THE LAST HUMAN COACH

How to Bring Coaching to Every Manager

Stefano Calvetti

The Last Human Coach: How to Bring Coaching to Every Manager

Copyright © 2026 Stefano Calvetti. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means — electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise — without the prior written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

This book is intended to provide general information on leadership development and coaching. It is sold with the understanding that neither the author nor the publisher is engaged in rendering professional advice tailored to any specific situation.

ISBN 9798170457021 (hardcover)

First edition, 2026

Cover design by Stefano Calvetti

Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

FOREWORD VI

INTRODUCTION 1

Confessions of a Coach Who Did Not Want the Answer 1

PART I: THE RECKONING 13

The 2% Problem 15

Why Your Leadership Program Doesn't Stick 33

The Quiet Arrival 51

PART II: THE NEW COACHING 61

What a Machine Coach Can Do That I Can't 63

Where It Goes Wrong 77

The Empathy Illusion 99

The Human Coach Gets Promoted 111

PART III: THE PLAYBOOK 129

How to Evaluate an AI Coach 131

The 90-Day Pilot 153

The Organization That Coaches Itself 167

FINAL WORDS 177

The System I Have Not Been Naming 178

Afterword 180

The Instruments to Take with You 182

About the Author 184

Acknowledgments 185

Notes 187

FOREWORD

I am not AI curious. I am not an early adopter, especially when it comes to technology. And I am especially not all that interested in technology that moves us away from human interaction. A big part of why coaching is so valuable as a resource and so wildly successful and profitable as an industry is that it creates opportunities for human interaction that may not otherwise happen. All that being said, I am a big fan of author Stefano Calvetti. I admire his curiosity, intellect, and ability to mobilize around an idea. I especially appreciate that, while I know him to be a true believer in the value and efficacy of coaching, he doesn't hold it all so precious that it can't be (r)evolutionized to better serve the humans among us.

I have been deeply involved in the coaching industry for more than 20 years. I've earned the highest level of certification, that of Master Certified Coach from the International Coaching Federation (ICF), the only globally recognized credentialing board. It is a distinction awarded to only a fraction of coaches in the 30+ years the ICF has been in operation. Coaching has been very good to me. It's a profession I am deeply invested in and as such know the importance of being open to the changing needs of our consumers. Any coach would be foolish to think otherwise. I've read dozens of skill-based books on the craft of coaching and an equal number of books about the business of coaching, but not until The Last Human Coach have I read a book that takes a forward, speculative look at the coaching industry. This book gives those who sell coaching services or those who purchase coaching services for themselves or their company or organization a way to think about optimizing for value and for ROI. For coaches specifically, who may be skeptical of where this profession is going, Calvetti offers a way in to think differently and better understand how to sell the one thing AI can't offer, and what exactly it is worth to the people and companies who buy it.

I was very interested to read his book; I think you will be too. I took notes (something my clients know I rarely do) and have already enjoyed talking about it to colleagues and clients. It's a very accessible way to begin to inform your own point of view on AI-enabled coaching. I guarantee it will spark conversation, controversy even. That's a good thing. From those conversations, I hope you will find your place in the future of coaching. There's room for everyone.

Julie Colbrese,
CPCC/MCC, MS Psychology

INTRODUCTION

Confessions of a Coach Who Did Not Want the Answer

One missing thing

When I finally took the uniform off for the last time, after thirty-one years of service, I found myself doing an odd kind of accounting: trying to add up everything the Italian Navy had taught me.

I could handle a ship. I knew the maneuvers cold: how to bring something enormous alongside a pier without folding steel, and how to hold station in weather that had no business allowing it. I'd been trained in safety and security, in the procedures that keep people alive when the sea decides otherwise. I'd sat through instruction in law, the tactical nuances of every type of warfare, communications, operations, planning, intelligence, and the other courses that built the professional pillars of my career. From that point of view, I was well cared for.

For every discrete, examinable skill a naval officer is supposed to have, someone had sat me down, taught me, tested me, and written down whether I'd passed.

There was one thing missing from the list.

In thirty-one years, during which I commanded crews and teams in conflict areas as well as in more tranquil waters, no one ever sat me down to teach me how to lead.

Well, almost. There was one exception. I remember it mostly because I still remember the company's name: Isediform. They came during my last year at the academy, in the stretch before final exams, when every hour of our attention was already spoken for. For a few days, while we rehearsed everything we would actually be graded on, they walked us through some leadership principles.

Of the whole class, I retained one distinction: the difference among assertive, passive, and aggressive behavior, and the instruction to aim for the first. That's it. Thirty-odd years later, that is all that survives of what was, by every account, a good class and the only formal leadership instruction the institution ever gave me. Useful enough, delivered at the worst possible moment to people whose minds were entirely elsewhere.

Everything else, everything that actually mattered, once it was my turn to be responsible for other people, I picked up somewhere off the syllabus. I learned it by doing the job badly and watching what broke. I learned it from the officers I served under, most of whom effectively taught me what I did not want to become. One, however, taught me what I was reaching for instead. Mentors, plural, is the word people use for this, and I've used it too, in speeches. My number is one. One mentor. I learned it from my own failures, which turned out to be the most patient instructors I ever had, and from a stubbornness about the question itself: what is this thing, really, underneath the posters and the acronyms.

This book comes from a night 30 years ago, though I didn't know it then. In 1996, during my first division officer tour, I had to brief the captain in the morning on some activities I had only read about in military manuals. I was twenty-four and certain I was about to be found out. I remember sitting on my rack with a notebook, writing out what I would say, crossing it out, writing it again. There was no one to ask. My peers knew less than I did, and admitting fear out loud was not

something you did in that world. So I rehearsed alone, in the dark, for an audience of nobody, and in the morning I did it badly and survived.

It happened to me despite the fact that none of that was designed.

And I endured that process because I was lucky. My failures happened to be the survivable kind, and I had that one mentor. It also helped that I'd been born curious about the right thing. The most important capability I carried for three decades, the one on which other people's lives actually depended, was left almost entirely to chance.

So, I got away with it. Many people get burned.

If only I'd known this sooner!

After three decades, the uniform had started to feel tight. Some of that was literal, but most of it was the way a role tightens when you have outgrown the version of yourself that first put it on. I didn't know what came next. I knew only that I didn't want to spend the second half of life explaining the first half to anyone who would listen, a habit many retired officers drift into.

It was my wife, Elizabeth, who came up with the idea. Coaching. She'd watched me, and she knew something about me that I hadn't paid much attention to: that the part of the job I loved most lay beyond the ship and the mission. It was the young officer sitting across from me who didn't believe he could do the thing I was about to make him do. She knew I liked to mentor. She just had a better name for it than I did.

