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CAREERS GUIDE

The Marketing Team Lead Playbook

Delegate, give feedback, and lead a marketing team

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What is inside

I have spent the last twelve years or so in user acquisition, and a big part of that has been building and leading teams. I have hired a lot of people, promoted a few of them into their first management role, and watched what happens next. The pattern is almost always the same. Someone is the best performer on the team, they get handed a couple of reports, and then they quietly struggle for six months because nobody told them the job is now completely different.

This guide is the thing I wish I could have handed those people on day one. It is built around the frameworks I actually use, not theory. If you are a strong marketer stepping into your first lead role, or you are aiming for one and want to know what it really takes, this is the playbook. Read it once end to end, then keep it open as a checklist when you start.

CHAPTER 1

The shift from doer to leader

The hardest part of becoming a team lead is not learning new skills. It is unlearning the reflex that made you good in the first place. As an individual contributor you were rewarded for output. You wrote the ad, you built the funnel, you shipped the report. Your value was visible and it was yours. As a lead, your output is now the output of other people, and that feels deeply uncomfortable at first because it is slower, messier, and less directly in your control.

I tell every new lead the same thing. Your job is no longer to have the best answers. It is to build a team that consistently produces good answers without you in the room. If you do management well, the team gets stronger even when you are on vacation. If you do it badly, everything routes through you and you become the bottleneck you were trying to prevent.

What actually changes when you become a lead

As an individual contributor	As a team lead
You are measured by your own output	You are measured by the team's output
Success is doing the work well	Success is other people doing the work well
You solve the problem	You help the person solve the problem
Your calendar is full of doing	A third to half of your week is managing
You know exactly where you stand	Your impact shows up weeks later, through others

Notice that last row. The feedback loop on management is slow. You will coach someone in January and see the payoff in March. New leads panic in the gap and go back to doing the work themselves, because doing feels productive. Resist that. The discomfort of not personally shipping is the job, not a sign you are failing at it.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Your output is now your team's output, not your own.
- Building a team that works without you is the goal, not a nice-to-have.
- Management pays off slowly, so do not judge yourself by this week.

CHAPTER 2

Your first 90 days

The instinct in a new role is to prove yourself fast by changing things. Please do not. The most valuable thing you can do in your first month is observe, ask questions, and earn trust. You cannot fix a system you do not understand yet, and reorganizing on day one signals that you value your own ideas over the people who have been here longer than you. Here is the checklist I run through when I step into a new team.

1. Set up regular one-on-ones with every report right away, and in the first ones ask about their real problems and any promises the previous manager made to them. Unkept promises are landmines you want to find early.
2. Gather feedback on each team member from their peers and from the former manager, so you form your own view instead of inheriting reputations blindly.
3. List the people worth talking to across adjacent teams, stakeholders, and partners, and actually meet them. Relationships you build now are cheap and pay off later.
4. Learn the salaries and the bonus system, and find out who is due for a raise. You cannot advocate for your people if you do not know how they are paid.
5. Budget a third to half of your week for management work. If you lead four people, expect roughly half your time to go to leading them, not to your own tasks.
6. Learn the team's goals and clarify expectations: the six-month goals, what your boss expects, what adjacent teams expect, and whether all of it is actually realistic.
7. Assess each person's level with fresh eyes rather than accepting the old labels, and start sketching career tracks together with each of them.
8. Check the communication channels the team uses and how information really flows, including the informal paths that are not on any org chart.

> **FROM THE HIRING SIDE**
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> When I interview someone for a lead role, the answer that impresses me most is not a bold 30-day turnaround plan. It is a listening plan. Candidates who say their first move is to understand the team and its promises before changing anything are the ones I trust with people.

One more note on realism. When you learn the six-month goals, pressure-test them honestly. New leads often accept an impossible target to look agreeable, then spend two quarters absorbing the blame for a plan that was never achievable. It is far better to renegotiate scope in week two than to miss in month five.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Observe first. Do not reorganize on day one.
- Find the unkept promises and the pay picture early, because both shape trust.
- Protect a third to half of your week for managing, and pressure-test the goals for realism.

CHAPTER 3

Delegation without losing sleep

Delegation is the skill that separates leads who scale from leads who burn out. Most people delegate badly not because they are lazy but because they hand off a vague wish and hope. Real delegation is a small contract you agree on up front. Here are the five steps I walk through for anything meaningful I hand off.

