The Playbook: Manager Playbooks

THE 50 FACTOR — GROWTH FACTOR #11

The Playbook for Managers

The Complete Implementation Guide

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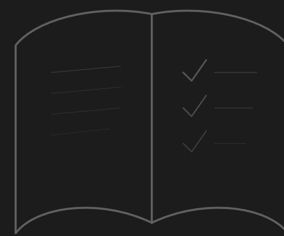

Principle #11: The Playbook for Managers

The Complete Implementation Guide

This white paper is a companion to Chapter 11 of The 50 Factor by Scott Scully. The book tells the story. This guide gives you the step-by-step playbook to document how management actually works at your company — so your judgment scales across the organization without you being in every room.

Why This Principle Matters

Here's what happens when managers don't have playbooks: they reinvent management from scratch.

Your best manager builds a rhythm that works — structured 1:1s, tight team meetings, clear expectations, consistent quality reviews. Your worst manager wings it — cancels 1:1s when they're busy, runs team meetings as status updates that could be emails, avoids accountability conversations, and fills their week with individual contributor work because "they're too busy to manage."

Both of these people have the same title. Both report to you. Both are building your company's culture, one team at a time. And you have no way to close the gap between them — because you've never documented what great management looks like at your company.

The result: you become the bottleneck. Every ambiguous situation escalates to you. Every "quick question" lands on your calendar. Every decision that a manager should be making flows upward because nobody has defined what's in their authority and what isn't. Your calendar fills with problems that aren't yours, and the strategic work that only you can do gets pushed to evenings and weekends.

Playbooks fix this.

A manager playbook is a documented operating rhythm for a management role. It tells a manager exactly how to run their week, their month, and their function. What meetings to hold, when. How to run a 1:1. How to run a team meeting. What decisions are theirs. What metrics to watch. What to escalate and what to handle.

When managers have playbooks, the first question in any ambiguous situation becomes *"what does the playbook say?"* — and 9 out of 10 times, they find their answer without you. Your judgment, your experience, your standards — documented once, applied by every manager, every week.

The data backs this up: in one real implementation, managers who fully adopted the playbook had teams that outperformed partial-adopters by 40% across every measured metric — retention, quality scores, revenue per rep, and new hire ramp time. Same company. Same market. Same roles. The only difference was whether the manager followed the playbook.

The Six Sections of a Manager Playbook

Every manager playbook contains six sections. No more, no fewer. Each one answers a specific question that every manager faces.

Section 1: Weekly Rhythm

The question it answers: "What does my week look like?"

This is a blocked calendar template showing exactly when the manager's recurring activities happen. Not "sometime this week" — specific days, specific times.

What it includes:

- • Monday morning: team huddle (15 min). Week's priorities, key metrics, any blockers.
- • Tuesday–Thursday: 1:1s with each direct report (30 min each). Stacked back-to-back on Tuesday and Thursday to batch management time.
- • Wednesday: quality review session (45 min). Score this week's samples against the quality scorecard.
- • Friday morning: weekly planning (30 min). Review the week's numbers. Prep next week's priorities.
- • Friday afternoon: recognition (15 min). Post at least one specific recognition in #wins. Write one handwritten note or personal message.

The specific schedule will vary by role — but the principle is the same: every management activity has a time slot. If it's not on the calendar, it doesn't happen.

Section 2: Monthly Rhythm

The question it answers: "What do I do each month that's different from the weekly routine?"

- • First Monday: monthly operational review. Pull the full scorecard. Identify trends. Prep for leadership meeting.
- • Second week: one extended 1:1 per direct report (60 min instead of 30). Career conversation + deeper performance discussion.
- • Third week: cross-functional sync with peer managers. Share best practices. Identify inter-team friction points.
- • Fourth week: personal development time. Read, attend training, work on one skill that would make you a better manager.
- • Last business day: monthly report to your manager. Numbers, wins, concerns, resource needs.

Section 3: SOPs for Each Recurring Activity

The question it answers: "How do I run each meeting and process?"

This is the most detailed section — and the most valuable. For every recurring activity in the weekly and monthly rhythm, the playbook provides: the agenda, the timing, the format, and the expected output.

Example — How to Run the Weekly Team Huddle:

- • Duration: 15 minutes. Not 20. Not 30. Fifteen.
- • Standing (if in person). No sitting = no settling in = no rambling.
- • Format: (1) This week's top 3 priorities — stated by you in 2 minutes. (2) Each person: what's their #1 priority this week? 60 seconds each. (3) Any blockers? Name them. Assign someone to resolve. (4) One recognition — name someone who did great work last week.
- • Output: everyone leaves knowing the top 3 and their own #1.

