often the children of immigrants, who arrived with academic records that would make any recruiter's year. They can build. They can ship. What often hasn't been built alongside the technical skill is the muscle for showing up: reading a room, earning trust across a hierarchy, translating brilliance into influence. Nobody taught them that, because nobody taught most of us that either. The difference now is that the pace of an AI-native workplace makes the gap show up faster, and cost more, than it used to.

I've spent the better part of my career coaching senior leaders through exactly this transition, and the pattern holds at every level. Technical excellence buys you a seat at the table. On its own, it does not buy you followership. The leaders who make that leap well almost always point to the same turning point: someone invested in their development as a whole person, not just their output.

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That's a harder thing to build a program around than a technical curriculum, mostly because it resists easy measurement. We solved that the slow way. Rather than lean on psychometric assessment alone, useful, but limited when the goal is behavior change, we build interview-based 360 reviews and use recorded coaching conversations to show, in a person's own words and actions, exactly where a behavior shifted and where it didn't. We run pre- and post-engagement testing so the return on a coaching investment is visible, not assumed. It takes longer to build than

a slide deck. It's also the only version that survives a skeptical finance leader asking, reasonably, how anyone knows it worked.

None of this is an argument against moving fast on the technology. It's an argument for building the human infrastructure at the same speed as the technical one, especially for the people who walked into these rooms without a blueprint for how to lead in them. The organizations that get ahead of this won't just retain more of their best early-career talent. Five years from now, they'll have leaders who know how to bring their full selves into rooms that were not originally built with them in mind.

What is your organization doing, concretely, to develop the leadership skill of your most technically gifted early-career hires, and how would you know if it worked?