So during my terminal leave, that strange, suspended stretch when you're still technically in but already halfway out, I started studying, and about a year later, I was a certified coach.

I went in assuming I'd be refining something I already had. Thirty-one years of leading people surely counted as thirty-one years of raw material. What I found instead was that I'd been doing a related job the whole time, and mistaking it for this one.

Take listening. I thought I was good at it. I'd sat through a thousand briefs, absorbed a thousand reports, and I could tell you the moment someone was hedging. I was confusing listening with assessing.

That is a commanding officer sorting incoming information for the parts he needs to act on. Authentic listening, the kind coaching is built on, does not impose the listener's agenda. You are not waiting for the piece you can use, or drafting a reply while the other person is still talking. You are following where they're going, rather than steering them toward the destination you picked before they finished. It is astonishingly hard, and I was worse at it than almost anyone I trained with. Command had taught me to listen for the useful piece, and over the years that habit wore away at my ability to sit and hear another person out.

Then empathy, which I'd have told you I understood. I'd led people through fear, through loss, through failures that weren't their fault, and a few that were. But command empathy is directed: you feel enough to move the person forward, toward the mission, toward the standard. Coaching asks you not to impose your destination; when there is one, it must belong to the person across from you. You sit with someone in the hardest moment of their week, and you don't fix it, don't reframe it, don't hand them the answer you can plainly see. You hold the space, and you trust that they'll find their own. Every instinct I'd built over three decades screamed at me to solve the problem, and most of the training came down to unlearning that urge.

Underneath all of it was the belief that the person across from you was resourceful and capable of finding a way forward, and that your job was to help them reach it. That is nearly the opposite of what a warship requires of its captain, who has been taught that command and control is how he should lead.

More than once that year, sitting in a training session, I caught myself thinking the same thing. *If only I'd known this when I had four hundred people relying on me.*

A crack in the model

Once I was certified, I started coaching. Coaching, it turned out, works, and I experienced its value as a coach and as a coachee: someone would arrive stuck in a way they couldn't name; over weeks, the knot would

loosen; they would walk out different. Coaches help people move again under their own power. It was the most satisfying work I'd ever done that didn't involve a ship.

Then I looked at who was sitting across from me. Executives. Senior people. Men and women whose organizations had decided they were worth an investment that often ran into five figures, once you counted a full engagement. My coachees were, almost without exception, people who had already made it. Whatever important work remained, the system had chosen to invest in people who were already near the top.

And I kept thinking about the young officer. The one I'd described to my wife, without quite realizing I was describing the whole problem. The version of me at twenty-four who didn't yet believe he could do the thing, who was going to learn leadership the way I had by breaking things and getting lucky. That person was not in my office, and, in most organizations, he would never be offered a place there. He was out there right now, running a watch or a shift's worth of frightened people, learning the hardest job there is exactly the way I'd learned it: alone, at night, from his own mistakes.

However, the very thing that makes coaching work is also what makes it impossible to give to the people who need it most.

Coaching works because it delivers sustained, individualized attention: a trained practitioner sits with you, fully present, for an hour that belongs only to you. Until now, buying that attention has meant buying a human hour, and human hours are physiologically scarce. A coach may have a dozen clients at a time, at prices that keep sustained coaching concentrated near the top. That intimacy gives coaching its power, but it also keeps most people outside the room. However you arrange the schedule, one practitioner's attention only stretches so far.

And there's a second wall. Coaching, as a field, is essentially unregulated. There is no license to lose, no board that can strike you off, no exam the state requires before you hang out your shingle. Anyone can wake up tomorrow, post on LinkedIn that they are now a leadership coach, and be one, at least in the only sense the market checks. The

International Coaching Federation, whose standards I'd defend to anyone, has real rigor behind it, but its authority is entirely voluntary. It works by attraction: coaches choose to hold themselves to its methodology and ethics, and those who don't want to bother simply don't, knowing that they would never suffer any consequences.

The buyer, therefore, faces two problems at once. Good coaching is priced out of reach for almost everyone. Much of what remains affordable has no proof of quality behind it, only a confident profile photo and the word itself.

So the profession I'd joined had, without anyone deciding it, made a quiet arrangement with itself. It would take one of the most powerful forms of individualized development we know and reserve it, almost entirely, for the people who were already the most developed. The frightened twenty-four-year-old, the one whose people would actually feel the difference tomorrow morning, would get a two-day workshop, if he were lucky. He'd get assertive-versus-aggressive, delivered while his mind was somewhere else, and he'd be sent back out to lead by chance, exactly as I had been.

I am convinced that leadership can be *taught*, that the thing I'd left almost entirely to luck had a craft behind it: listening, presence, and all the rest. And I'd discovered that this craft, as currently delivered, was structurally incapable of reaching the version of me who'd needed it.

Coaching is doing exactly what its current delivery model allows. The crack is in the arithmetic.

The 11 p.m. chat that's happening right now

Having seen the crack, I assumed I was looking at an unsolvable problem, the kind you name in a book and then propose we all feel bad about together. The limit felt physical: human time is expensive, and you can't multiply one person. The most you could hope for was to shave the edges: train more coaches, subsidize a few programs, widen the door by an inch, and do some pro bono work. The wall stayed a wall.

Then I started paying attention to what people were already doing when no one was watching. The frightened twenty-four-year-old, my stand-in for everyone the profession can't reach, was not, in fact, waiting patiently for a workshop. At eleven at night, before the conversation he was dreading, he opened a chat window and typed out the thing he was scared to say to anyone at work. *Here's the situation. Here's what I'm afraid will happen. What do I do?* And something was answering him. Not a coach, nor anyone else. A general-purpose artificial intelligence (AI) machine built for no such scope, with no method behind it, no coaching ethics, no idea who he was or what his organization believed about leadership. But answering in a very reasonable way. Thirty years earlier, that had been me: same hour, same fear, except my chat window was a notebook that, unfortunately, could not reply.

I spent a year learning how to coach people through these exact moments of struggle, yet my coachees have to wait for a scheduled event to get help.

AI coaching is not waiting for someone to invent the category. People are already using general-purpose AI for coaching-like conversations tonight, including in workplaces like yours, whether or not anyone has discussed it in a meeting. That does not make every conversation coaching or the advice good. The activity began before most organizations named it, evaluated it, or governed it. Their question now is whether those conversations will remain accidental or become deliberately designed.

Calling it designed means someone has made the hard choices: the method, the ethical limits, the privacy rules, the quality floor, and the organization's view of leadership. Accidental describes what is happening now: a machine available at eleven at night, improvising leadership advice with no one accountable for whether it is any good.

An organization may legitimately decline to procure a dedicated AI coach, and the midnight conversations will still continue unless it also sets boundaries and provides approved tools. Declining the product leaves the coaching-like AI outside the organization's design.

