

Are You Managing to Lead?

By Monty J. Sharp

For many people, the terms "manager" and "leader" are synonymous. In the business world, they are often used interchangeably, i.e. "team leader", "team manager", "project manager" - you get the idea. And why not? After all, leaders and managers do basically the same thing, right?

In some instances, there do seem to be commonalities between the two and management techniques are sometimes confused with leadership traits. However, there are, I believe, some key distinctions to be made that radically separate the two.

Here then, are what I consider to be some key differences between a leader and a manager:

A manager administers. A leader innovates.

Managers take policies and procedures and ensure that they are carried out. Leaders are constantly challenging the "status quo" to achieve bigger and better things.

A manager maintains. A leader develops.

As long as things are running smoothly, the manager is typically happy. The leader is never satisfied with the "status quo" or "the way we've always done it". Leaders are constantly asking for more and bigger things - of themselves as well as those they lead.

Managers rely on control. Leaders inspire trust.

Managers can feel threatened by subordinates who don't seem to be "towing the line". In doing so, they create a co-dependency in the subordinates who, in turn, rely on the manager to dictate nearly every step of the process. Leaders know how to tap into the inherent strengths of those they lead and then foster those strengths to the benefit of the organization.

A manager has his eye only on the "bottom line." A leader has his eye on the horizon as well.

In orienteering (using a map and compass) you must set your sights on a distant object to get an accurate bearing. If you take only short-range sightings, it is much more likely you will stray far off the right course. In the same way, "bottom lining" only without also "visioning" can result in ending up at a destination you did not plan on.

The manager imitates. The leader originates.

While using "tried and true" methods isn't always a bad thing, someone else's methods may not be exactly right for every organization. Leaders aren't afraid to try new, and even unorthodox, methods to achieve optimum results.

Managers focus on product. Leaders focus on process.

While still holding to the principles of quality, productivity and efficiency, the leader is able to recognize the effort as well as the "end-product".

Managers need lots of positive feedback. Leaders have an innate sense of their own self-worth.

Everyone likes a "pat on the back" for a job well done. However, managers rely heavily on things like "performance reviews", "appraisals" and "kudos" from their supervisors and their subordinates to demonstrate a job well done. They also tend to rely heavily on those tools as motivators for their subordinates.

Managers need subordinates. Leaders strive to develop other leaders.

Leaders are always in the process of developing other leaders. Managers tend to feel very threatened when they perceive someone may be "passing them up".

Managers tell "what". Leaders share "why."

The manager is primarily concerned with simply giving the steps to achieve the desired result. The leader also takes the time to explain why those steps are crucial to the desired result. In doing so, the leader is also imparting his "vision" to those that help make that vision a reality.

Managers are more concerned with doing things right. Leaders are more concerned with doing the right thing.

Managers tend to be very "order" and "structure" oriented. Leaders have a keen sense of the "spirit of the law" and aren't afraid to "bend" the rules if it will achieve a greater good for everyone.