

ROBIN BONATESTA

LEADING WITHOUT COMMITTING

LEADDEV NY

2025

Managing teams outside your tech stack



MY BACKGROUND

🎓 = Double majored in Fashion Merchandising + Computer Science

📱 Started career as iOS engineer at an early stage startup

📈 Worked at variety of start ups

👤 2022 - Hired at Rent the Runway as a Mobile Engineering Manager and became a **fierce** advocate for the app

“No really, download **Rent the Runway** on the App Store **today!**”

- Robin Bonatesta

**I HAVE NO
IDEA WHAT
I'M DOING**



THE CHALLENGES

Credibility: “Who put *her* in charge of an API?”

Feedback: without knowing the technical

Growth: coaching careers you’ve never lived

Can she even spell
API?

My new team, in my head

THE PLAYBOOK

01

IDENTIFY +
FILL BLIND
SPOTS

02

BUILD TRUST

03

LEVERAGE
WHAT YOU
DO KNOW

04

MANAGE
DOWN TO
MANAGE UP

01 - IDENTIFY + FILL YOUR BLIND SPOTS

Learn and speak the language

Get to know your product and new platform

Set up feedback mechanisms

“

Let me repeat back to make sure I'm understanding correctly

Me, all the time

02 - BUILD TRUST

Establish some credibility

Show that you care - ask questions

Shadow your engineers (on-call, deployments) and take action

Watch yourself: Stop saying “us vs. them”

“

Software is a team sport

Me, all the time

03 - LEVERAGE WHAT YOU *DO* KNOW

Fundamentals › Syntax

Bring lessons from your stack or
past experiences

Identify opportunities for your
engineers to improve their areas of
ownership

04 - MANAGE DOWN TO MANAGE UP

Teach engineers to manage up

Understand + develop their career goals

Empower them to set and articulate a technical vision for their platform

Shared 1:1 notes to confirm understanding and keep a brag doc

REMEMBER: MANAGEMENT != SYNTAX

Work to **identify + fill your blind spots** to learn about your team's responsibilities

Build trust and show your engineers that you care with actions

Draw on your experience to **leverage what you *do* know**

Teach your engineers to **manage up** and be in the driver's seat of their own career

THANK YOU!



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