That is an uneasy conclusion for a man who spent his first career working elbow-to-elbow with other men and women, and his second learning to love the human version of this work. I did not want the answer to be a machine. I made the case reluctantly and against my own preferences. The alternative I kept hoping for, that we would somehow train and fund our way to a human coach for everyone, was never going to arrive in time for the people already typing at midnight. Even worse for people in the Global South.

A thread to watch

I want you to pay attention to something about that midnight chat scenario I described earlier. The machine had answered the young officer when none of his organization was available. But had it understood him? When his typing became short and clipped because he was more frightened than he would admit, did anything on the other end register it as I would have across a table?

I can tell two stories about this. In one, the value of a coach lies in feeling what another person feels, in carrying some of the shared human weight of the moment. A machine has none of that and never will, so whatever it produces is a hollow imitation.

In the other story, I asked myself what my clients had actually experienced during my best sessions. They could not see my inner emotional state. What they experienced was my attention: I caught the hesitation, slowed down when they went quiet, and tracked the thing they were not saying. They experienced what I perceived and how I responded to it. Whether I also felt what they felt was invisible from their side of the table.

If most of what reaches a coached person is skilled perception rather than shared feeling, then the question of whether a machine can feel may not be the only relevant one. I am not going to resolve that here, so you have to wait a few chapters.

The promise

So this book is going to do three things, in order.

First, it's going to make the barrier impossible to ignore: the arithmetic that reserves real development for the few and hands everyone else a laminated certificate. I'm going to show you exactly how the economics work, why your leadership programs don't stick, no matter how good the facilitator was, and why coaching-like use of the general-purpose chatbots people already have may already be happening at midnight, outside your organization's view and unaligned with anything it has deliberately chosen. This is the part that's broken, and nothing that comes after will land if you're still half-convinced the current system is basically fine.

Once the barrier is undeniable, we are going to examine what could fill the gap, spending as much time on what the technology gets wrong as on what it gets right. I'll tell you, as a coach and a leader, what a machine can do that I can't. I'll also show you the specific ways these systems fail. Whether you get the good version or the bad one is more important than anything else in this argument. This is also where I return to the difference between perceiving and feeling.

Last, I'm going to replace the manifesto with a checklist: how to tell a serious AI coach from an impressive demo, and how to run a real pilot program. You will finish that chapter able to name a population, set boundaries, and define safeguards strong enough that indefinite delay is no longer automatically the responsible choice. The midnight chat window will not wait for you to feel ready, and what you do about it once you put this book down is the one part I can't write for you.

Most chapters end with something you can take back to work: a diagnostic, a test, a map, a scorecard, a rubric, a charter, or a decision.

Two more things before you start. This book is not the report of a completed trial. It is an argument about access, a description of what a system would need before it deserved the name, and a practical method for deciding whether any such system deserves some attention from you. Where the evidence is solid, I will say so, and where I am proposing or forecasting, I will say that too. To be transparent, I have

an interest to disclose: I co-founded a company that builds one of these systems. Its work appears in these pages, and I will tell you when it does.

Finally, the word "Coaching" can change shape and dimension depending on the context in which it is used. This book uses it for several activities that resemble one another without being the same. Professional coaching is a bounded relationship with a method, an ethic, and a scope. Leadership development is the wider category that includes coaching alongside practice, feedback, mentoring, and formal instruction. Mentoring and field accompaniment carry advice, example, and follow-up. Advice from a general-purpose AI resembles coaching without being it (we'll explore this in depth). And purpose-built AI coaching is the category this book proposes to go over the arithmetical barrier: a method, boundaries, evaluation, memory under control, and a human who is accountable.

That's the course we'll steer: what's broken, what could replace it, and what you can do about it. You may disagree with what I'm writing more than once, and that's absolutely fine. In fact, it's something I want from you. My ask is that you keep reading, because I'll address the objections I would have raised myself as a reader. If any survive to the last page, you can find me on LinkedIn and raise them with me directly.

Who this book is for

A word on who I wrote this for.

First, and most of all, I wrote it for the people who own development outcomes and lose sleep over them: the heads of HR, the L&D directors, the CHROs, the CPOs; the career services professionals and professors in higher education who help students prepare for their next steps; the program directors at nonprofits and NGOs running workforce, youth, and social-integration programs; the public-sector managers responsible for young people at the council or state level; and the heads of hospital units. Some of you decide for people who will never appear on a payroll. You run a youth employment program in a

secondary city, a livelihoods project in a province the state reaches late, a reintegration program for people who came home from abroad with less than they left with. The question in front of you is what kind of support to put in the hands of the participants you serve. You carry the responsibility, and you are in a position to act. You're also the ones this book asks the most of, because I'm going to argue that the tools you've relied on don't do what you've hoped, and then I'm going to hand you a different bet to place. If you own the outcome, this book is aimed squarely at you, whatever the size of your budget, and I've tried to respect your time and your intelligence on every page.

Then I wrote it for the coaches, the crew I now belong to. Some of you will open this book braced for betrayal, expecting a retired officer to explain cheerfully how a machine will take your work. I would understand that feeling because, as a matter of fact, I am writing about how parts of the profession will change. However, I am conscious that pretending otherwise would help no one. Coaches who understand the change will have more say in where their craft remains indispensable and which new roles they choose. Some will move into different professional roles. Others will see parts of their practice compressed or displaced. If you are a coach, one chapter is written directly to that fear.

Finally, I wrote it for anyone standing close enough to feel the ground move: the leader who does not run L&D but suspects something is shifting and wants to understand it before someone explains it badly; the founder deciding what kind of company to build; and, most of all, the young person walking into a first real job right now, or opening a market stall, or joining a program because the job did not exist. Unless something changes, that person will learn to lead, and to hold a life together, the same brutal way I did: alone, at night, from their own mistakes. They may never read this book, but they are the reason it exists; everyone else named here is deciding what kind of help they will receive.

If you're any of those people, you're in the right place. And if you are among those who can decide, then the rest of this is really a conversation between us. Let's begin with what's broken.

PART I: THE RECKONING

CHAPTER 1

The 2% Problem

Coaching works!

Of course, coaching works; otherwise, I would not have dedicated the second part of my professional life to it.

If you look up the number everyone quotes, you will find it quickly: coaching returns five, six, or seven times its cost. The frequently repeated 5.7-to-one figure comes from a 2001 study of 100 executives. Only 43 of them, however, provided a monetary estimate of the return, and those estimates were retrospective and self-reported.[1] The study is interesting, but I would not carry its ROI figure into a conversation with a skeptical CFO or board. Once they dismantle the most dramatic number, they may reasonably wonder what else in your case was built the same way.

