

# Widening the Gateway for Aspiring Managers

How women and men lead differently and why both matter.

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Our industry has entered a transition. As senior leaders retire, the next generation of managers and supervisors are stepping forward. Yet the path to promotion remains narrow, putting the industry at risk of losing talent. Behind closed doors, leaders weigh three questions of potential candidates: *Can they do it? Will they do it? Will others follow them?* Often, these discussions also carry a subtle gender\* undertone we don't talk about out loud.



Men and women tend to navigate the climb toward advancement in remarkably different ways. Men often lead with confidence, sometimes missing the subtler interpersonal cues that build trust. Women frequently sense those cues deeply, yet hesitate to assert themselves in systems that haven't always felt built for them. These aren't flaws or fixed traits; they're learned responses molded by an industry that has long rewarded horsepower over heart.

The good news is that the outdoor industry has made visible progress. Women now lead at every level. The C-suite is no longer off-limits, and there's a stronger blend of leadership strengths from both genders shaping the culture.

But the gateway can still be narrow. The bottleneck isn't just gender; it's that elusive *something* that makes someone the next

right person. You know it when you see it, but the question worth asking is: *What do those people have that others don't?*

Many leaders with tenure never ascend, despite being next in line. Advancement today is earned by cultivating executive presence: a combination of polish, perceived readiness and trust. It's how managers carry their influence and balance their natural style with the skills they're deliberately developing that don't come as easily — this is where growth happens.

Here, we'll examine career advancement from the employee's perspective, with scenarios and checklists that can be used to address common pitfalls for those who've been overlooked for promotion. A companion article to follow will focus on the leader's lens: how to notice potential early, challenge bias and intentionally prepare the next generation for growth.

## Visibility & Credibility, Gifts & Gaps

A key area that quietly limits advancement is visibility. In fact, it was an aspiring female operations manager at a Rocky Mountain resort — frustrated from doing everything right yet feeling stalled — who inspired this article. Her dilemma offers a chance to reframe. Advancement isn't about trying harder; it's about trying differently: building visible sponsorship, asking how you're perceived, reviewing readiness criteria and cultivating allies. These steps widen the gateway for promotion.

It's easy to assume that good work will speak for itself. It rarely does. Visibility doesn't mean self-promotion; it means context-setting, helping others understand the impact and intent behind your work. Sometimes, it's appropriate to remind upline leaders of the value you've delivered and the insight you bring.

The following gender perspectives are shared separately not to draw lines, but to bring clarity. Women often lean on interpersonal strength, men on independence. Each approach carries both gifts and gaps.

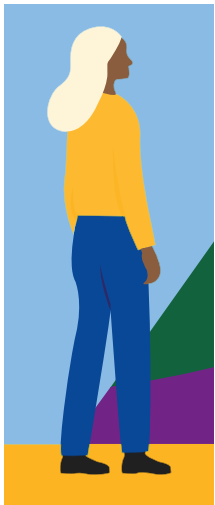
Many women I work with know how to read a room, but they also take ownership for everyone's comfort in it. The instinct to be the peacekeeper can dilute influence. On the other hand, many men I work with are decisive and self-reliant; they move quickly and trust their instincts. But that same independence can sometimes keep them from seeking input or building alignment, leaving others feeling left out of the process.

The invitation here is to lead with both heart and horsepower, and for men and women to become greater allies to each other. What follows are mirrors, not judgments. Each section offers a self-audit followed by reflection tools to help leaders calibrate presence, balance and authority.

\*While gender identity and expression exist on a spectrum, the data cited in this article comes from research comparing the experiences of women and men in the ski industry. For clarity, we use that language when discussing documented trends.

## The Female Leadership Gap:

### When Strength Becomes Overextension



I've coached and worked alongside capable women who underestimate just how much credibility and quiet power they already hold. They're often the glue in a team — intuitive, collaborative, emotionally intelligent — but that same interpersonal strength can morph into overextension.

We see it on the mountain, in the lodge, in the office: women smoothing edges, absorbing tension, keeping things OK for everyone. It's admirable, but it's also exhausting. Many women in our industry don't hit a wall of competence;

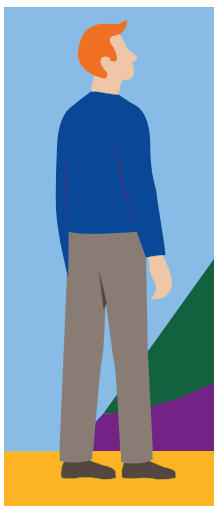
they hit a wall of bandwidth. They're the first to volunteer, the last to leave, the ones others count on. But being indispensable isn't the same as being seen.

