



Recently Promoted. Now What?

Overcoming the Promotion Trap

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Promotion isn't just a reward, it is also a transition.

Many leaders step into expanded leadership roles because they were exceptional individual contributors. They were **super-doers**, high achievers who were reliable, duty-focused, and willing to carry responsibility early. They solved problems, stepped in when others did not, and became the person people counted on.

Those strengths earned trust and advancement. And then something subtle happens. What made them successful before can subtly limit the organization once their role changes. This is the promotion trap.

The making of a super-doer

Super-doers are rarely accidental. Many learned early that being dependable mattered. They were praised for stepping up, fixing problems, and carrying responsibility when others did not. Over time, usefulness became intertwined with trust, and trust became intertwined with identity.

As organizations grow, the demands change, but these habits often remain. Under pressure, super-doers default to what has always worked. They step in. They protect standards. They make sure things get done.

Not because they do not trust others, but because responsibility has been reinforced for a long time. This history is important, because it explains why the next shift can feel uncomfortable. For many super-doers, it can even feel lazy or as if they are doing less than they should.

That instinct makes sense, but it is flawed. Because the effort of leadership is less visible than the effort of doing. Stepping back from execution can look like disengagement on the surface, even when the leader is actively clarifying direction, strengthening decision-making, and developing others.

What changes is not the level of responsibility, but the type of work being done.

Super-doers are accustomed to measuring contribution by output. Leadership requires measuring contribution by capacity built, decisions improved, and ownership sustained over time. Those outcomes are harder to see day-to-day, but they are far more consequential.

Letting go is not doing less. It is doing different work at a higher level.

The super-doer trap

Leaders who were super-doers often continue operating the way they always have:

- Jumping in to fix issues
- Taking work back when deadlines tighten
- Making decisions others could make
- Carrying responsibility others should now own

A closely related trap shows up under pressure:

“It is easiest if I just do it.”

In the moment, this feels efficient. The work gets done. Quality is protected. Risk feels contained.

But over time, this choice sends unintended signals. Each time a leader steps in to do work that should belong to someone else, two messages are reinforced. First, that speed matters more than ownership. Second, that development can wait.

The organization begins to rely on the leader’s capacity instead of building its own. Team members stop stretching. The leader becomes the bottleneck they were trying to prevent.

What feels easiest in the moment often makes leadership harder over time. It feels responsible. It feels helpful. And in the short term, it often works. But over time, the cost shows up.

Teams wait instead of acting.

Decisions bottleneck.

The leader becomes exhausted.

Growth slows incrementally, even as effort increases.

The issue is not commitment or competence.

It is role clarity and altitude.

How this looks to others

From the outside, a super-doer leader who has not yet honed delegation and leadership at scale can send mixed signals.

Team members may hesitate to act because responsibility is given, but ownership does not consistently stick. Over time, people wait for direction, hold ideas back, or stop raising issues early.

Peers often experience this as friction. Work overlaps. Decisions slow. Collaboration feels heavier than it should because authority and ownership are unclear.

Superiors may see a leader who is capable and committed, but also overextended. The leader stays too close to the work, becomes a bottleneck, and struggles to scale impact through others.

In most cases, this is not about intent or effort. It is a signal that leadership posture has not yet caught up with responsibility.

From super-doer to leader: Making the shift

Shift Required	What It Looks Like in Practice
Clarifying expectations instead of fixing	Defining outcomes, timelines, and success criteria before work begins
Delegating responsibility, not just tasks	Assigning ownership of results, not just pieces of work
Placing decision authority appropriately	Clearly naming who decides what and honoring those decisions
Coaching instead of rescuing	Asking guiding questions rather than stepping in under pressure
Holding accountability without taking work back	Following up consistently while leaving ownership where it belongs

A clearer leadership litmus test

If self-reflection feels murky, look for these signals instead:

- Do decisions routinely come back to you that should be made elsewhere
- Do team members wait for your input before acting, even when they have context
- Are you regularly stepping in late to save work instead of addressing expectations earlier
- Do meetings drift into problem-solving that others could own
- Are you exhausted while your team is underutilized

If several of these are true, the issue is not effort or care. Delegation and ownership require attention.

What happens when the shift is made

Organizations that help leaders make this transition, whether early or late, tend to see:

- Faster, clearer decision-making
- Stronger ownership across the team

- Healthier leaders who are no longer overextended
- More sustainable growth
- Increased predictability of targeted outcomes

Promotion is not the finish line. It is a change in responsibility. Leaders who recognize the shift avoid the promotion trap and grow into leaders who create clarity, capacity, and results.