The evidence I suggest you look at and reference is a 2023 study in which researchers conducted a meta-analysis limited to randomized controlled trials, applying the same basic experimental logic used in clinical research. They excluded testimonials and simple before-and-after reports, then pooled what remained: 39 coaching samples involving 2,528 participants. Coaching produced a statistically significant positive effect across leadership and personal outcomes, with a best estimate in what statisticians call the moderate range.

The researchers also found evidence of publication bias, the tendency for studies with positive findings to be published more readily than those with disappointing results, and an adjustment for it produced a smaller estimate. Coaching had a positive effect in these trials, but the size of that effect deserves some careful reading.[2]

Across the included trials, the pooled effect was moderate, with Hedges' g of .59, although the results varied between studies.

The 2025 ICF study estimates that there are approximately 123,000 professional coaches worldwide. It puts the global number of coach practitioners at a record 122,974, about 110,000 of whom have active clients. That is the worldwide supply of the service I just spent three paragraphs establishing as effective. Executives, founders, managers, and private clients worldwide draw on the same pool of roughly 110,000 active practitioners. They are not evenly spread. The largest concentrations are in North America and Western Europe, which together generate most global coaching revenue.[3]

Now that we have the supply numbers, what about the demand?

The United States alone has tens of millions of people in roles that involve managing others: frontline supervisors, mid-level managers, directors, and the whole layered pyramid that runs the working economy. I'll do the arithmetic properly on the next pages, because the ratio is the point of this chapter. You can already feel where it goes. Roughly 110,000 active coaches worldwide face a management population that reaches eight figures in one large country. Whatever the exact quotient, the delivery model cannot meet the need.

Coaching works. The 2023 trials say so carefully, without hype. Its supply is so small relative to the need that accepting its effectiveness forces the natural follow-up: who, exactly, are we letting have it?

The arithmetic of exclusivity

Let's take the numbers we saw above, starting with supply: about 110,000 have active clients. Now, let's look at the dimensions of demand. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics counts just over 11.1 million people in management occupations in the United States.[4] That figure counts people whose duties place them in management occupations and excludes the self-employed and many team leads and shift supervisors who manage people every day but are classified elsewhere. It is a conservative number for the people who carry leadership responsibility in one country.

Before I go further, I should clarify that I am assuming that every one of those eleven million needs leadership development. A skeptic will want to fight me here: *You are exaggerating! Surely not everyone needs a coach!* I'm not claiming every manager needs a $15,000 executive engagement. What I am bringing to the table here is that every one of those eleven million people has responsibility for other human beings: their time, their growth, and their experience at and of work. Leadership is part of the job, and it involves skills that can and should be developed. So, if eleven million people are already doing that work, well or badly, they need some form of development in it. Most received no more preparation than I did, which is to say almost none. Consider who is on the other side of that work. Gallup puts the ratio in large companies at roughly one manager for every ten employees. Whatever the exact figure, the eleven million manage most of the people who work for someone, and each of them shapes a working day that is not their own.

Are they getting the help they need, and that the people working with them would benefit from?

The arithmetic says: overwhelmingly, no.

Imagine every working coach on Earth abandoning every other client and redeploying to serve only American managers. Each coach would still be responsible for roughly a hundred of them, before anyone outside the United States received a single session. The global supply of coaching cannot meet the management-development needs of one large country. Training more coaches can narrow the shortage, but the delivery model itself cannot serve managers as a population.

Can we put a percentage on the gap? Only approximately, because no national census tells us how many managers are receiving professional coaching at any given time. But the available data lets us estimate the order of magnitude.

The 2023 ICF study counted approximately 34,200 coach practitioners in North America, 93% of whom had active clients. Each active coach was working with an average of 13.5 clients. That gives roughly 429,000 active coaching relationships. Among practitioners, 56% said

their clients were mostly managers or executives. If we use that share as a rough proxy for the portion of coaching capacity directed toward leaders, we arrive at approximately 240,000 active manager or executive coaching relationships across North America.[5]

Set that estimate against the 11.1 million people in formal management occupations in the United States, and the result is 2.2%. The 2 percent capacity estimate measures how much professional coaching exists relative to the people who could use it, not how many managers have been coached.

The numerator covers North America while the denominator covers the United States, and "mostly managers or executives" describes the composition of a coach's practice rather than providing an exact count of clients. This is an estimate of active professional-coaching capacity, not a census of coached managers.

Active coaches, North America	34,200
× share with active clients	93%
× average clients per coach	13.5
× share who are managers	56%
Managers in coaching	**≈ 240,000**
÷ people in management occupations, US	11,132,700
Managers with a coach	**2.2%**

Figure 1 - The arithmetic of exclusivity

Whether the true figure is slightly above or below 2%, professional coaching currently reaches only a small fraction of the managers responsible for other people's working lives. I call this the 2% problem. Throughout this book, I will use "the neglected 98%" as shorthand for the vast majority left out by the current model.

Money is what sorts people into those who get coached and those who do not.

A one-to-one coaching engagement is normally delivered as a series of sessions rather than as a single conversation. The 2025 ICF study reports an average fee of $234 for a one-hour coaching session.[6] Twelve sessions at that average cost $2,808, before adding assessments, stakeholder interviews, progress tracking, organizational reporting, or program administration.

This is a deliberately conservative figure. It is the worldwide average across different forms of coaching and economies, not the price of a full executive coaching engagement in a major U.S. market.

Multiply it. Providing twelve sessions once to each of the 11.1 million people in formal U.S. management occupations would cost approximately $31.2 billion.[7] The entire global coaching profession generated an estimated $5.34 billion in annual revenue.[8] Serving U.S. managers alone, once, at the global average session price would therefore amount to almost six times the annual revenue of the entire worldwide industry, with all of it spent in one country.

Use a U.S. executive-coaching rate, and the bill grows. Add assessments, stakeholder interviews, or organizational reporting, and it grows again. The exact package price can move considerably without changing the conclusion: sustained human coaching cannot become universal under the present economics.

Coaching's value comes from revisiting goals, testing insight against experience, and adjusting over time. One engagement per manager per career would still be a thin developmental offer. Every time the calculation becomes more realistic, the access problem grows.

This is the arithmetic of exclusivity.

It does not prove that coaches are greedy, or that firms overcharge, or that the market is broken. The prices are, if anything, rational. The ICF's own data puts the average coach at about 12 active clients at a time, which means each hour of their attention is scarce, and scarce things cost what scarce things cost. Nobody is doing anything wrong.[9]

In this inescapable scenario, there is no villain to fire and no obvious waste to remove. Even generous reform opens the door only a little wider. The exclusivity comes from trying to deliver one human

being's undivided attention to eleven million people, and no amount of goodwill changes that arithmetic.

