

From Manager to Leader

You can cross the great divide.



by Miffy Ozeroff and Sally Hull

FINALLY, YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO TAKE that next step up to a leadership opportunity. You're already a fantastic manager, and now you're ready for more. You send in your resume. It's full of accomplishments, skills, and experience supervising global teams, project planning, and implementations. You're perfect for the job!

Or, so you thought. You don't even hear back from them. What happened? What did you miss? What did they miss about you? You later find out that you simply didn't have the leadership attributes they were looking for. Now, you're frustrated. You know you're capable of the job. Why didn't they see that? How can you communicate your leadership abilities more clearly?

Maybe for you it wasn't a new job. Maybe it was a new project that you wanted to lead. Perhaps you've been overlooked within your own company for advancement and leadership. Many professionals struggle with the transition from management to leadership. They think they have the skills and experience, but they haven't changed the perception of others. They haven't taken the next step to set themselves apart.

There are simple things you can do today to more clearly demonstrate your leadership abilities and distinguish yourself. Whether attending a meeting or revising your resume, you can begin to make that transition in the minds of others. But first, you have to be clear in your own mind about what makes a leader and whether or not you really want to embark on that journey.

Leader vs. Manager

What does make a leader? Is it certain behaviors? Is it style? Is it character? What do leaders do that makes people perceive them as leaders?

To answer these questions, let's look first at what makes a good manager. We've all had poor managers, so we know a good one right away. It's someone who inspires us, who cares about what we do and how we do it. It's someone everyone wants to work for—the person who makes the group work as a team, and that team exceeds all expectations. If you're lucky enough to be on that team, coming to work is fun and challenging. You work hard, but you get results.

So, isn't a manager also a leader? Are these not leadership skills? What would keep a great manager from being seen as a potential leader?

Leaders have many of the traits of a great manager. They inspire. They motivate. However, leaders take it all a step further. Leaders are enthusiastic, optimistic, and articulate when talking about plans, hopes, and successes. Their enthusiasm energizes and attracts others. It brings visions to life. Leaders sincerely believe in what they are saying, and they demonstrate their personal convictions through their behavior. This gives them the confidence to make unpopular judgment calls and to sell ideas that contradict the status quo. It's what enables them to inspire others to follow them down a difficult road while keeping up the group's morale. Leadership is not just a bigger paycheck or a higher position. It's a different perspective.

Do you have what it takes? Look inside yourself and ask yourself: What is my personal agenda? What do I want to prove? What mission in life obsesses me? What is my burning passion? The answers will help you decide if leadership is a path you want to take.

Crossing the Divide

Once you commit to the journey, communicate your passion to others. If you're missing out on leadership opportunities simply because people don't think of you as leadership material,

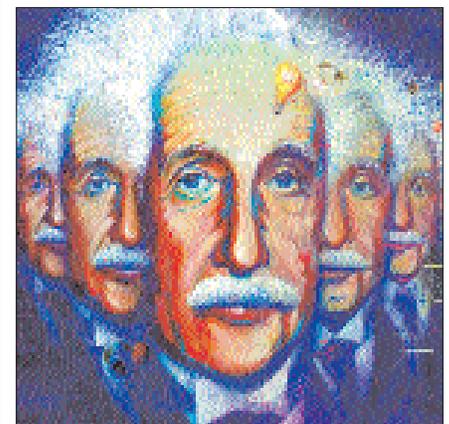
examine your behaviors and shift them to more clearly demonstrate your leadership capabilities. We are judged by what we do and say. Those judgments cause others to conclude whether we are just great managers or great managers with the potential for leadership.

Let's look at three simple scenarios that illustrate how your behavior influences peoples' perception.

- **In a meeting.** For most professionals, meetings are a common occurrence. Sometimes we forget that our behavior in meetings plays a significant role in how we are perceived by those who have the potential to advance us. Which behaviors represent your typical behavior?

