

How to be a boss: leading with confidence

What differentiates a manager from a leader? According to business guru, Peter Drucker "management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things." This article explores how you can make the transition from a good manager to an effective leader.

What comes to mind when you consider the nature of leadership? Perhaps it is someone with the ability to get followers. Maybe you think leadership to be the single-minded pursuit of an end goal? Leadership isn't just about vision, planning and effective execution. It is also about engaging others. This requires empathy, effective communication, plus the ability to motivate and encourage. Authentic leadership can, therefore, be said to be the art of motivating people to work together in the pursuit of a common goal. In contrast, management is the ability to organise resources and assign tasks in such a way as to achieve the defined goal.

Learning to lead

Observing leaders in action is an excellent way of learning how to become one yourself. If you don't have any immediate role models, then look at TED talks on leadership such as Simon Sinek's simple but powerful model for effective leadership, starting with the question: "Why?" You might read about the leadership styles of people like Nelson Mandela, Steve Job or Oprah Winfrey. Also, why not think about those in your community who exhibit outstanding leadership skills. Consider their attitude, behaviour and actions. What does it tell you about their values? Which resonate with you? How might you bring more of this approach to your life?

"If your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, then, you are an excellent leader", Dolly Parton, entertainment legend, businesswoman and humanitarian.

Leadership is a mindset, not a job title

Arguably one of the most important skills any leader needs is to be able to think strategically.

Taking a strategic approach means having a vision of where you want to be and working to achieve that. The best strategic thinkers focus on the vital few issues that drive their vision forward to reality. Practice this leadership trait by pausing before you dive into something significant. Ask yourself - does this take me closer to where I want to be? Now you can make conscious choices about how you spend your time, energy and resources.

Six Leadership Styles

Next is to gain an appreciation of the different leadership styles available and map where you sit today. Business psychologist Daniel Goleman defined Six Leadership Styles uncovered among the executives he studied. These are:

1. The **commanding leader** demands compliance. If this style can be summed up in one phrase, it would be "Do what I tell you."
2. The **visionary leader** mobilises the team toward a shared vision and focuses on end goals, leaving the means up to everyone. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be "Come with me."
3. The **affiliative leader** works to create emotional connections that create a sense of bonding and belonging to the organisation. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be "People come first."
4. The **democratic leader** builds consensus through participation. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be "What do you think?"
5. The **pacesetter leader** expects and models excellence and self-direction. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be "Do as I do, now."
6. The **coaching leader** focuses on developing the potential in people. If this style were summed up in one phrase, it would be "What are the options?"

Working with Emotional Intelligence

Goleman observed that each of the six leadership styles comes from the use of Emotional Intelligence; this involves being mindful as to which method might be appropriate and under

what circumstances. If you wish to become an effective leader, you need to understand what all of this means for you. It helps if you operate from a clear set of values that are important to you as these will guide your actions. If you are unsure, then begin by understanding your strengths and the way you use them.

Here's a simple process that you might like to try: think back to a time when you successfully overcame a challenge. What motivated you to push on? How did you go about this? Which personal resources did you tap? Make a list of your answers. Test your beliefs by asking for feedback from people who know you well. What do they think is your leadership style, and how well does it work? Armed with this information, you will help you develop deeper connections to the values and preferences that motivate and drive you.

Developing a flexible leadership style

Now consider each of the six leadership styles. Which is closest to your 'go-to' approach? Which ones do you rarely use? Most people tend toward one leadership style more than another. However, one strategy doesn't fit all scenarios. Some circumstances, such as in a crisis, may require a firm top-down approach. Other situations, such as generating ideas, will benefit from a coaching approach that encourages individuals to work things out for themselves.

Learning how to flex your leadership style is vital, and this takes effort and practice. The rewards are great, so it is worth persevering. The people who report to you likely perform better if you develop a wide range of styles and apply these mindfully. Likewise, by understanding the preferred leadership style of your superiors, you can adjust your response and encourage them to flex their approach to improve their management of you.

Managing the transition from team member to boss

Being promoted to a leadership role can bring challenges. Relationships need adjusting and boundaries clarified. Key to this is open two-way communication with team members. In practice, this means valuing the opinion of team members and treating people fairly and with consideration.

"What you do has a far greater impact than what you say", best-selling author, successful businessman and keynote speaker, Stephen Covey.

Common pitfalls for leaders and how can you avoid them

Many organisations suffer from strategic initiative fatigue - the leaders may brim with bright ideas, but over time the team can become jaded if none come to fruition. Effective leaders avoid this by ensuring every discussion about a new strategic initiative concludes by asking incisive questions such as:

1. Who will devote time to getting this done?
2. What are we prepared not to do to invest in this initiative?
3. What value will this initiative add to the overall goal?

If these questions are unanswered, then the leader will be brave enough to know that the initiative should not proceed in the present form.

Dealing with emotional wobbles

Leadership can be lonely. Sometimes the pressure of expectation can overwhelm, especially when times get tough. That is when self-doubt creeps in, and you wonder if you are up to the job. If this happens, try gently challenge this view. You can do this by asking yourself the following three questions:

1. How do I know for sure that I can't do this?
2. What other ways are there of looking at this?
3. If there was a way of doing this, do I want to find it?

These questions will help you reframe your thinking into something more useful.

It also helps to create a network of support with seasoned leaders who you respect. Can one or more of these people mentor you? You can also look to the great leaders for inspiration. Take

Michelle Obama or Richard Branson, for example. Both have risen to become exceptional leaders, yet they had their struggles too.

Leaders don't have all the answers

The best leader surrounds themselves with capable people and is open to their ideas. Add to this the practice of self-compassion, which is an essential life skill. Start by acknowledging that all your feelings are natural, but some are more helpful than others. Be gentle as you dispute the direction that self-doubt is leading you. Ask yourself, what's the evidence? This question can help you gain a sense of perspective. It encourages a growth mindset which says no one is perfect, but we can all work to improve.

Remember, nobody comes into this world fully formed as a natural leader. Even Alexander the Great studied to become a leader. You too can work towards being a better leader. An effective leader creates a sense of purpose by inspiring others with a compelling vision of a better future. Of equal import is the willingness and capability to show how to achieve the vision. Begin acting like a leader today, and you are a step closer to being acknowledged as one.

Author: Beverly Landais, Certified Executive Coach PCC ICF

connect@beverlylandais.co.uk

www.beverlylandais.co.uk

M: 07792 223756