Too much parenting, too little adulting

Varun Choraria · 2026-06-20 · https://www.varunchoraria.com/too-much-parenting-too-little-adulting/

In the age of agentic AI, something I've first-hand witnessed as a people manager is that the default mental models are unchanged.

What I mean is, a manager winds up oscillating between people issues and project management. Over time, this leads to significant burnout, and treating your team on the basis of pareto principles: top 20% don't get laid off, others are victims of "paper trails."

Politics invariably will happen if > 2 humans are involved in anything. An easy way to usually solve this problem is to use frameworks like RACI, DACI etc. and assign clear ownership. While it does work, you're not fundamentally letting your reports function as adults over time. A manager then gets terribly burnt out chasing follow-ups and then finger-pointing on the basis of who lacks agency and who does not.

One fundamental truth that I've learnt in the last ~6 months is that you cannot expect everyone on your team to have an equal level of skin in the game. Not everyone will be engaged at the same level as you might be.

So, even in the age of agentic AI, you become the usual middle manager who is fighting to justify business value.

Behaviors don't change

In a diverse team, everyone comes from diverse backgrounds, various societal hierarchies, value systems and traumas. I've been in the business long enough to realize that no one is exempt from previous job PTSD and/or burnt by leadership.

This is especially visible when you inherit a team. The "new sheriff in town" aka, "my way or the highway" or enforcing SOP rarely works sustainably, since it is directly tied to how motivated the team is. And the moment business pressure increases, motivation tanks and everything breaks.

So then the convenient thing is to point at "behavior issues" of people and PIP them.

The net effect from a business equation perspective is that you're probably at a worse spot than before you started.

Observe and Absorb

Something I've realized is that most leaders aren't fools (although some terribly are) and genuinely care about their team. So as a manager:

1. **Solve for intent first.** In my experience, intent comes down to buckets like: documentation, process, budgets, cadence meetings, and retrospectives. Transparency needs to be the status

quo; no information sits in silos. Lead through vulnerability.

2. **Process:** This is a tricky one. The current state might be such that file storage is one place, tribal knowledge exists at varying levels depending on team tenure, documentation might be an afterthought, planning happens in a different tool, reporting is in silos and heavily correlation-based, hygiene is a fever dream across the board. The common denominator of this is that process workflows typically sit outside of the daily tools and habits of the team. As a manager, using agentic AI, it is imperative to ensure whatever process you set sits within workflow. An example of this is that all campaign planning, monthly cadences, OOOs, etc. sat on a team google calendar with meta data enriched in the description. Leadership and cross-functional teams had access to the marketing team calendar, and were advised to look at it. Leadership did not have to shoulder-tap for basic information or navigate a labyrinth of google drive files or email threads.

3. **Alignment:** This is extremely inter-personal. Interview your team and get to know them as human beings. Your prime job is to enable them, and teach them to enable their stakeholders. Servant leadership needs to percolate in their daily habits as well. Why? Because trust is what gets work done. You do not need to build trust across the organization immediately. You need to build it in smaller pockets first, and work your way upward:

    1. Instruct the team to write well-written emails, anticipating all objections first. A simple show-and-tell on leveraging AI to do this works wonders. You then become less of a manager-report, but more of a player-coach model which scales automatically. Habits like sharing minutes of meetings, keeping things in writing / async, going into meetings with a clear agenda written in the calendar invite itself, and flagging blockers early drives alignment in a healthy way.

    2. Teach your team to say No. I do this by just clarifying the closest-to-revenue tasks. One way to share this mental model is that while everything can seem important - some are one-way doors and some are two-way doors. Or, some tasks are glass balls (which can break) and some are rubber balls (which can bounce back). All tasks can be done, but queueing can be prioritized to ship needle moving items every week - which can be attributed for. One practice I enforce in the world of MCPs is that now everyone has information-parity. So the expectation is to leverage that, create an air-tight business case and email that over for a quick spitballing exercise. I do not see much of an operating difference between product and marketing teams - both are in service of sales from day zero.

    3. Share feedback on the problem-statement. More often than not, feedback - even the trivial ones, become a mud-slinging “he said, she said” fight which hurts credibility. Ultimately, no one can operate in silos so feedback needs to be entirely emotionless and tied to impact, justified by an SLA. You need to structure your message in that way, so you don’t leave room for interpretation.

    4. Encourage self-promotion. Promotion in any org is always biased on showmanship and pompousness. Unfortunately, you cannot change the world but you can bring a certain

> level of meritocracy to it. Everyone's work is important to achieving business goals, so why is each team member rewarded unfairly? I'm still figuring this out for myself, and something I've arrived at so far is you need to change the mechanics of reward. Like Mckinsey's airport test, you want to encourage rewards for being a good person first. Skill / will gap can be solved for with coaching. But, for long-term growth and ensuring team environment stays positive - you want to reward things like EQ, empathy, ability to be coached, and how calm they can stay when shit hits the fan.

The bottomline is that as a manager, you have to build an environment where people behave like adults as a function of time. That comes when you micromanage less, and instead resort to engineering acceptable behaviors that build the team culture.