

You should be elevating every team member's reputation — here are simple ways to do it

You may naturally talk up certain high-performing team members. But what about everyone else? It's common for leaders to think, *Those people still need to earn my advocacy.*



But your recognition and support may be exactly what they need to believe in themselves and excel in the first place — helping them gain confidence in their contributions and boosting their reputation with others. Doing so can even start a *virtuous* cycle: Elevating them helps you see them as more capable, which leads to you giving them more opportunities to earn your confidence.

Which direct reports could use more of your advocacy? Match people with the appropriate tactics below — listed from smaller, everyday strategies to larger investments of your time and credibility.

1. Recognize a direct report's strengths and contributions.

Do it: Regularly, whenever they add value.

Is it really that someone isn't doing *anything* praiseworthy? Or that you and others just don't see what they're doing well or don't value it the same as other contributions? That's often true for people whose work or accomplishments may be less visible or difficult to measure — like team members who don't self-promote, remote workers, those from underrepresented groups, or those in support roles.

To make sure that nobody on your team gets shortchanged, be sure you have a good understanding of every direct report's accomplishments and progress (see [Revisit how your team shares updates](#)). Also, consider every team member's greatest strengths, so you can look for opportunities to recognize their character and competence — not just the milestones they reach. If you struggle to think of someone's strength, push yourself to notice what they do well by asking yourself, *How does this person show their intelligence in their daily work?*

Then, look for opportunities to highlight their greatness. Depending on the situation, you could give them recognition privately or publicly (depending on their comfort with public praise) and/or to your boss or other leaders.

For example, to the person (to raise their confidence):

"I noticed that when you explained the project rationale, the whole team understood it right away. I really appreciate how you make complex concepts understandable. That helps everyone get on the same page quickly."

To higher-ups or in public (to raise their visibility):

"It was Shondip's great idea to organize the report this way. He's really good at making complex concepts understandable."

For more, see [Recognize a direct report's excellence in a creative, customized way](#) and [Notice and recognize every team member's greatest strength](#).

2. When you receive positive feedback about your team's work, direct credit toward the deserving person or people.

Do it: Whenever you get praise for your team's work — especially for contributions made by a direct report whose work may be less visible to others.

Redirecting credit doesn't require you to risk your reputation — you're agreeing with someone else's endorsement. In fact, it may enhance your credibility as a leader who helps people shine.

Besides, it takes only a moment longer to attach the specific names of those responsible for the accomplishment. For example:

“I’m glad to hear you found our posters so helpful. Tyrone created the posters. I’ll be sure to pass your comments along to them.”

3. Coach a direct report on how to improve their own reputation.

Do it: When you spot a tendency or skill gap that affects how others see them.

It’s easy to judge a direct report’s shortcoming rather than focus on how to help the person overcome it. For example, they ramble when giving updates in department meetings, so you think, *They’re not good at this*. Maybe you even worry that their behavior will reflect poorly on you, so you try to minimize or hide their involvement in the task. But that only limits the person’s potential — and *your* reputation as a leader.

Part of your job is helping your direct reports build their reputations — not just their skills. So, if they’re doing something that causes others to see them as unreliable, uncooperative, or not worthy of respect — that’s ultimately on you. Embrace your role and provide the coaching and feedback they need to raise their standing. For example:

“I’ve noticed during department meetings that you spend time on your project’s technical details rather than emphasizing the impact it will have on customers. Those technical details make it hard for nontechnical people to follow and difficult for them to see the business value of your work. Before the next meeting, would you be willing to talk through some ways to tailor your message so more people understand its value?”

4. Give a direct report a supporting role in a high-profile project you’re working on.

Do it: When someone can gain experience in a relatively low-risk way that helps others see them as contributing to important initiatives.

Maybe they aren't quite ready to lead a big project. But can you help them take a small leap to allow them to practice? For example, if you need to devise a launch plan for an important product, you could ask the person to interview stakeholders across departments so you can factor those perspectives into your plan.

As you introduce the task, frame it in terms of how it will help them and the project:

“I’m working on the launch plan for project X. I’d like you to interview team leaders to learn what’s important to them for the launch. It’ll give you experience connecting with the leaders and seeing how the plan comes together. And it’ll make the plan much better because we’ll be able to incorporate stakeholder perspectives. How does that sound?”

5. Ask to include a direct report directly in an important conversation.

Do it: When you want stakeholders to see first-hand the expertise and value that the person brings.

Having your direct report speak for themselves gives them a chance to dazzle others directly. It's also often a more effective way to work — rather than you trying to represent their knowledge. Consider highlighting this benefit when you ask higher-ups about including your direct report in the discussion. For example:

“Would you be open to my bringing Jasmine to Thursday’s executive meeting? She’s our customer research expert. She can share her perspective directly and answer questions, rather than my trying to relay all that information.”

6. Recommend a direct report to take on a bigger project or role.

Do it: When you and your direct report feel confident in their skills — and you're ready to endorse them.

This kind of sponsorship often happens during conversations with high-level leaders, when your direct report isn't in the room. Before you take the step of recommending them, be sure that you know your direct report's career goals and interests — to ensure that you're sponsoring them for the right things from their point of view.

Depending on the situation, you might suggest they play a part in a cross-team initiative to meet an important company goal, take on new duties, or even get promoted to a new role. For example, you might say to an executive:

“I recommend Jasmine for your big customer satisfaction project, given her customer research expertise — and I can help free up her workload so she has the time.”

For more, see [Who should you be sponsoring \(not just mentoring\)](#).