AVION CONSULTING

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

Executive Coaching Isn't a Rescue Plan. It's a Retention Strategy.

The organizations still reserving coaching for leaders in trouble are protecting the wrong end of the roster, and the data on who actually leaves makes the case plainly.

10%

Of newly promoted leaders succeed without targeted development support, according to Gallup

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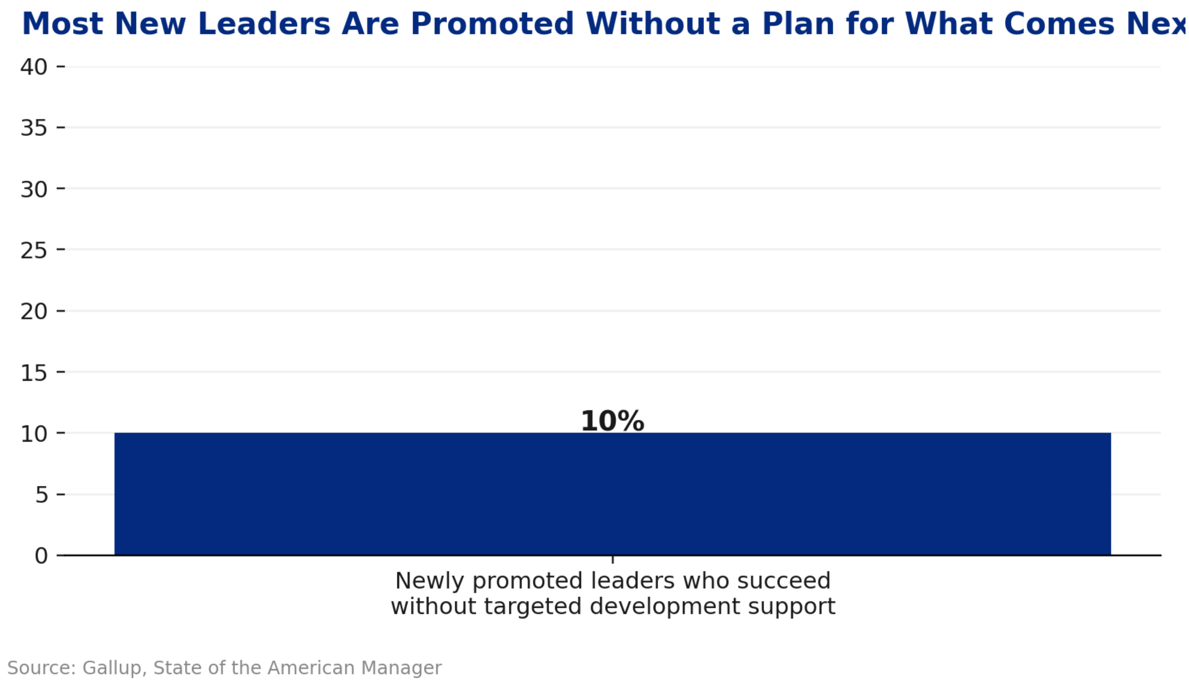
The Frame That's Now Outdated

For a long stretch of its history, executive coaching carried a quiet stigma: if you were assigned a coach, something had gone wrong. That framing was never fully accurate, and it has aged especially poorly. The clearest historical breakdown of who actually gets coached found that organizations rarely invest coaching dollars in genuinely poor performers at all, because the return on that investment is weak. Coaching has always gone disproportionately to people already above the performance line, the ones an organization is trying to take from good to exceptional, not the ones it is trying to save.

In my own practice, the clients who get the most out of coaching are almost never the ones sent to me as a last resort. They are the leaders who were just promoted into something bigger than their last role prepared them for, the ones absorbing a transformation they did not design, the ones who are already excellent and are about to find out whether excellence at the last level transfers cleanly to this one. It usually does not, not without help.

