

Leader or Manager?

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Are you a leader or a manager?

What percentage of your time do you spend sorting out problems? Be honest! And how much time do you spend planning, spotting trends or just thinking about your business?

It doesn't matter what title you have on your business card. If you spend most of your time working 'in' the business – the roll-up-your-sleeves type stuff – you're a manager. If you make time to work 'on' the business, you are allowing yourself space to be a leader.

What do they do in that corner office?

The corner office, the swish furniture, the lunches and dinners with clients – a good life, right? Skilled leaders form the backbone of any successful business. Their hard work makes it look easy.

If you use your corner office just for pushing paper around, you're still a manager. Leaders are the ones creating the plans, steering the company with their eyes on the horizon, assessing risks, keeping tabs on the competition – all the while keeping the staff motivated to stretch to their highest potential.

Why do so many leaders struggle?

New leaders seldom have good role models to draw inspiration from. Managers are often thrown into leadership roles with the assumption that they'll instinctively know what to do. Leaders often spend more time researching the best lunch spots than they do working on the business. Then comes the time when they look around and realize that they have no followers – and without followers you're not a leader.

I have to keep putting out fires!

When there are so many fires to put out every day that there seems to be no time left for leadership, it's often due to a lack of long-term planning. True leaders look ahead, organize their time and delegate. They have the fewest fires to extinguish. It's like keeping your accounts up to date all year instead of having the final shoe-box crunch at year-end.

Everyone can be a leader

Whatever their position in the organization, everyone can learn leadership skills. True, not all of us are destined to be head of a major company, but leadership in every role is important to business success. When the latest change comes down from senior management, by getting on board and encouraging others you become a leader. By thinking of more efficient processes, you become a leader. If you have responsibility for others, the team will be more productive if you lead them rather than simply manage the work.

How can a company prepare their future leaders?

First, to encourage up-and-coming employees, they must demonstrate that leaders will be able to move to positions of responsibility within the organization. Leadership skills should be highlighted as critical to the ongoing success of the business. Providing formal training is a start – this shows the importance the company attaches to leadership skills.

Partnering employees with an experienced (and successful!) leader as their coach or mentor is a powerful way of enhancing leadership skills. This allows the future leader to glimpse the role they will have within the company, as well as keeping the skills of the current leaders sharp and focused.

How can I develop leadership skills?

Gather all the information you can about successful leaders. Take a leadership course, either through your organization, at a continuing education class or online. Read books about successful leaders and note their methods of balancing the work they have to do with their long-term vision.

Seek out leaders you admire in your organization or in your business community and ask them the secrets they have learned. Look out for examples of poor leadership and learn from those too!

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