The profession, therefore, rations its scarce capacity. Without anyone making a single explicit decision, those 110,000 active coaches focus on the thinnest slice of the management population: executives, high-potentials, and people whose organizations can pay $15,000 or more without flinching. Everyone else gets the workshop, the laminated certificate, and the two days of instruction that never become a slope.

The neglected 98%

Now, I am sure you wonder: this is the top of the pyramid; who exactly is at the bottom, and what does it cost us to leave them there?

In 2015, Gallup published *State of the American Manager*, drawing on two decades of engagement data covering some 27 million employees and more than 2.5 million work units. Buried in it was a finding that should have changed how every company makes a promotion decision, but mostly didn't. They asked what best explained the gap between a thriving team and a collapsing one across business units of the same companies, where pay scales, benefits, and mission statements were largely shared. Gallup found that managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores across business units.[10]

It means that when engagement scores vary sharply from one business unit to another, differences in how those units are managed account for a substantial share of the variation. Senior executives' job is to shape the system, but it is the frontline and mid-level managers who translate that system into Monday morning.

This statistic measures variance in engagement scores across business units, not absolute engagement levels. A great manager inside a dysfunctional company can buffer only so much; toxic executives and below-market pay set floors that no frontline manager can lift. The sturdier claim is narrower: among the factors that vary from team to team, management accounts for a substantial share. Yet the person with the most immediate influence over an employee's working life is

rarely the one the coaching budget protects. It is their boss, and their boss's boss.

Now lay that finding on top of the arithmetic from a few pages ago, and watch the pyramid turn upside down.

The organization channels scarce, expensive coaching upward to executives, the C-suite, and the handful at the top whose decisions are important but whose direct human contact is limited. A CEO shapes strategy, but they rarely run anyone's working day directly. The people who run everyone's working day, frontline and mid-level managers, receive the least individualized development in the building, if any. The heaviest investment goes to the leaders with the fewest direct reports, while the managers whose work reaches nearly everyone, clients included, get whatever is left over.

It gets worse because of how these people came to be in the role. Gallup's data suggest that only about one in ten people has a high natural talent for managing, which, in this book, I treat as the everyday form of leading.[11] The rest are promoted for something else, for being the best engineer, the top salesperson, the one who'd been there longest, or for being someone recommended by someone else. A related problem, as a body of research puts it, is that careers often advance through "managing up," while real leadership is tested in "managing down."[12] So the typical frontline manager is someone who was excellent at a different job, handed responsibility for other human beings as a reward, and then left to figure out the hardest part alone. That is, I'll note, exactly the position I was in at twenty-four, rehearsing in the dark for an audience of nobody, except that I at least had a uniform's worth of institutional scaffolding around me. Most of them don't even have that. The pyramid is not an American habit. In a group of garment factories in India, economists asked middle managers to nominate the line supervisors reporting to them for a team leadership program. Places were assigned randomly within those rankings, so the researchers could see who actually benefited. The supervisors the managers most wanted trained showed no measurable gain in productivity. The supervisors ranked lowest raised their lines' output by 12 percent.

Across all trained employees, quitting fell by 15 percent. The authors conclude that the way firms allocate development resources helps explain why poor management persists.[13] This is what I mean by the neglected 98%: the part of the pyramid the money cannot reach, and the part where leadership, good or bad, lands on the most people.

An unsupported manager is more than a neutral gap in a development plan. Their team will likely have a measurably worse experience than it would under a better-prepared leader, while the manager has neither natural talent for the job nor an executive coaching budget. Gallup finds that among people currently in management roles, nearly one in five, 18 percent, show high talent for managing others, a somewhat better rate than the population's one in ten, because firms have learned to select a little; another two in ten show a basic talent that coaching and development can raise to a high level; and the rest, by Gallup's measure, show neither.[14]

In human terms, for every hundred people who report to a manager, roughly eighteen work for one with high natural talent for the job; about twenty work for one whom Gallup says could be developed to that level, and who, at 2% coverage, is almost certainly not getting the help; and the remaining sixty or so work for a manager who has neither the talent nor, in most cases, anyone helping. That is an illustration, assuming talent is evenly distributed across teams of all sizes. Its shape does not depend on the exact numbers. The twenty are the people this book is about, and the cost of leaving them alone comes into view when you remember that almost everyone on a payroll is one of the hundred.

The middle number is the one this book is about. Multiply the gap across those numbers and the true cost comes into view: the daily working life of most of the workforce.

You win… the consolation prize

So if the 98% can't have coaching, what do they get instead? If they are lucky and the organization they work in cares about them, they get the workshop. Before we dissect the efficacy of workshops or off-sites,

let me clarify that the format isn't a scam and the people who run it aren't charlatans (also, because I am one of them). A good workshop can give you a day to step back and reflect, a framework worth knowing, or a room full of peers admitting they struggle with the same things. I am sincerely proud of the sessions I have run. The problem is that workshops have become almost the sole answer for the largest group, even though the format cannot carry that entire burden.

A leadership program for the many is an *event* that can last a day, two days, or occasionally a weekend. It is scheduled, catered, and delivered to a group. Someone stands at the front. There are slides, and often a model: a two-by-two grid, a pyramid, a set of four letters or five behaviors, printed on a certificate you're encouraged to keep at your desk. The energy in the room is good. People nod and applaud the speaker's incredible, motivating, and revealing words. They leave feeling that something happened.

Then Monday comes, and the room is gone along with the speaker, and the manager is back in the exact situation the workshop was supposed to help with. On their desk, there is a difficult report that needs a decision, and outside the office door, there is a conversation they are dreading. The certificate from the weekend's workshop is already in a drawer, and the framework has already blurred behind the work's routine. Using a metaphor I will return to throughout the book, an event like the workshop can be considered a spike, while development is more like a slope: no collection of spikes adds up to a slope, no matter how high each one goes.

I have a story that cost someone I know a weekend and his company money. A few years ago, in Rome, I reconnected with a high-school friend over a nice dinner. We talked about my new job, and he mentioned that his employer had sent him to one of those enormous leadership events the previous year, featuring a famous speaker, thousands of people, lights, music, and plenty of great energy. Out of pure curiosity, I asked him, "*Sounds like a lot of fun! Now, a year later, what do you remember of that weekend?*" After thinking about it for a minute, he told me the only surviving artifact of those expensive 2-days of

leadership development was that he had walked across hot coals. That was the entire yield. The most memorable thing about an expensive leadership event turned out to be the part with no leadership in it: the pure adrenaline stunt engineered to feel like a transformation and the impossible made possible. Everything about leading people had actually evaporated within the year and maybe even earlier, exactly as it had for me after my faraway leadership class, leaving behind only the sensation of having done something dramatic.

