

Leaders Create a Sense of Urgency about the Vision.

“Managers do things right. Leaders do the right thing.”

“Management is about efficiency. Leadership is about effectiveness.”

“We lead people. We manage things.”

These are often-quoted sayings that have been attributed to so many people in the literature it is hard to know who said them first.

That last quote is often attributed to Ross Perot. It reflects an idea shared by many CEOs, senior managers and leaders in corporate America. It is also pervasive among my students when they first enroll in our graduate leadership program.

The problem with suggesting that we "manage things" and "lead people" is that both leadership and management are about both the task and the relationship. Without a task, leadership is nothing more than a social club. It lacks a goal, a vision or a mission (which is the task of leadership). Without relationships, managers would not have anyone to assign tasks.

John Kotter does the best job of describing the differences between Leadership and Management on the task side. He describes the task of Leadership as change, vision and strategic goals. He explains that the task of Management involves structure, implementation and day-to-day operations.

Joseph Rost explains best the differences between Leadership and Management on the relationship side. He suggests that Leadership is a non-coercive,

interactive, voluntary process of influencing people toward a common goal. It is multi-directional because leaders influence and are influenced by their followers. Management is by definition a position and it relies on an authority relationship.

When organizational leaders state that they want their people “to lead, not manage”, I believe they are referring to the distinctions made by Rost on the relationship side, not Kotter on the task side of these differences. Obviously, organizations need the tasks of Leadership performed effectively and the tasks of Management done efficiently.

If we manage people like they are "subordinates", we will get "sub-ordinary" performance. If we lead people to become intrinsically motivated followers, we get extraordinary results. The research shows that transformational leaders inspire people to go “above and beyond” (Bernard Bass).

Clearly, organizational leaders want their people "to lead, not manage". They want the differences that Leadership inspires on the relationship side (Joseph Rost), i.e. they want their people to get the extraordinary results that come with an influence vs. an authority relationship, rather than the sub-ordinary results we get when we treat people like "subordinates".

Senior leaders are not suggesting they want to reduce the efficient Management that is described by Kotter on the task side of these differences. Rost and Kotter both make the case that Leadership and Management are both necessary for organizational life, but they are referring to the differences on the task side (administrative vs strategic) more so than the relationship side (authority vs influence).

This semantic difference is very important to understand. Generally speaking, when we hear senior officials say they want people "to lead, not manage", they are not suggesting that we reduce the important role of Management on the task

side of these differences (Kotter). They are addressing the need to maximize the "above the beyond" results that we get when we use voluntary, interactive influence (Rost) rather than just ordering people around.

One impediment to leading instead of managing in many organizations is that we keep our people so busy with the tasks of Management (as defined by Kotter), i.e. the day-to-day, operational tasks of Management, that they have precious little time for the tasks of Leadership, i.e. the more strategic, important but not necessarily urgent, work of Leadership, including delegation and leadership mentoring (which is important but not urgent).

The key to finding time for Leadership is to figure out how to eliminate some of the work that is urgent and not important (much of this can be Management) in order to prioritize the duties that are important but not necessarily urgent (much of this can be Leadership).

Leaders create a sense of urgency about what is important. Visioning and strategic planning is perhaps the best example of this. It is easy to put off strategy sessions for weeks, months or years because we are too busy. We want to go fast. We want to get things done now. Ironically, without a sense of vision, organizations move more slowly.

Consider a person driving 80 miles per hour through the mountains of Colorado. And they run into a thick fog. The first thing you do when you can't see where you are going is you slow down.

Counter-intuitively, taking the time to create a vision, especially a shared vision, offers the opportunity to go faster because we can see where we are going. Attached here are some samples of vision statements that emerged out of strategic planning sessions.

Generally, the vision statement is the last step in strategic planning. The key question to ask yourself is: "If we are successful in implementing this strategic plan, how will the world be different?" The answer to this question, stated simply, is your vision statement.