



# Today's Leadership Challenge

## Are You Leading...or Just Managing?

### A case study in turning good managers into great leaders

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In our last newsletter, we focused on the fact that leaders, not managers are needed to guide organizations and institutions through today's challenges. [Visit here to see the article "Today's Leadership Challenge"](#).

#### Leading or Managing – What's the Difference?

When responding to business challenges and driving change, the job of a *manager* is to keep the current system operating –to maintain control, order, and predictability while minimizing risk. The job of a *leader* is to challenge the status quo, to create new systems and ways of operating, and sometimes to take risks.

The roles of leading and managing are not mutually exclusive. Leading is not better or more important than managing when it comes to organizational change and success. In fact, strong leadership combined with effective management can significantly improve the levels of organizational success.

#### Lead or Manage During Challenging Times?

Especially during times of change and duress or growth and opportunity, organizations need people in top and mid-level positions to exhibit strong leadership characteristics. These people need to do more than just manage. They need to step up to the challenges facing the organization and provide a

desirable and attainable vision of the future while motivating and inspiring others to reach that vision.

Leaders lead. They guide people from a current set of circumstances to a new situation in the future – and they lead people despite obstacles that may occur. They see possibilities; they have new ideas and invite new ideas from others; and they envision a desirable future and provide a needed sense of direction. Just as importantly, they communicate their vision in ways that inspire and motivate others to want to reach that same vision. Managers, on the other hand, focus on being the best at the current operations.

#### Becoming Leaders

To use Warren Bennis's framework on the difference between a leader and a manager (*On Becoming a Leader*), organizations and institutions need to develop leaders who have the skills and the abilities to:

*Innovate*.....not just administer

*Focus on people*.....not just systems and structure

*Inspire trust*...rather than relying on control

*Have a longer term perspective*.....rather than a short range view

*Ask "what?" and "why?"*.....rather than how and when

*Have their eye on the horizon*... as opposed to just the bottom line

*Challenge the status quo*...not accepting the status quo

*Be their own person*.....rather than the classic "good soldier"

*Do the right things*.....not solely focused on doing things right

After seeing this fundamental difference, many organizations and institutions come to the realization that they have established a structure of managers and ask themselves, “What can we do? Can we transform our managers into leaders?”



### Leadership Can be Developed

While leadership skills naturally exist in some people, others find developing these skills more challenging. Through years of working with managers and leaders, we have found that if people have the inherent capability, sufficient motivation, and the knowledge of what effective leaders do, their *leadership capabilities can be developed*.

To be clear, no one can teach managers to have character, persistence, courage, risk-taking, curiosity, or enthusiasm -- but we **can** emphasize these as the characteristics of an effective leader. We can also highlight what effective leaders do and provide essential tools and skills needed for the job. Our experience has also taught us that the learning experience is different: it has to be more dynamic, more inductive, with broader ideas and concepts, more focused on process and questioning, on discovery and alternatives. And yet practical.

But it all begins with understanding the difference between managing and leading, and understanding what effective leaders do. And then doing those things, or learning how to do them.

### A Success Story

Let me end with a simple success story. Not a wholesale transformation of a manager to a leader, but a success story nevertheless, and one that maybe you can relate to.

Art James is a middle-aged Vice-President of IT for a medium sized institution. Art was a classic manager, but was needed by the organization to step up and lead his organization through a difficult transition period. By my assessment, he had the potential and I agreed to work with Art. I first got him to see the difference between leading and managing. He “got it” but this practical, bottom-line, and introverted manager was having difficulty seeing how he could change some very ingrained behaviors, and he felt the transformation needed was overwhelming. I convinced him to focus on a few key behaviors in the upcoming weeks.

For example, if leadership is an interpersonal influence process, then he needed to spend more time in settings where he could influence people in his organization to make some of the dramatic changes needed. I knew Art had the respect of his organization, and in personal conversations with him, I knew he had the passion and could be quite convincing around some of these needed changes.

The problem was, Art spent far too much of his time on managerial tasks. This, combined with his introverted nature caused him, for example, to spend the majority of his time in his office. When I talked to others in his organization, they complained that he just wasn’t accessible. When I talked to Art about this, he complained about the many meetings he had during the day and the dozens of emails awaiting him when he got back to the office.

We made an agreement. On Mondays every week Art had a weekly meeting with his staff from 10 to 11 AM. His usual habit was to race from this meeting back to his office to catch up on emails. We agreed that once the meeting ended, he was not to return to his office until at least 12PM. During that time he was

to “wander around” and interact with members of his organization that worked on that floor of the building.

Just one hour a week. At first I gave him no agenda for these informal interactions, but after he found out he was learning a lot about his people and they were learning a lot about him and what he cared for, we crafted his passion into some key messages that he worked into his conversations as he interacted with people in his organization.

The result was that his organization succeeded in this difficult transition, and Art won the commitment of some of the more difficult “hard-liners” who were dead set against the change. And in my conversations with members of his organization months later, they cited a transformation in his leadership of that organization.

This was not the only behavior that Art worked on during that period, but all were based on knowing the difference between managing and leading, and carving out the time and consciously practicing the skills and behaviors needed.

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*Our next article will focus on the leader as a source of vision, values and integrity.*

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