I'm not mocking my friend. He is smart and successful, and he received exactly what the format was built to deliver: a peak experience and a story to tell. What he did not receive was the thing a team needs: a manager who becomes a little better at the job each month. That requires practice, feedback, and repetition over time. It requires someone, or something, present near the actual difficulty. An energetic speaker in a sold-out arena cannot do that, and neither can a certificate in a drawer.

The consolation prize is not enough. The top of the pyramid receives sustained, individualized attention that works. The rest get an event, one that costs a great deal and photographs well, and whose effects have mostly faded by the following quarter. The 98% are being served a format that cannot carry the whole developmental job, then having its success measured by how good the room felt while it was happening.

If you ask me, I find that a strange way to spend a training budget, don't you?

A costly gap

Unfortunately, I know very well what one unsupported manager can do because I spent two years learning it in a way I would not repeat for any amount of money.

Somewhere in the middle of my career, I served under a man who was, by every professional measure, competent. He knew his job. He knew the regulations and the military manuals. He was respected by

people above him, and on paper, he was exactly the officer you'd want in the role.

He was also the worst leader I ever worked for.

He couldn't lead. He managed by shouting and insulting people. Nothing was ever quite right unless he had done it himself; praise was a weakness he'd apparently trained himself out of; a good day was one where he simply didn't find something to be angry about. He was corrosive in a low, unpredictable way. Under him, every navigation felt longer than it was, and every deployment was something to be endured rather than done. I remember waking up and doing the arithmetic on how many days remained, the way you do in a place you're trying to survive.

To measure this person's impact on me, you need to know I joined the Navy to fulfill a dream I've had since I was a child. For as long as I can remember, when people asked me what I wanted to do as a grown-up, I would answer with no hesitation: "*I want to be a Navy officer!*" Then, during those long years under a toxic leader, I began thinking about leaving for the first time. Lying in my rack, sometimes crying silently, I considered what else I could do, what civilian life might look like, and whether the career I loved was worth the price this man exacted from me day after day. One badly equipped human being came closer to pushing me out of a job I would have died for than any enemy I ever faced. And I was not alone in my misery because he was pushing many other colleagues toward the same breaking point.

I was only one data point among many.

My two years under that officer were one personal instance of a broader, measurable problem. Gallup's latest study found that 42% of employees who had voluntarily left an organization during the previous year believed their manager or organization could have done something to prevent their departure.[15]

That does not mean managers cause 42% of voluntary turnover. It means that in roughly two out of five voluntary exits, former employees perceived a preventable failure somewhere in their relationship with the organization. The direct manager is often the person through

whom that relationship is experienced, but pay, workload, senior leadership, job design, and organizational decisions also belong in the chain.

The financial consequences vary by role. Gallup estimates that replacing a frontline employee costs around 40% of that employee's salary, a technical professional approximately 80%, and a leader or manager around 200%.[16]

Those estimates show why unsupported management is much more than a gap in a training plan. It can become preventable attrition, reduced effort among those who remain, disrupted morale, and organizational knowledge that takes months or years to rebuild.

Turnover is the easiest invoice to spot, but the higher cost is spread across the rest of the team. Gallup's latest meta-analysis compares business units in the top and bottom quartiles of employee engagement. The more engaged units show 14% higher productivity, 78% lower absenteeism, 21% lower turnover in high-turnover organizations, and 51% lower in lower-turnover organizations, 18% higher sales productivity, 10% higher customer loyalty, and 23% higher profitability.[17]

Gallup's separate finding that managers account for at least 70% of the variance in engagement scores across business units explains why the middle tier is such a powerful economic lever.[18]

A poor middle manager who does one job badly passes the effects of his poor leadership on everyone whose work passes through him. The cost shows up in departures, absences, missed output, lower discretionary effort, customer problems, and the time senior leaders spend fixing situations that should never have reached them.

Put conservative salaries on one team simply to see the scale. The replacement percentages rise with seniority, following the low, middle, and high ends of the estimates cited. If two frontline employees earning $60,000 each leave and Gallup's 40% replacement estimate applies, replacing them would cost approximately $48,000. One technical employee earning $100,000 adds approximately $80,000. Replacing a manager earning $120,000 can cost around $240,000.[19]

These figures are illustrative and exclude lower output while positions remain vacant: recruiting and onboarding time, lost knowledge, disrupted customer relationships, and the quieter cost of capable employees deciding that extra effort is no longer worth it. That is the multiplier power of the middle-tier.

The arithmetic of exclusivity is expensive because the people with the most influence over retention and performance get the least preparation, and the consequences show up later in turnover reports and exit interviews. The causes can look diffuse from a spreadsheet. At the time, I could have written my own exit interview in one sentence about one man.

For what it is worth, he, my ex-boss, was not a villain, even if I perceived him that way at the time and for many years after. He was a version of me at twenty-four, without anyone there to correct him: a capable professional handed responsibility for people, never taught the most important part, and left to lead with habits shaped by examples no one had challenged. He was exactly what this chapter has been about. The system had failed him long before he failed the people working for him, and it has not stopped producing leaders in the same mold.

The same arithmetic, without a payroll.

Everything I have counted so far assumes a payroll. The moment you take it away, the problem changes shape without shrinking at all. From here on, I use "manager" for anyone responsible for another person's work, livelihood, or development, whether or not they have a title or receive a payroll with it.

The International Labour Organization's 2018 count put two billion people in informal work, six in ten of the world's employed, and in Africa 86 in every hundred.[20] In 2023, it counted 256 million people aged 15 to 24 who were neither working nor studying nor training, one in five worldwide, two in three of them women.[21]

At home, in 2022, about 4.3 million Americans between 16 and 24 were doing neither,[22] and more than 20,000 young people a year age

out of foster care, usually at eighteen;[23] one well-evaluated program for them gives each an hour a week with a specialist who carries about eight,[24] and a caseload of eight does not stretch to twenty thousand.

Many of them are managers, often without a supervisor: the woman who chairs a savings group, the man with two employees in a market stall, the returnee who opens a workshop with the money he brought home, the line supervisor promoted for being the fastest sewer, each responsible for someone else's working day.

The word "coaching" travels into that world and changes shape on the way. In aid-funded programs it names a range: at one end, a field officer who visits a household every week for two years, part trainer, part monitor;[25] at the other, a coach trained in a nine-month cycle who works much the way I was taught. Three things are braided together in those conversations: informing, accompanying, and developing the person's own capacity to decide. Only the third is coaching in this book's sense. All of it is sustained and individual, and it returns over months, which is why it works. It is delivered by scarce, trained humans, which is why it is rationed.