1. Set the task right. Make it Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Significant to the strategy so they understand why it matters, and Time-bound. If you cannot state it this clearly, you are not ready to delegate it.
2. Agree on the rules. Decide when they should escalate to you, where their ownership starts and ends, that they have the right to make mistakes, and which adjacent teams they need to keep informed.
3. Agree on the resources. Confirm the tools, budget, people, and time they actually have. Delegating a goal without the resources to hit it is just setting someone up to fail.
4. Set the reporting. Agree how you will check progress and see intermediate results, so you catch drift early without hovering over every step.
5. Define the consequences. Be clear on the reward if they stretch and deliver, what happens if it does not work out, and how this task moves their own growth forward.

That last step matters more than people think. When someone knows a task is a real stretch tied to their development, and that you will back them if it wobbles, they lean in. When it feels like busywork with all the risk and none of the upside, they do the minimum. Delegation is a motivation tool, not just a way to offload your inbox.

The real blocker is usually in your own head. Three mindsets stop new leads from delegating, and each one has an answer.

The three mindsets that block delegation

The thought	How to beat it
I will do it faster myself	True this once, false forever. The hours you spend teaching now buy back weeks later. Delegation is an investment, not a time trade.
I will do it better	Probably, at first. Good enough and owned by them beats perfect and owned by you. They only reach your level by doing the work, not watching you do it.
I am useless if others do the work	Your value is now the team's results, not your personal keystrokes. A lead whose team runs without them is succeeding, not disappearing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Delegate as a contract: task, rules, resources, reporting, consequences.
- Tie the task to the person's growth so it motivates instead of dumps.
- The blocker is your own head, not their ability. Invest the time to teach.

CHAPTER 4

Feedback that develops people

Most feedback fails for one of two reasons. Either it never happens because the lead avoids the discomfort, or it lands as an attack and the person spends the whole conversation defending themselves instead of listening. Developmental feedback is a skill you can learn, and it starts with a few principles that keep the conversation useful.

- Do not guess at causes. You saw a behavior and a result. You do not know why yet, so do not walk in with a theory about their character.
- Separate the person from the work. The report was late. That is a fact about the report, not a verdict on the human.
- Share the impact calmly, not raw emotion. Explain what the behavior caused, not how frustrated you felt in the moment.
- Do it in a calm setting, in private, when neither of you is rushed or heated.
- Guide them to their own conclusions rather than handing down a sentence. People act on fixes they arrived at themselves.
- Attack the problem, not the person. You are on the same side of the table, both looking at the issue together.

With those in place, the conversation itself has a shape. I run it in five stages, and I try not to skip ahead.

1. Describe the problem with facts. State what actually happened, specifically and without judgment: the campaign went live two days late, three approvals were missed.
2. Explain the impact. Connect that fact to a real consequence for the team, the goal, or the stakeholders, so they see why it matters.
3. Find the cause by asking them. Do not diagnose it yourself. Ask what got in the way, and listen. The real reason is often not what you assumed.
4. Ask them for the fix. Let them propose how to prevent it next time. Ownership of the solution is what changes behavior.
5. Set checkpoints. Agree on how and when you will both check that the fix is working, so the conversation leads to something real.

And do not save feedback only for problems. Reinforcing feedback is just as important and far more neglected. When someone does something well, name it specifically and explain the impact, exactly like you would for a problem. Vague praise like good job teaches nothing. That handoff doc you wrote saved the whole team a day of confusion, keep doing that tells them precisely what to repeat.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

In reference checks I always ask how someone handled feedback with their reports. The leads people remember fondly are almost never the softest. They are the ones who were direct about problems and equally specific about what was going well. Consistency is what builds trust, not niceness.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Lead with facts and impact, not theories about the person.
- Ask for the cause and the fix instead of handing down both.
- Give reinforcing feedback as specifically as you give corrective feedback.

CHAPTER 5

One-on-ones that actually help

The one-on-one is the single highest-leverage habit you have as a lead, and it is the first thing people cancel when they get busy. That is exactly backwards. A one-on-one is not a status update. You can get status from a tool or a standup. This meeting belongs to your report, and its purpose is everything a status update does not cover: how they are really doing, what is blocking them, and where they want to grow.

- Hold them weekly or biweekly, and protect the slot. Cancelling on someone repeatedly tells them they do not matter, no matter what you say.
- Their topics go first. Let them set the agenda before you bring yours, so it stays their meeting.
- Cover blockers and growth, not just this week's tasks. What is in their way, and where are they trying to get to.
- Bring your items and any feedback after theirs, once they have been heard.
- Take notes and follow up. Nothing kills a one-on-one faster than raising the same problem three weeks in a row with no action from you.

The quality of a one-on-one lives in the questions. Yes-or-no questions get you yes-or-no answers. Open ones get you the truth. A few I come back to: what is the most frustrating part of your work right now, what would you change if you could, what are you learning, and where do you feel stuck. Then the hardest skill of all, which is to stay quiet and let the silence do its work until they fill it.

