

Leaping into leadership

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What differentiates a manager from a leader? According to business guru Peter Drucker “management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.” **Beverly Landais** explores how you can transition from being a 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. To achieve this requires empathy, effective communication and the ability to motivate and encourage. Leadership can be said to be the art of inspiring people to work together to pursue 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.

What does it mean to be a leader?

An effective leader is authentic and actively encourages others to realise their potential. They build trust by demonstrating humility, empathy and integrity in their dealings. They are committed to creating a legacy that will impact positively more than solely their immediate environment. They will be focused on doing the right things and committed to social responsibility while pursuing commercial success. Great leaders are also lifelong learners who are curious about the world and seek to

learn and develop continually. The best leaders are active listeners who seek feedback and input from others.

Learning to lead

Observing leaders in action is an excellent way of learning how to become one yourself. Take a look at TED talks on leadership, such as Simon Sinek's simple but powerful model for effective leadership, starting with “Why?” You might read about people's leadership styles like Nelson Mandela, Steve Jobs, or Oprah Winfrey.

Leadership comes in many guises. Look around those in your social and business circle - who exhibit outstanding leadership skills? Consider their attitude, behaviour and actions. What does it tell you about their values? Which resonates with you? How might you bring more of this approach to your life?

Managing the transition from team member to boss

Being promoted to a leadership role can bring challenges. Relationships need adjusting and boundaries clarified. The 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.

You may also feel the siren call to remain in your comfort zone as a technical expert. Whilst this is natural, be alert to the temptation of micromanagement by getting too involved in the tasks that team members should do. It can help to find a mentor in the business or elsewhere who can provide reassurance and a guiding hand to help you succeed in a new leadership role.

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. Practise this leadership trait by pausing before you dive into something significant. Does this take me closer to where I want to be? Now you can make conscious choices about spending your time, energy and resources.

Six leadership styles

Next is to appreciate 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. This style can be summed up in one phrase, “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. This mode of leadership involves an invitation to “Come with me.”
3. The affiliative leader works to create emotional connections that make sense of bonding and belonging to the organisation. Such leaders often talk about putting “people come first.”
4. The democratic leader builds consensus through participation. You will recognise this style if your boss habitually asks, “What do you think?”
5. The pacesetter leader expects and models excellence and self-direction. As the name implies, this leadership model is all about hurrying up and “Do as I do, now.”
6. The coaching leader focuses on developing the potential in people. Such a leader will encourage by asking, “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 this means. It helps if you operate from a clear set of important values to you, as these will guide your actions. If you are unsure, begin by understanding your strengths and how you use them.

Here's a straightforward process you might like to try.

Think back to 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. Evaluate 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 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 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.

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 to gently challenge this view. You can do this by asking yourself the following three questions:

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

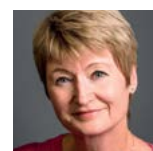
These questions will help you reframe your thinking into something more useful.

Leaders don't have all the answers

The best leaders surround themselves with capable people and are open to their ideas. Add to this the practice of self-compassion, 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.



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