

LeaderPerfect Newsletter

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What Sets Leadership Apart from Management?

by Dr. Mike Armour

Long-time subscribers to this newsletter know that I have written often on the contrast between leadership and management.

It's an important distinction to be made, because the corporate world has blurred the line between them.

When I first started teaching leadership courses in the 1970s, books on leadership were a rare breed. The typical bookstore might have four or five titles related to leadership. But there would be an entire section devoted to management. Peter Drucker was in his heyday. MBA programs were sprouting up everywhere. And management was the topic du jour.

Then, in the 1990s, roughly with the publishing of *In Search of Excellence*, attention began turning to leadership. Within a matter of years the "in thing" was to be known as leader.

And corporations were quick to oblige. Overnight management teams were rechristened as "leadership teams." The phrase "upper management" was heard less and less. Instead, the upper echelon of the company was referred to as "corporate leadership."

A Change in Name Only

Yet, while names were changed, functions did not. Leadership teams continued to do the same things that they had done as management teams. Performance reviews and promotions of so-called "leaders" were based on the same criteria which had been used when they were known as managers.

After two decades of this trend, I deal increasingly with men and women who are high on the corporate ladder and who consider themselves leaders, because they have been called leaders for years. But when I explore their role and outlook at any depth, I discover that they are in fact functioning as managers. They have lost a clear distinction between leadership and management.

To help them realize that leadership and management are distinctly different activities, I use a simple illustration. I point out that we speak of managing people and of leading people. We also speak of managing budgets, managing inventories, and managing

expectations. But we would never speak of *leading* a budget or an inventory or a set of expectations.

The very syntax of our language thus underscores that leadership and management, while closely related, are decidedly different functions. Both are essential. One is not necessarily better than the other. They both make their own unique contribution to organizational well-being and success.

I compare them to the two pedals on a bicycle. We need both for the bike to run smoothly. Is it possible to ride a bicycle with only one pedal? Of course. But it's not particularly efficient.

When riding a bicycle, moreover, no one pedal dominates the action all the time. Sometimes the left pedal is carrying the weight, sometimes the right. So it is with management and leadership. There are times in the history of a business or organization when leadership needs to be at the fore, other times when management needs to be at the fore.

Knowing Which Hat You're Wearing

Since this newsletter is dedicated to leadership, I should emphasize that **great leadership always has a strong element of management associated with it**. With great regularity leaders must take off their leadership hat and put on a management hat. The key, then, is to know when you are wearing which hat.

I've therefore developed a chart that I use in coaching and training to delineate between the leadership function and the management function. Admittedly, the elements of this chart are broad generalizations. But they are helpful generalizations in painting the contrast between being a leader and being a manager. Let me share this chart with you.

	Management	Leadership
Primary Focus	Immediate and Near-Term Issues	The Big Picture and Long-Term Issues
Primary Activity	Monitoring Processes and Resolving Problems	Holding Course on Vision, Values, and Strategy
Primary Perspective	Tactical	Strategic
Primary Style	Reactive	Proactive
Primary Concern	The Bottom Line	Long-Term Sustainability

Primary Priority	Survival of the Organization	Strength of the Team
Primary Risk Response	Mitigating Risk	Espousing Risk
Primary Clout	Positional Authority	Personal Influence

As I said above, these distinctions are generalizations. As a result, there are exceptions to the principles highlighted in the chart. For instance, an Army lieutenant leading a platoon into battle is functioning as a leader, but his actions are tactical, not strategic. That's why I prefaced each of the categories with the word "Primary." Conversely, there are times when good managers must get out of their tactical mindset and think strategically.

But these exceptions do not invalidate the general rule of thumb that the primary perspective of managers is tactical, the primary perspective of leaders is strategic.

I have clients who keep a copy of this chart near at hand to remind them of the differences between their leadership function and their management function. It helps them be clear as to which hat they are wearing at a given moment and to wear that hat more effectively.

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