Weak questions versus questions that open people up

Weak	Better
Everything going okay?	What is the most frustrating part of your work right now?
Any blockers?	What is slowing you down that I could help remove?
Happy here?	If you could change one thing about how we work, what would it be?
On track?	What are you least confident about hitting, and why?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The one-on-one is their meeting, not a status check. Protect the slot.
- Their agenda first, then blockers and growth, then your items.
- Ask open questions, take notes, and follow up so trust compounds.

CHAPTER 6

Time management for managers

New leads drown. The work that used to be your whole job is still there in part, and now people problems, hiring, and planning land on top of it. The trap is that the new work is rarely urgent, so it always loses to the fire of the moment. Six months later you look up and realize you never once worked on strategy, hiring, or developing your people, because something was always on fire. The Eisenhower matrix is a simple way to see the trap and climb out of it.

The Eisenhower matrix for a team lead

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	Do now: a live campaign broke, a client escalation. Handle it, then ask why it became urgent.	Protect this: strategy, hiring, developing people, fixing root causes. This is where a lead earns their keep.
Not important	Delegate or batch: routine approvals, most pings and status requests. Do not let these eat your day.	Drop it: busywork and meetings that exist out of habit. Say no.

The whole game is protecting the important-but-not-urgent box, the top right. That is where strategy, hiring, and growing your people live, and it is the first thing that gets crushed under a pile of urgent noise. Block time for it on your calendar and defend that block like a meeting with your boss, because in effect it is.

- Delegate or batch the urgent-but-not-important. Group your approvals and messages into a couple of windows instead of reacting all day.
- Protect planning and deep-work time as recurring, non-negotiable calendar blocks, and hold them.
- Run a short retro after anything that caught fire. Five minutes on why it happened stops the same fire from restarting next month.
- When something urgent lands, ask whether a system fix in the top-right box would have prevented it. Usually the answer is yes.

That last habit is the one that compounds. Most recurring fires are symptoms of a missing process, an unclear owner, or a gap you have been too busy to close. Every hour you spend in the important-but-not-urgent box quietly shrinks next month's pile of urgent.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- New leads default to the urgent and never protect the important.
- Block and defend time for strategy, hiring, and developing people.
- Run short retros so the same fire does not keep restarting.

CHAPTER 7

Leading a remote marketing team

Marketing teams are remote and distributed more often than not now, and remote leadership rewards a different reflex than in-office leadership. The core shift is simple to say and hard to live: judge people by outcomes, not by hours. If you catch yourself watching who is green on Slack or wondering why someone was quiet for two hours, you are managing the wrong signal. Trust over surveillance is not a nice value, it is the only thing that works remotely.

For that to be fair, the outcomes have to be written down. Vague expectations that everyone absorbed by osmosis in an office do not survive distance. So write the goals down, keep them somewhere everyone can see, and make async the default.

- Put goals and OKRs in writing, in a shared place like Notion, so anyone can check what good looks like without a meeting.
- Default to async and documentation. A decision that lives only in a Zoom call is lost to everyone who was not on it, including your future self.
- Keep the rituals lean: one weekly team sync, protected one-on-ones, and a clear channel structure in Slack so people know where things go.
- Onboard remote hires deliberately. In an office people learn by osmosis; remotely you have to write down what they would have picked up by sitting nearby.
- Respect time zones. Rotate meeting times so the same person is not always taking the 6 a.m. call, and lean on async for anything that does not need everyone live.
- Watch for disengagement early. Going quiet, dropping out of channels, or shorter one-on-ones are the smoke. Reach out privately and directly before it becomes a resignation.

Common remote failure modes and the fix

Failure mode	The fix
Meeting overload to feel in control	Cut to a few essential rituals and move the rest to async updates.
Undocumented decisions	Write down what was decided and why, in a shared place, every time.
Invisible burnout	Ask directly in one-on-ones and watch for quiet withdrawal, since you cannot see it on a face.

FROM THE HIRING SIDE

The remote leads who thrive are relentless writers. They document decisions, they write clear briefs, and their teams rarely have to ask what was meant. When I evaluate a remote manager, the clarity of their written communication tells me more than anything they say in the interview.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Judge outcomes, not hours. Trust beats surveillance every time.
- Write goals down and make async and documentation the default.
- Keep rituals lean and watch for quiet disengagement before it hardens.

Where to go next

None of this clicks from reading alone, so pick one framework and use it this week. Set up your one-on-ones, or delegate one real task with the five-step contract. If you want to go deeper, the careers articles on the shenshin.co blog dig into hiring, team building, and growing a marketing career, and the free course walks through user acquisition from the ground up so you can lead the work as well as the people. Start small, stay consistent, and let the results compound.

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