

# There's A Difference Between a Leader and a Boss

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## **There's A Difference Between a Leader and a Boss.**

While the terms “boss” and “leader” are interchangeable, there's clearly a difference between someone who leads an organization and someone bosses. People get the difference, as subtle as it may be. There's a photo of an Egyptian hieroglyphic that is often circulated on the internet. In one version, a man sits on a sled, and people pull him. It's clear he is the boss. In a picture that's very similar, the man who was sitting on the sled helps pull it. That person is labeled as a leader. The difference between the two versions of the picture is clear. In one version, the person is simply benefitting from the work of others. In the second version, the leader is helping complete the project.

The best leaders are part of the team. Their role is different, but they're getting things done for the overall good of the project and the organization. We want to distinguish when we're talking to others and when we're interacting with others that what we're doing is leading, and we're helping the overall mission. We're not just using others for our benefit, or so that we don't have to do work. True leaders work. They provide value to the organization. But because their role is different, they may be providing value in a different way than those who are reporting to them. Understanding this subtle distinction is important.

### **2A. Show, Don't Tell.**

One of the things leaders should do is make certain employees understand the importance of their roles. Don't simply tell employees,

"You get this done, this is your job." In well-functioning organizations where leaders are more than just bosses pushing people around, everyone understands the roles and overall mission. You want to show the employees how the big picture fits together and how every player is headed downfield to get to the goal, rather than just telling them to get something done and ordering them around.

## **2B. Be A Team, Not A Dictatorship.**

In all communications, you want to talk about the team and how the team fits together. You don't simply want to send directives down from high and expect everyone to jump. That can be viewed as being bossy or pushy. But when everyone understands that it's a team and there are shared objectives, then everyone knows they're part of the process. They understand their different roles contribute in different ways, and that each role must be filled for the larger overall mission to be accomplished.

## **2C. Serve Others.**

All the actions and activities within the organization should be to service others. This is not to say that your role as a boss or a leader is to service those who work for you. Your job is to service the organization, your supervisors, and ultimately the mission of the company. Your company has clients or customers who need to be serviced, and the teams within the company are all aligned to complete the goals for the customers. When you interface with your employees and work with them, the vision should not be self-serving. It's not a look at whether the division of labor is fair and equitable

between employee and supervisor – it's a look at whether the team is aligned for the customers.

Always keep an outward focus on what's being accomplished by the tasks at hand, and make sure it's clear that it's not about the interpersonal relationship between the supervisor and the employee. It's about meeting and servicing others and taking roles on that lead to the accomplishment of servicing others.

## **2D. Don't Power-Play.**

One of the keys to being viewed as being a leader and not a boss is to make sure that you don't overplay your power. In most organizations, a boss or a leader has more authority and autonomy than those who report to the boss or leader. It is inherent in the supervisory relationship that the supervisor usually can hire, fire, discipline, evaluate, assign roles and determine the fate of employees. That's a lot of power. One of the keys to being viewed as a leader is to make sure your employees understand that what you do isn't a power play, but rather a utilization of the tools that are inherent in your function to serve the organization's objectives.

Often, how others view your use of power is based on whether your decisions appear to be applied arbitrarily, unequally or unfairly. You want to be very clear in your management objectives and how you're utilizing your power for the greater good of the organization.

## **2E. Lead, Don't Manage.**

There's another technical but subtle distinction between being a leader and being a manager. A manager is given a process to perform.

It is the manager's job to control the inputs and to make sure that a particular output is completed. This is really about making sure that processes are followed, and things are completed as directed. While the organization needs that, be sure you don't push others to do things a certain way without having a give-and-take or allowing for adjustments.

This often means leaders paint with a broader brush about what we're trying to do and where we're trying to go. They trust in the ability of the employees to get the tasks completed correctly with their personal touch. Leaders may often be surprised to learn employees have skills and abilities that weren't expected. This is one of the great benefits of leading versus managing. When the employees are given the freedom and ability to do things in a way that is good for them, often the employee thinks of things that the higher management wouldn't have considered. You want to be setting objectives and goals and understanding what the ultimate deliverable of the employee is, and not focus as much on the tasks at hand.

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