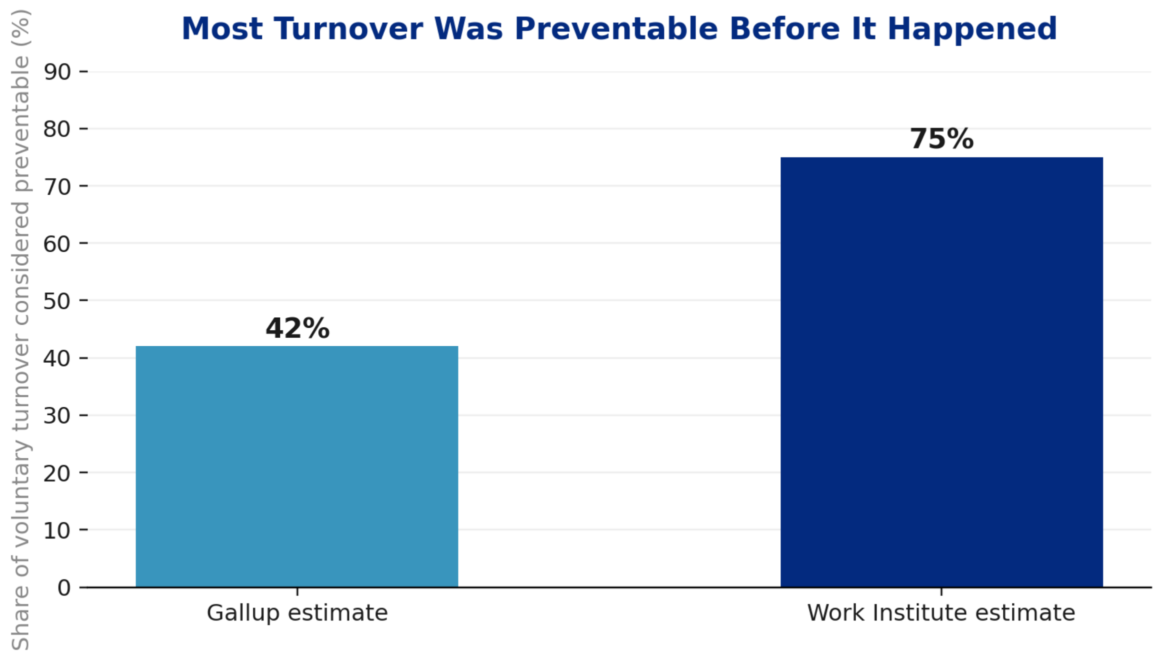
What Happens When You Don't

Gallup's research on newly promoted managers puts a hard number on that gap: only 10 percent succeed without some form of targeted development once they step into the role. The other 90 percent are left to figure it out on the job, in full view of the team now watching them for signs of whether the promotion was deserved. Technical excellence got them the promotion. It was never going to be sufficient on its own to sustain it.



The vast majority of newly promoted leaders need support that most organizations don't provide.

The cost of leaving that gap unaddressed shows up first in retention, and it shows up fast. The Work Institute's retention research consistently ranks lack of career development as the single most preventable reason people quit, ahead of compensation. Gallup finds that 52 percent of people who leave a job say their employer could have done something to keep them. Between 42 and 75 percent of voluntary turnover, depending on which methodology you use, is estimated to have been preventable.