Example — How to Run a 1:1:

- • Use the MAP format from Principle #18: Major Projects (10 min), Activities (10 min), Potential Issues (10 min).
- • Direct report drives the agenda. They come prepared.
- • Manager listens first, coaches second, decides third.
- • Running notes doc per person. Review last week's notes before each 1:1.

The playbook has an SOP like this for every recurring activity: team huddle, 1:1, quality review, performance conversation, new hire onboarding session, client escalation handling, and so on.

Section 4: Decision-Making Framework

The question it answers: "What can I decide on my own, and what do I need to escalate?"

This is the section that gets you out of being the bottleneck. It explicitly defines three zones:

Green zone (decide and execute): Scheduling, team assignments, day-to-day client issues, process adjustments within their team, recognition, first-stage accountability conversations.

Yellow zone (decide and inform): Performance improvement plans, budget reallocation within their approved envelope, cross-team process changes, client escalations above a defined severity level.

Red zone (escalate before deciding): Hiring, firing, compensation changes, contract modifications above a threshold, client issues that could result in churn, legal or compliance concerns.

The beauty of this framework: it's customizable per management level. A team lead's green zone is smaller than a VP's. As managers grow, you expand their green zone — which is how you develop future leaders.

Section 5: KPIs and Scorecard

The question it answers: "How do I know if I'm winning?"

Every manager has a monthly scorecard with 4–6 metrics that define success in their role. These are reviewed in the monthly 1:1 with their manager (Section 2) and in the monthly leadership meeting.

Example (Delivery Team Manager):

- • Team quality score average: target 4.0+
- • Team A-Player Score average: target 80+
- • Client retention for their accounts: target 92%+
- • New hire ramp time: target productive within 6 weeks
- • 1:1 completion rate: target 100% (zero cancellations)

- • Recognition frequency: minimum 4 public recognitions per month

The scorecard connects the manager's daily activities to the company's growth formula. When the scorecard is strong, the team is performing. When it's weak, you know exactly where to coach.

Section 6: Resources and References

The question it answers: "Where do I find what I need?"

Links to: training materials for their function, the relevant position playbooks for their team members (Principle #13), templates (1:1 agenda, quality scorecard, recognition templates), key contacts for escalation, the company's HR policies and procedures, and the current quarter's strategic priorities.

This section turns the playbook into a one-stop operating manual. A new manager can open the playbook on Day 1 and find everything they need to run their function — without asking you.

The 50% Rule

A manager's week should be at least 50% management activities. For pure managers (no individual contributor work): 80–90% management. For hybrid player-coaches: 50–70% management.

If a manager spends more than half their time on IC work, they're not managing — they're a senior individual contributor with a manager's title. And IC work will always eat management work if you don't schedule it intentionally — because IC work has deadlines and management work doesn't. Nobody sends you an angry email because you missed a 1:1. Clients send you angry emails because deliverables are late. So IC work wins by default.

The playbook fixes this by blocking management time first. The 1:1s, the huddles, the quality reviews, the recognition — these go on the calendar before anything else. IC work fills the gaps. Not the other way around.

The test: Ask each of your managers to estimate what percentage of their week is management vs. IC work. Then have them track it for two weeks. The gap between their estimate and reality is usually 15–20 percentage points. They think they're managing 60% of the time. They're managing 40%. The playbook closes that gap by making management activities non-negotiable calendar blocks.

How to Build a Manager Playbook

The process is the same method you've used for every system in The 50 Factor — start with your best performer, document what they do, pilot it, refine it, roll it out:

Step 1: Identify your best manager. Not the most experienced. Not the most senior. The one whose team consistently outperforms on quality, retention, engagement, and ramp time.

Step 2: Block three hours with them. Interview them. Ask: "Walk me through your week. What do you do every day? What meetings do you run? How do you run them? What do you do when a direct report underperforms? How do you decide what to escalate? What does your Monday morning look like? Your Friday afternoon?"

Step 3: Document the rhythm. Write it up in the six-section format. Don't polish it yet — just get it on paper.

Step 4: Define the decision framework. Sit with the manager and draw the green/yellow/red zones together. Where are they currently making decisions? Where are they currently escalating? Where's the right boundary?