In development, coaching is usually already in the budget, and it is the line everyone is trying to bring down. One of the most rigorously evaluated anti-poverty program models in the world, the "graduation" model tested in randomized trials across six countries, bundles a productive asset, cash support, a savings account, and a coaching visit, usually weekly, for about two years. Projected benefits exceeded costs in five of the six countries, from $1.33 to $4.33 per dollar spent; Honduras was the exception. The visit is among its costliest components. A separate Ghana experiment found that an asset-only intervention and a savings intervention did not reproduce the full package's gains, although it did not establish how much of the difference was attributable to coaching.[26] Trials in Uganda, the Philippines, and Bangladesh found that delivering some or all of the coaching in small groups could cut program costs by 11 to 21 percent without reducing average effectiveness. The arrangements differed by country, and Bangladesh kept individual sessions alongside the group meetings. The savings were

substantial, but the model still depended on trained practitioners in every room. The authors are frank about how the first good coach is much easier to find than the thousandth.[27]

The same lesson arrived from a different direction in Nairobi. Inexperienced women running small shops were assigned either to a business course or to a mentor, an experienced trader from their own market. The course changed what they did, not what they earned. The mentor raised profits by a fifth. Then the pairs stopped meeting, and the effect faded.[28] Sustained individual attention worked where a classroom did not, and the gains did not outlast the relationship that produced them. That is the 2% problem in its purest form: a life-changing service, delivered by scarce humans, rationed by budget, in the places where the need is greatest. It makes the corporate version of the problem look like the easy one.

Even the consolation prize has a development edition. When David McKenzie and Christopher Woodruff reviewed the trials of business training for small entrepreneurs across the developing world, they found modest effects, often too small to detect from nothing, from a single course. Across 113 evaluations of youth employment programs, a team working for the ILO and the World Bank found that about one in three estimates was positive and statistically significant, and that the programs with better results tended to combine several services with individualized follow-up.[29] The ingredient that worked was the one that required a person to come back.

At home, the consolation prize for young people outside any payroll is the mentor, and the mentor is rationed exactly as the coach is. A 2014 national survey commissioned by MENTOR found that one young American in three reaches adulthood without a mentor of any kind, about 16 million people, 9 million of them growing up with the risk factors mentoring is meant to offset, and that each additional risk factor makes a natural mentor less likely.[30] That is the inverted pyramid of a few pages ago, drawn over a different population. What happens when the attention is structured and keeps coming back is visible in Chicago, where weekly group sessions with a counselor, built on

cognitive-behavioral methods, reduced arrests among disadvantaged young men by 28 to 35 percent during the program across two randomized trials and, in the first trial, where graduation could be followed, raised graduation rates by 12 to 19 percent.[31] It was not coaching, and I will not call it that. It was sustained, structured work on self-regulation, returning week after week, and it did what the certificate in the drawer never does.

Practical Instrument:
The Coverage Diagnostic

I leave you five questions to close this chapter. Answer them about your own organization, honestly, in private. There are no prescribed answers, and no one is scoring this but you. The goal is to find out which of these you can actually answer, and how you feel about the answers.

If you run a program rather than a company, answer them twice: once about the participants you serve, and once about the frontline staff who carry them, the field officers, job coaches, and case managers who are the only individualized attention most participants will ever get. Read "managers" as "participants and the people who carry them," and in Question 4 ask what either of them could reach for at six tomorrow morning.

1. What percentage of your managers received any individualized development in the last twelve months?

Not workshops or e-learning modules. I mean an individualized, recurring, one-to-one developmental relationship with a coach, a mentor, or a manager who was actually responsible for developing them. If you don't know the number, that is itself the answer. If you do know it, is it closer to 5% or 50%?

2. Of the development you *did* provide to managers this year, how much of it was an event, and how much was sustained over time?

Add up the spend. What share went to things that happened once (the

off-site, the speaker, the two-day program) versus things that recurred week over week or month over month? A budget that is mostly events buys mostly spikes.

3. Rank your management layers by how much developmental investment each one receives. Now rank those layers by the average number of employees directly managed by the leaders within each one.

Put the two lists side by side. In most organizations, the investment is inverted: the most flows to executives who directly manage the fewest people, and the least to frontline managers who directly manage the most. If yours is inverted, you are spending the most where leadership touches the fewest lives.

4. If one of your frontline managers is dreading a hard conversation at 6 p.m. tomorrow, what specifically can they turn to for help in that moment?

Name the actual resource, something they would actually reach for at 6 p.m. If the answer is "nothing," you have just located the exact gap this chapter is about and, quite likely, described the moment they will instead open a chat window.

5. If the individualized development you provide this year worked, how would you know?

What would you measure? Could you tell, twelve months from now, whether it improved retention on those managers' teams, raised engagement scores, or changed their employees' experience of work? If you cannot name the measurement, then you cannot tell whether you are buying development or buying the feeling of having addressed it.

If most of your answers were "I don't know," do not panic. That is not a verdict on your competence. It means you, too, are running into the arithmetic.

The Instruments to Take with You

At the end of the first nine chapters, I have detailed something you can take back to work: a diagnostic, a test, a map, a scorecard, a charter, or a decision. The last chapter leaves you with a question: whether you want to explore AI as a solution to support the leadership development of the neglected 98%.

Three of the tools in this book were built to leave it.

The scorecard, the pilot charter, and the governance and measurement annex are working documents, meant to be printed, filled in, argued over in a room, and signed. Reproducing them from these pages would be tedious, so they are also available to download and ready to be printed and used. Take them, adapt them, and put your own organization's name at the top.

The scorecard is for evaluating systems and deciding which one earns a pilot.

The charter is what you sign before the pilot begins, the one page that fixes your criteria while you can still be honest about them.

The annex is the technical companion to the charter, the place where the version freeze, the data flows, the comparison design, and the amendment log actually live, so that the charter itself can stay on a single page.

Use the scorecard first, then the charter, then the annex.



Scorecard

About the Author

Stefano Calvetti spent thirty-one years as an officer in the Italian Navy, retiring as a rear admiral. He commanded ships and crews, deployed to Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Somalia, and served as Deputy Military Assistant to the Prime Minister, leading people at every level from a small team on a deck to strategic and political leadership. Early on, he realized something that shaped the rest of his career: that a ship is only metal, and that what decides whether it succeeds is the crew, the individuals, and whether anyone is helping them become their best. Leadership, he decided, was mostly about the people, and the best way to serve them was to help them find their own answers rather than to hand them his.

When he left the Navy, he trained formally in the discipline he had been practicing, in a rougher form, for three decades. He is an ICF Professional Certified Coach (PCC), a Certified Professional Co-Active Coach (CPCC), an Enneagram practitioner, and the founder of Master Your Sea, through which he coaches executives and leaders across the United States, Canada, and Europe. He is also a co-founder of Besage.ai, the company behind iLeader. The conviction underneath both his coaching and the company is the same one that runs through these pages: that good coaching should not remain the privilege of the few who can already afford it.