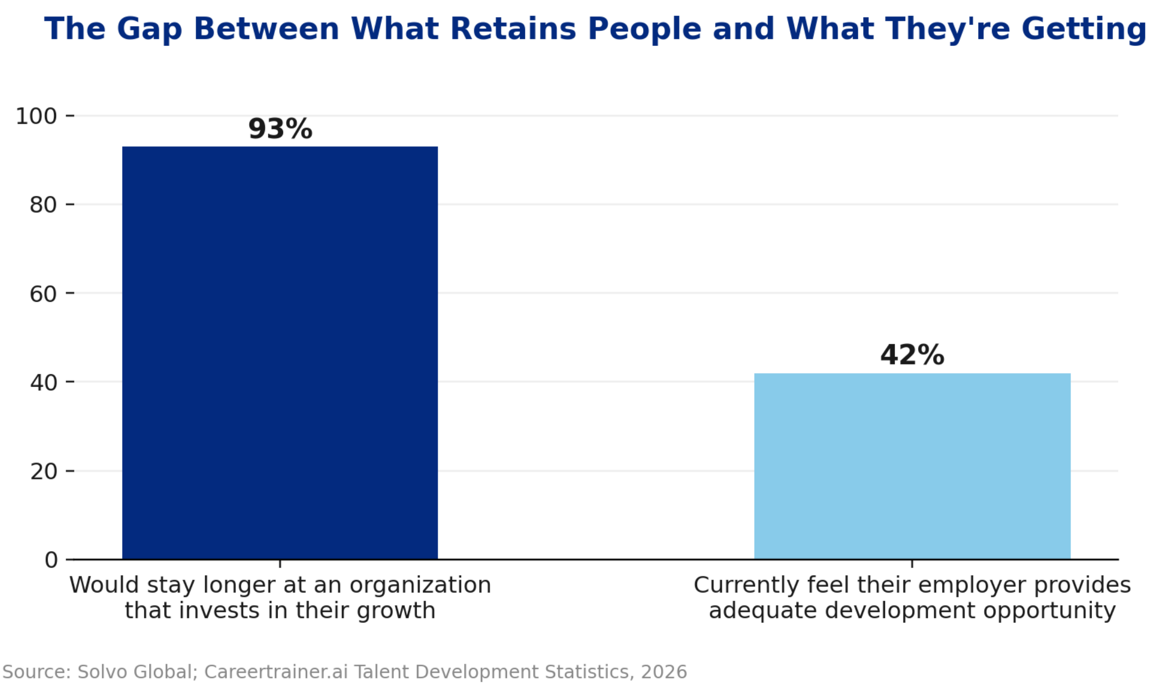


Source: Gallup; Work Institute Retention Report, cited in 2026 turnover research compilations

A majority of voluntary turnover was, by the estimates of two independent methodologies, avoidable.

Your Best People Feel This First

High performers do not typically announce their frustration before they leave. They tend to be the least likely to complain, and by the time a resignation letter arrives, the decision was usually made well before the conversation. Ninety three percent of workers say they would stay longer at an organization that genuinely invests in their growth. Only 42 percent currently feel their employer is providing it. That 51-point gap is not an engagement survey footnote. It is the leading indicator of who is quietly job hunting on your best team right now.



The gap between what would retain people and what they're actually experiencing.

The Numbers at a Glance

Metric	Figure	Source
Newly promoted leaders who succeed without targeted development	10%	Gallup, State of the American Manager
Voluntary turnover considered preventable	42% to 75%	Gallup; Work Institute Retention Report
Leavers who say their employer could have retained them	52%	Gallup
Workers who would stay longer at an org investing in their growth	93%	Solvo Global research, 2026
Workers who currently feel adequately developed by their employer	42%	Talent development research compilation, 2026
Estimated total cost to replace a $200,000 executive	~$800,000	Sage HRMS, ROEI Return on Employee Investment whitepaper

The Real Cost, in Dollars

Put a number on the alternative and the case sharpens further. One widely cited HR benchmark estimates the total cost of replacing a $200,000 executive, factoring in separation, vacancy, replacement search, onboarding, and ramp-up time, at roughly $800,000, four times the salary itself. A coaching engagement, by comparison, typically runs a small fraction of that same executive's annual compensation. The math is not close. The organizations treating coaching as a discretionary expense are, in effect, choosing the more expensive option and calling it fiscal discipline.

What Coaching Actually Protects

None of this is an argument that every leader needs coaching, or that coaching is a substitute for addressing genuine performance problems where they exist. It is a narrower and more specific argument: the leaders most worth protecting with coaching are usually your strongest ones, at the exact moments they are being asked to stretch, whether that is a promotion, an expanded mandate, or a transformation they did not choose but now have to lead. Coaching offered only after something breaks is coaching offered too late to prevent the break in the first place.

Business is business, but change, including the kind a newly promoted leader is living through, is personal. The leaders who navigate that change into the next best version of themselves almost always point back to the same thing: someone invested in them deliberately, before the stakes forced the issue.

Before the Next Budget Cycle

Before coaching gets cut or deferred in the next planning cycle, it is worth asking a more precise question than whether the organization can afford it. The better question is which of your strongest leaders are, right now, stretched into something new without support, and what it will actually cost, in the search fees, the ramp-up time, and the team disruption the data describes, if one of them leaves before anyone thought to ask.

References

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6. Careertrainer.ai, "Talent Development Statistics 2026."
7. Sage HRMS, "ROEI: Return on Employee Investment," white paper, cited in executive coaching cost-benefit research.