Another tendency is to over-prepare. Women often wait until they've got 95% of the qualifications before applying, while their male peers throw their hat in at 60% and learn as they go. The solution isn't to mimic bravado, it's to reclaim balance. Speak with conviction without over-explaining. Learn to let silence do some of the talking.

When women temper empathy with authority and men pair confidence with humility, something powerful happens. The conversations deepen. The team's bench gets deeper and more prepared.

## The Male Leadership Gap:

### When Competence Outruns Maturity



Across resorts, I've seen countless talented men rise through every corner of the business until they hit a plateau. Many are builders by nature, whether they're repairing a lift, streamlining a process or improving the guest experience. Their pride in craftsmanship runs deep, and rightly so.

But sometimes that pride turns into resistance to grow beyond doing. The identity of being one of the guys — the best skier, the park legend, the one everyone trusts to get it done — can be hard to outgrow. Leadership requires a

different muscle: accountability, communication, composure.

I've coached more than a few young men who equate freedom with credibility: "I can ride whenever I want. I don't want a desk job. I don't need a title." They love the mountain

## Female Gap Analysis Self-Audit

**PURPOSE:** To help women identify where over-reliance on relational, nurturing or approval-seeking patterns may limit authority or advancement, and to strengthen strategic voice and presence.

### VOICE & AUTHORITY

- + **Reflection:** Do I soften my message to be liked rather than heard?
- + **Action:** Practice concise, bottom-line-first communication; speak without qualifiers or apologies.

### BOUNDARIES & PRESENCE

- + **Reflection:** Do I overextend emotionally to manage everyone's comfort?
- + **Action:** Set time, energy and emotional limits; allow others to self-regulate.

### STRATEGIC CONFIDENCE

- + **Reflection:** Do I hesitate to apply until I'm 100% ready?
- + **Action:** Apply at 70% readiness; seek mentoring for scope stretch.

### CONFLICT COMFORT

- + **Reflection:** Do I avoid confrontation to preserve artificial harmony?
- + **Action:** Reframe conflict as collaboration and alignment.

### DATA/EMPATHY BALANCE

- + **Reflection:** Do I rely mostly on intuition or relationships instead of metrics?
- + **Action:** Use both; lead with empathy, close with evidence.

### VISIBILITY & SELF-PROMOTION

- + **Reflection:** Do I assume my work speaks for itself?
- + **Action:** Practice visible wins, storytelling and strategic advocacy.

lifestyle, that's why they're here. There's also a piece of identity work here. Many action-sports professionals have lived in perpetual youth. To lead, you must evolve from individual style to team rhythm.

Sarcasm, humor or detachment often mask uncertainty and even insecurity. Some men are wildly competent technically, but struggle to read a room, manage conflict or deliver feedback without edge or defensiveness. It's not a lack of intelligence, but emotional range.

Men in mountain ops may also tend to avoid formal management training, often because it's offered during critical ramp-up stages and they're pulled to meet deadlines. They've built expertise through technical experience, and that's powerful, but an expanded skill set is also necessary. Transitioning from being the one who does the work to the one who inspires and develops the people who carry it out requires humility and the ability to delegate. It isn't about surrendering your technical know-how, it's about rising high enough to see the horizon. ▶

## Male Gap Analysis Self-Audit

**PURPOSE:** To help men identify blind spots rooted in independence, ego or informality, and strengthen emotional intelligence, accountability and professional credibility as they mature from operator to leader.

### PROFESSIONAL MATURITY

- + Reflection: Do I rely on sarcasm, humor or bravado to mask insecurity?
- + Action: Replace irony with curiosity; speak plainly and respectfully.

### OWNERSHIP & RELIABILITY

- + Reflection: Do I prefer autonomy over accountability (no boss mindset)?
- + Action: Embrace responsibility as mastery, not constraint.

### COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE

- + Reflection: Do I interrupt or dominate airtime?
- + Action: Practice active listening and concise input.

### INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- + Reflection: Do I avoid feedback or emotional topics, writing it off as soft stuff?
- + Action: Develop emotional intelligence; recognize emotions in self and others.

### TRANSITION FROM DOER TO LEADER

- + Reflection: Do I still identify as the best [fill in the blank] instead of a people-developer?
- + Action: Shift pride from personal skill to growing others' competence.

### PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

- + Reflection: Do I treat attire, punctuality or reports casually because culture is informal?
- + Action: Model polish and dependability for younger staff.

## The Shared Path:

### Align, Amplify, Ascend Model

After seeing these patterns season after season, I've watched the most growth happen when men and women lean into each other's natural style as well as their own strengths. Here's what that looks like through the stories of Jess and Mark.

### Jess's Story: A Step Back, Away & Up

It didn't happen overnight. There was no dramatic resignation or shake-up, just a quiet realization that somewhere along the way, Jess had lost her spark.

She was good at her job, reliable, steady, the one people turned to when things got messy. Her reviews were strong, her teams respected her, and her projects delivered. By every measure, she was succeeding. So why did she feel invisible?

As she explored the concept of perception versus intention, Jess began to see the subtle ways she diminished



her own authority. She realized the leadership journey wasn't about waiting to be noticed, but owning how you show up.

- + **ALIGN:** Her presence began to match her purpose. She noticed when her body language, tone and words sent mixed signals and recalibrated in real time.
- + **AMPLIFY:** She started using her voice with conviction instead of caution. She learned that influence doesn't come from volume; it comes from clarity.
- + **ASCEND:** When a stretch role opened at another resort, she took it. Months later, she was invited back to her former organization at a higher level. She didn't return to what she'd left, but as who she'd become.

Sometimes you have to step away in order to rise. Inside any organization, people are frequently seen through the lens of who they were, not who they're becoming. Growth can outpace the roles available — and even outpace others' ability to see your potential with fresh eyes. The move expanded her skills, her confidence and her visibility. Leaving wasn't a step away; it was a step up.

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### Mark's Story: Urgent to Thoughtful

Mark had always been quick to solve, quick to decide, quick to speak. His humor was sharp, his standards high, and his sarcasm — though meant to lighten tension — often left people second-guessing whether he was joking. ▶

He wasn't a bad leader, just an urgent one — the kind who thought decisiveness was leadership. On the mountain, that urgency read as confidence; in the conference room, it read as arrogance. A senior executive he respected finally said what others wouldn't: "Mark, you win the room, but sometimes you lose the team."

It landed. He realized he'd been spending energy proving himself instead of connecting with the leaders who could help him grow.

- + **ALIGN:** He matched his intent with his impact, slowing down just enough to ensure people heard what he meant, not just what he said.
- + **AMPLIFY:** He shifted from spotlighting himself to amplifying others' ideas. His team's engagement and trust grew.
- + **ASCEND:** When a senior opportunity opened, his name rose to the top. Not because he had the loudest voice in the room, but because he had learned to lead at a higher frequency.

Mark's growth reflected what many men in the industry experience: tremendous technical ability, capable decision-making and drive, but sometimes a gap between competence and maturity. Like Jess, his evolution wasn't about becoming someone else but expanding the version of himself that others could trust and follow.

## The Shared Lesson

Jess and Mark came from opposite directions, but they reached the same summit. Jess found her power by aligning confidence with clarity. Mark found his influence by aligning urgency with empathy. Both learned to lead with purpose, presence and authenticity.

**The invitation here is to lead with both heart and horsepower, and for men and women to become greater allies to each other.**

Leadership isn't male or female — it's the alignment between who we are and how we show up. That's the real *it factor* behind promotion readiness, not gender, not luck, not even tenure. It's the integration of self-awareness, voice and stretch, the quiet confidence that makes a person the next right choice. 🦊

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The image shows a smartphone held in a gloved hand, displaying a mobile app interface for purchasing a lift ticket. The app shows a scenic background of a ski resort with gondolas. The text on the screen includes: "Lift Ticket", "Get your lift ticket to access the Biggest Skiing in America. Buy early for the best rates & availability", "See more", "Start date" with a date input field (mm/dd/yyyy), "How many days on the mountain?" with buttons for "1 Day", "2 Days", "3 Days", and "4 Days", and a quantity selector showing "1" and an "ADD TO CART" button.