

Balance **management** skills with **leadership**





by Bob Hughes,

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Which are more important, management or leadership skills? The answer is: successful businesspeople need both. But which you should make most use of depends on circumstances and your role.

Management is about how resources are managed to achieve goals. Leadership is about taking ownership and responsibility. Leaders set direction and communicate goals. They inspire and motivate people to achieve.

Combined, these have greater power and real impact than each alone: for the team and for the organisation.

Everyone can be a better leader and manager – and there are four key elements to achieving this (see **next page, top right**).

Attitude means “dropping the ego”. Leadership isn't about your hierarchy, position, or status. It's about success. And it's about enabling your team members to be successful, too. We can grow the next generation of loyal managers and leaders as a result, sometimes referred to as succession planning.

Delegation is a key way to involve others. People learn from new challenges and your life is a lot easier when you let go of needing to be the one alone who has all the answers. When you develop people well, you can trust team members to solve problems.

Inspiration is very much a leadership skill. And it is vital if we are going to both motivate ourselves and others.

And all three above should lead to successful actions: what we do and how we do it better.

To illustrate why it is so important to have both managerial and leadership skill-sets, here are the top-five challenges businesses face most often and how each skill-set can be used to solve these.

1 Poor performance by an individual
Solving poor performance is a classic example of why businesspeople need to develop both their leadership and management skills.

Although this is a management issue, its solution often lies more in the leadership skill-set. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking there is something wrong with the person when the real problem is there is something wrong with the task they are being asked to perform. A management response might be to put the person into the “poor-performance process”, setting and monitoring weekly targets. One consequence of this is that we will always be looking for failure and will miss the good points.

A leader, however, will check both their and the staff member’s understanding of the situation to ensure that the staff member really does have the skills needed to deliver the required performance or understands how to deliver it in the right way.

A good leader will also look at the wider factors. Has this person always delivered in this way? Has something changed recently? Addressing those underlying factors is a key leadership tool.

The qualities a good leader would use in this situation are listening and asking questions. They would check for understanding by asking, *and listening to*, what the staff member has to say. If we genuinely ask questions from a basis of understanding, and then demonstrate belief in the staff member’s willingness to improve, we can build trust and peoples’ confidence in their own abilities.

2 Poor performance across the team

If the team is not working well together and performance has suffered across the whole team, leadership skills are more likely to provide the solution.

A manager would set and monitor targets more tightly. They might take the team out for a team-building event, like go-carting, thinking that is the way to improve team morale: getting them to bond at a single “rewarding” event. There is nothing wrong with regular social events – but one person’s preferred activity may not be another’s.

Leading a team is about understanding each individual as well as the team dynamic. A leader works to understand everyone’s skills strengths and motivations – as individuals and as a team. They create an inspiring vision that the team can get behind. Crucially, they communicate why that vision is important.

3 Solving a silo mentality

When people work in silos and do not communicate well the risk is they will neither understand nor appreciate the importance of the bigger picture.

A manager would believe that they just have to communicate *more* – setting out rules or processes more clearly, by notes and emails, or by holding “cascade briefings” further to clarify processes and tell people what to do.

A leader would demonstrate the importance of *better* communication by listening more and encouraging more interaction within and between teams. Asking open questions and really listening to the answers is vital to good communications. It is also important to remember that communications are more than two-way in today’s social-media environment.

4 High-performer conundrum

At first glance, it might seem to be good to have one high-performing individual within a team but this can, sometimes, be disruptive.

A manager would reward and encourage them because of their contribution. They may see this person as the “hero” in the team rather than realising that they are the source of disruption and discontent. Even if they do recognise this, the manager might conclude that the high-performance outweighs the disruption.

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A leader would recognise the poor impact on the wider team and consider some radical options. The first is to support the high performer to improve their social skills, especially their emotional intelligence. Improved social skills enable people to improve their working relationships with others.

The good leader is also willing to consider the possibility of moving that person on, either within or outside their organisation – for the overall benefit of the whole team.

5 Unreasonable demands from “the top”

The problem of unreasonable demands from “the top” is more likely to be encountered within salaried NHS dentistry, academia, or larger dental practices. But practices also have mini-teams (dentist/nurse partnerships) or

Four key elements

- Attitude: our flexibility, how we think, and how we gather information
- Relationships: how we involve others
- Inspiration: how we motivate ourselves and others
- Actions: what we do and how we improve our activities

the group that runs the reception, for example, both of which have a leader and senior management above them.

In response, a typical manager either complies by setting tighter targets or responds by what is called “shroud waving”. Shroud waving is a way of pointing out the worst-case scenario in dire terms to secure more resources. The effects of such scenarios may be valid but the likelihood of them happening is often low. Shroud waving is the workplace equivalent of emotional blackmail.

A leader would tap into the knowledge of the team to look for radical alternatives to the way they currently work so they can deliver what is being “demanded”. They would offer alternatives, explain any constraints, and say what is possible given the situation. When all options have been explored, if the demands genuinely are “unreasonable”, the leader should show resilience in their communications with senior management.

It is down to behavioural misattribution

At the heart of the leadership versus management debate is a fundamental behavioural misattribution. When something goes wrong, the manager believes someone is to blame. There is the assumption that people have personality flaws that need fixing. Leaders, however, understand that we are more often than not subject to particular circumstances and that the environment in which we work has an impact.

Most people come to work with the intention of doing a good job. Obstacles that threaten this arise because of circumstances – not human frailty. And it is the job of the good manager and leader to clear those obstacles out of their team members’ paths so the team – and the organisation – can succeed. ♦