Top Tips

Leadership

Is it in the job title?

Very often we hear the words 'leader' and 'manager' used as if they were the same. This can be further complicated by a structure that can have a Team Leader reporting to a Manager who reports to another Manager who eventually reports in to the Leader or 'Head of' the function. So if seniority doesn't give the answer, we can see that it's more about what the person does and how they do it.

So what is leadership?

Leadership is the ability to establish a direction for a team, department, or business, and then to motivate people to move the business in that direction. It is more than a management or operating style. It can be seen in the ability to deliver results on target, consistently over a period of time.

Some differences

There are many differences between a leader and a manager, and no two people are likely to agree precisely what they are. Try thinking of some great leaders:

Political

Military   _____

Business   _____

Sport   _____

_____

What do these people have or do that others don't? You will probably have included 'personality' or 'charisma' in your descriptions. Here are some more thoughts:

A leader…	A manager…
• Looks far ahead for the horizon	• Looks ahead for the next step
• Looks for long-term direction in the future	• Looks for immediate answers in the here and now
• Concentrates on big picture and 'helicopter view'	• Concentrates on detail
• Looks at what the market or the competition could do	• Looks at what has already happened
• Thinks strategically	• Thinks tactically
• Asks 'what' and 'why'	• Asks 'how' and 'when'
• Inspires people	• Controls the task
• Empowers their team	• Delegates jobs
• Aligns people with the organisation's vision	• Establishes detailed plans, allocates resources
• Motivates people to achieve in their own way	• Provides policies, systems, procedures and controls
• Works to produce change and turn long-term vision into reality	• Works to maintain order and achieve short-term targets

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Leadership in business

Although a leader is often found to be at the top of a business, that does not mean that a manager cannot be a leader as well. Leadership is not only about what you do, it's also about how you do it. It is not just about personality and charisma, although these can help, but about adopting and developing a whole set of skills and behaviours.

Characteristics of a leader

A successful leader will:
- Build a team or teams which will achieve the tasks
- Develop their people
- Empower and motivate their teams
- Reward individual's achievements
- Leave detail to others; they need not be a technical expert
- Be creative
- Think strategically
- Manage change successfully
- Be proactive – make things happen
- Manage flexibly
- React decisively
- Be prepared to reveal their own weaknesses without feeling vulnerable
- Be sensitive to people by reading the data between the lines
- Be toughly empathetic, give people what they need not what they want
- Reveal differences to stand out and set them apart from the team

You can probably think of many more.

Types of leader

As you may have discovered when you were thinking about great leaders, there is no 'one size fits all' definition. A person may show all the qualities listed above, but still not be a true leader. One study has grouped leadership styles under three pairs of styles:

The **Charismatic** leader achieves by force of personality, often inborn, although this can be learned.

The **Expert** leader relies on being the best in his/her chosen area, to gain respect from his teams

The **Democratic** leader encourages his/her team/s to involve themselves fully in decision-making, and will persuade rather than control.

The **Autocratic** leader uses power to achieve results, usually arising from their rank or position.

The **Visionary** leader provides a picture of the future and uses it to inspire his/her people.

The **Controlling** leader is more concerned with ensuring compliance to the system.

The study went on to conclude that the first (left hand) style in each pair was usually the most successful; although the second style did achieve results it was usually at the expense of team morale. This is hardly surprising, as a leader achieves the task through the people.

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Some key aspects of leadership

A leader needs a vision. He or she is able to figure out what the world they want to create looks like, and to paint a mental picture of it for others to use. It is not just an objective, goal, or idea, but a tangible sense of how things could be.

A leader can share and sell this vision to others. Other people then share the commitment to the vision, and become involved in making it happen, as though it were their own. Leaders inspire confidence in their vision, and the team believes that their contribution will be recognised and rewarded. In doing this, progress towards achieving the vision is created and maintained.

Leaders know when to use the system and when to challenge. They do not waste time trying to overturn the system for the sake of it, but will harness the system to deliver their vision, as they understand how the system works and can be made to work. However, when necessary they will challenge the system and make changes as needed. They know when to build bridges and when to overturn them, which makes them seem as if they can see into the future.

Leaders show intuition, courage, integrity, and humility. They use the facts combined with instinct to make balanced and meaningful decisions. They will think analytically, but not fall victim to 'analysis paralysis', neither will they make a snap decision without having thought it through. They have strong personal values, and will demonstrate strong humanity and people skills when needed. Leaders will listen to the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of their team and others, and use these to sustain high performance.

What leadership is not

- Sitting in a meeting giving instructions louder than anyone else
- Making impulsive decisions in an attempt to appear charismatic
- Achieving consensus all the time
- Perpetuating existing culture and systems for the sake of it
- A one-shot achievement, unsustainable or costly
- Doing it all by themselves or taking all the credit

For related topics see Top Tips:
- ➔ **Change Management**
- ➔ **Communication**
- ➔ **Strategic Thinking**