Let's assume that you meet with top management once a month and that through your body language and comments, you make it clear that you view their presentations negatively. You sit with your arms crossed. You fail to offer constructive remarks. You leave the meeting complaining about how things were handled. What do you think management is concluding about you? Such behavior is no way to win support. You are not seen as a team player or as a positive addition to the larger group. In fact, you're seen as a drain on the team.

But suppose you come to the meeting prepared. You present your remarks. You answer questions. You point out any negative issues. You offer solutions that benefit your team. Once you are done with your part of the meeting, you sit quietly and let the meeting move on. What conclusions is top management drawing now? Yes, their view of you has improved. Now you appear well informed—someone who is looking out for their team. You may be seen as a great manager, but still not as a leader? What's missing?



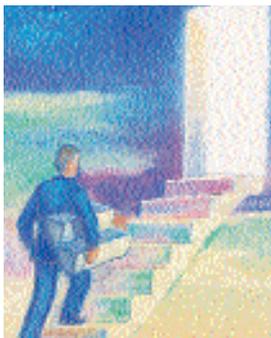
Now, suppose that you look and act interested as the meeting progresses. Instead of raising negative issues, you ask for clarification. You ask permission to play devil's advocate before talking about issues you see as negative. You put the discussion in the broader, enterprise context. You ask how these issues will affect other groups outside of your own. Now what do you think management is concluding? Now you're demonstrating leadership behaviors. You are outwardly focused instead of inwardly focused. You see the larger picture and are concerned about how it will be impacted. Now you have that extra something that management is seeking.

• **In interactions.** What are some other ways you can demonstrate leadership potential? Start right now to distinguish yourself in your day-to-day interactions with people. These moments with people inside and outside your department are also fertile ground where judgments of you are formed. Are you demonstrating leadership behavior?

Think of how many people outside your department you know well enough to greet you in the hallways. Of that list of people, how many do you know well enough to pick up the phone and ask them to have lunch with you? Finally, of those people, how many have you actually called to have lunch with you?

These questions demonstrate another difference between a manager and a leader. A manager will know how to call to get information or data, but doesn't spend time building the critical relationships that cross the invisible boundaries between departments. A leader, however, knows that success requires the cooperation of many people in different parts of the company. A leader knows that he or she needs to understand those people—their

objectives, resources, concerns, priorities, and constraints. Such understanding comes from reaching out to others and



spending casual, but valuable, time with them. When you focus only on your group or department, you will likely forget the larger priorities and goals of

the company. This view is too narrow and will obstruct you from leadership positions. However, if you choose to reach out to others, your leadership attributes will become more apparent.

• **In your language.** Sometimes we hold ourselves back just through the words we use. If you want to demonstrate your leadership abilities and distinguish yourself for that new position or that new project, examine the words you use. Take a look at that resume you submitted and see if you sound like a leader. The use of leader-like language casts you in a different light. Whether you get the job or not, you will be seen as someone who is committed to developing your leadership skills.

We may have the greatest skills and still not be perceived by others as the person we think we are. By focusing on our behaviors and our words, we can begin to close the gap between the perception of where we are and who we are.

Look outside your current job and start taking leader-like steps. Try taking on a special project as the project lead rather than a member of the team. Ask to plan and coordinate a large meeting. If your department has regular presentations to other departments, volunteer to be a presenter. Start an informal discussion group on topics of interest. If you feel you can't express yourself adequately, sign up for a communication skills class. Know how to summarize, paraphrase, express personal feelings, admit mistakes, ask for clarification, solicit different views, and respond non-defensively. These skills will give you the flexibility to respond to different situations effectively. By taking these actions, you will create the initial foundation for becoming a leader.

But don't stop there! Share your passion for leading with your manager, your peers, and your staff. Even if you don't get that next job or project, you are starting to think and act as a leader. Your desire to challenge yourself and to look at opportunities will lead you to bigger and better things. To be a leader, live it every day in everything you do, and you will make a difference in your life and the lives of others. **EE**

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ACTION: *Position yourself on the other side of the great divide.*