He lives in Washington, D.C. with his wife and co-founder Elizabeth. If, after having read this book, you have questions, you can contact him on LinkedIn using the QR code below:

Notes

Chapter 1: The 2% Problem

1 Joy McGovern et al., "Maximizing the Impact of Executive Coaching: Behavioral Change, Organizational Outcomes, and Return on Investment," *The Manchester Review* 6, no. 1 (2001): 7–8, https://researchportal.coachingfederation.org/Document/Pdf/268.pdf.

2 Erik de Haan and Viktor O. Nilsson, "What Can We Know about the Effectiveness of Coaching? A Meta-Analysis Based Only on Randomized Controlled Trials," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 22, no. 4 (December 2023): 641–61, https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2022.0107.

3 International Coaching Federation, *2025 ICF Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary*, prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (Lexington, KY: International Coaching Federation, 2025), 5, https://coachingfederation.org/resource/2025-icf-global-coaching-study-executive-summary/; for regional distribution, International Coaching Federation, *2023 ICF Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary*, 6.

4 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 1. National Employment and Wage Data from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics Survey by Occupation, May 2025," May 15, 2026, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ocwage.t01.htm.

5 International Coaching Federation, *2023 ICF Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary*, prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (Lexington, KY: International Coaching Federation, 2023), 6–8, https://coachingfederation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/2023ICFGlobalCoachingStudy_ExecutiveSummary.pdf.

6 International Coaching Federation, *2025 ICF Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary*, 5.

7 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 1. National Employment and Wage Data"; International Coaching Federation, *2025 ICF Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary*, 5. Author's illustrative

calculation: 11.1 million managers × 12 sessions × $234 ≈ $31.2 billion.

8 International Coaching Federation, *2025 ICF Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary*, 5.

9 International Coaching Federation, *2025 ICF Global Coaching Study: Executive Summary*, 5.

10 Randall Beck and Jim Harter, "Managers Account for 70% of Variance in Employee Engagement," *Gallup Business Journal*, April 21, 2015, https://news.gallup.com/businessjournal/182792/managers-account-variance-employee-engagement.aspx.

11 Beck and Harter, "Managers Account for 70%."

12 Robert Hogan, Derek Lusk, and Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, "Are Your HiPos Overrated?," *People + Strategy* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 40, https://www.hoganassessments.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/HRPS-41_1_Hogan1.pdf.

13 Achyuta Adhvaryu, Emir Murathanoglu, and Anant Nyshadham, "On the Allocation and Impacts of Managerial Training," NBER Working Paper 31335 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2023), abstract and results tables, https://doi.org/10.3386/w31335.

14 Beck and Harter, "Managers Account for 70%," for the 18 percent, the two-in-ten "functioning talent" finding, and the observation that organizations have slightly improved their odds of selecting talented managers.

15 Corey Tatel and Ben Wigert, "42% of Employee Turnover Is Preventable but Often Ignored," Gallup, July 9, 2024, updated February 16, 2026, https://www.gallup.com/workplace/646538/employee-turnover-preventable-often-ignored.aspx.

16 Tatel and Wigert, "42% of Employee Turnover."

17 Jim Harter, "Employee Engagement vs. Employee Satisfaction and Organizational Culture," Gallup, June 28, 2018, updated July 29, 2025, https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236366/right-culture-not-employee-satisfaction.aspx.

18 Beck and Harter, "Managers Account for 70%."

19 Tatel and Wigert, "42% of Employee Turnover."

20 International Labour Organization, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture*, 3rd ed. (Geneva: ILO, 2018): two

billion workers; 61 percent of global employment; 85.8 percent in Africa.

21 International Labour Organization, *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024* (Geneva: ILO, 2024), main findings: a 20.4 percent NEET rate for ages 15–24 in 2023, about 256 million people, two in three of them women, https://www.ilo.org/publications/major-publications/global-employment-trends-youth-2024.

22 Kristen Lewis et al., *Broad Recovery, Persistent Inequity: Youth Disconnection in America* (New York: Social *Science* Research Council, 2024), 5, https://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2024/. The estimate refers to 2022.

23 Sara Muller-Ravett and Erin Jacobs, After Foster Care and Juvenile Justice: A Preview of the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation (New York: MDRC, 2012), 1–2, https://www.mdrc.org/sites/default/files/After%20Foster%20Care.pdf. The figure of more than 20,000 young people aging out of foster care each year is a rounded national estimate for the period the brief describes.

24 Erin Jacobs Valentine, Melanie Skemer, and Mark E. Courtney, *Becoming Adults: One-Year Impact Findings from the Youth Villages Transitional Living Evaluation* (New York: MDRC, 2015), service description; each YVLifeSet specialist typically serves about eight young people at a time.

25 Abhijit Banerjee et al., "A Multifaceted Program Causes Lasting Progress for the Very Poor: Evidence from Six Countries," *Science* 348, no. 6236 (2015): 1260799, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1260799. The program's components include a productive asset transfer, consumption support, access to savings, technical training, and regular "life skills coaching" visits by program staff.

26 Abhijit Banerjee et al., "Unpacking a Multi-Faceted Program to Build Sustainable Income for the Very Poor," *Journal of Development Economics* 155 (2022): 102781, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2021.102781; Banerjee et al., "A Multifaceted Program Causes Lasting Progress for the Very Poor," table 4. The Ghana experiment compares the full program with asset-only and savings interventions; it does not isolate the effect of omitting coaching alone. See also Abhijit Banerjee et al., "Corrigendum to 'Unpacking a Multi-Faceted Program to Build

What comes next

You have just read the foreword, the introduction and the first chapter.

The rest of the book keeps the promise made on page 9. Part I finishes the reckoning: why leadership programs don't stick, and what managers are already doing at eleven at night with a chatbot nobody approved. Part II is about the machine: what a purpose-built AI coach can do that I can't, the five ways these systems go wrong, and what empathy turns out to be made of. Part III is the playbook: an eight-criteria scorecard for judging an AI coach, a one-page charter for a 90-day pilot, and the organization that coaches itself.

Most chapters end with something you can take back to work. Three of those instruments, the scorecard, the pilot charter and the governance annex, are free to download at ileader.ai/the-last-human-coach.

The Last Human Coach: How to Bring Coaching to Every Manager is available in hardcover, paperback and Kindle: a.co/d/06KChxLp

If you finish it with an objection I didn't answer, find me on LinkedIn and raise it. I meant what I wrote on page 10.

Excerpt from the first edition, 2026. © Stefano Calvetti. All rights reserved.