Step 5: Pilot with one other manager for 30 days. Choose someone who's struggling — not to punish them, but because the playbook will have the biggest impact there. Have the two managers compare notes after 30 days: what worked, what didn't, what was missing.

Step 6: Refine based on what breaks. Every playbook has gaps the first time through. The pilot reveals them. Fix them before rolling out to the full group.

Step 7: Roll out to all managers in that role. Formal launch meeting. Walk through section by section. Explain the why. This is a ceremony, not an email (see Principle #15).

The Build Order

Don't try to build playbooks for every management role at once. Build them in sequence:

1. **Most common management role.** Usually the team lead in your main delivery function. This is where you have the most managers, the most variance, and the most impact. 2. **Next most common management role.** Usually the sales team lead or account management lead. 3. **Department heads.** Their playbooks are different — more strategic, less tactical — but the same six-section format applies. 4. **C-suite roles.** The CEO playbook is the last one you build, and it's the most important one for succession planning.

A company of 20–30 people should have 4–6 playbooks over the next 12 months. A company of 50–100 should have 8–12.

The Bottleneck Unlock

This is the real payoff — and it's worth quantifying.

Before playbooks: you spend an estimated 8–12 hours per week answering "quick questions" from managers, sitting in on meetings that should be running without you, and making decisions that aren't actually yours to make. That's 20–30% of your week consumed by management work that belongs to your managers.

After playbooks: those questions get answered by the playbook. Those meetings run without you. Those decisions get made at the right level. You get 8–12 hours per week back for strategic work, client relationships, and the growth initiatives that actually move the company forward.

Over a year, that's 400–600 hours of CEO-level time reclaimed. At a conservative $500/hour opportunity cost, that's $200K–$300K in strategic capacity freed up — from a project that takes 3 hours to start and 8 weeks to complete.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Mistake #1: Building the playbook yourself. You're not the one doing the job. Your best manager is. Interview them. Document their rhythm. Let reality drive the playbook, not theory.

Mistake #2: Making the playbook a manual of rules. A playbook is a rhythm, not a rulebook. It describes how to run the week — not how to handle every possible scenario. Leave room for judgment. The decision framework (Section 4) is where judgment meets structure.

Mistake #3: Not defining the decision framework. Without explicit green/yellow/red zones, everything escalates. This is the section that most playbooks skip — and it's the section that produces the most value.

Mistake #4: Building for the best managers. Your best managers will follow any system. Build the playbook for the managers who need the most structure. Then let your best managers add to it.

Mistake #5: Treating it as a one-time project. Playbooks are living documents. They should be updated quarterly as the company evolves, roles change, and lessons are learned. Version number and "last updated" date on every copy.

Mistake #6: Rolling it out in an email. See Principle #15. Formal launch meeting. Walk through every section. Explain the why. Casual rollouts produce casual adoption.

Quick-Start Checklist

- ✓ ☐ Identify your best manager (the one whose team consistently outperforms)
- ✓ ☐ Block 3 hours with them this week to document their rhythm
- ✓ ☐ Write the first draft using the six-section format
- ✓ ☐ Define the decision framework (green/yellow/red zones)
- ✓ ☐ Pilot with one additional manager for 30 days
- ✓ ☐ Refine based on what breaks
- ✓ ☐ Hold a formal launch meeting for the full management team
- ✓ ☐ Build reinforcement into weekly 1:1s (review one section per week)
- ✓ ☐ Track the 50% rule: are managers spending at least 50% on management activities?
- ✓ ☐ Build the next playbook (next most common management role)
- ✓ ☐ Update quarterly — add version number and "last updated" date

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Implementation Tools

Ready-to-use templates for this Growth Factor

PDF **Manager Playbook Template**
Six-section structure, ready to customize

XLSX **Weekly Rhythm Builder**
Columns: Time Block, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday

PDF **Decision Framework Template**
Green/yellow/red zone definitions

XLSX **Management Time Tracker**
Columns: Day, Activity, Duration (min), Type (Mgmt/IC), Notes

XLSX **Manager Scorecard Template**
Columns: KPI, Target, Jan, Feb, Mar, Apr, +8 more

This is Principle #11 of 50 — the first principle of Part II: The Operating System. Parts I built the foundation: recognition, accountability, ground truth, the growth formula, quality, A-Player Scores, referrals, client success, governance, and awards. Part II builds the operating system that lets it all scale. The manager playbook is the first piece — because without it, every other system depends on you being in the room. With it, your judgment scales across the organization.

Get the book: The 50 Factor by Scott Scully