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Barry Johnson & Mandy Geal

From manager to leader in three not very easy steps

by Barry Johnson & Mandy Geal, Learning Partners Ltd.

Why do we now need leaders more than ever?

Most companies were designed for the industrial age of the past century. Capital was the scarce resource, interaction costs were high, and hierarchical authority and vertically integrated structures were the keys to efficient operation. Today superior performance flows from a very different source of wealth creation - people power. The organisation must mobilise the power of the underutilised talents, knowledge, and skills of self-directed employees to create sources of significant new wealth at relatively low risk. So the creation of wealth calls for a new focus: maximising returns on people. And that requires managers to be leaders.

Manager as a Leader

Much confusion arises by the assumption that the words manager and leader are interchangeable. A manager may be a leader. Managers are appointed. Followers select leaders. A leader has followers of their own volition. Managers select the people who are in their department. Many leaders are not managers and may only lead in highly specific situations.

So the question arises what is it that managers who are leaders do?

The answer to that question opens up all sorts of avenues. Let's keep this simple; managers who are leaders are first and foremost good managers. That is they carry out the managerial functions in an exemplary manner. They lead in the specific situation of getting work done in the organisational environment in which the manager and his or her staff are employed and perhaps in no other situation.

Effective managers who are leaders in modern industry are effective by:

- Giving people good information
- Treating people as adults
- Supporting their decisions.

Giving People Good Information

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Good information seems to fall into four categories:

1. about company – its goals and successes
2. about job, role and goals, and this includes training
3. about what is expected of them
4. about what they have done (feedback).

The last two items are the ones that are most associated with a leader. The keys then are that people know what is expected of them, that is both in required outputs and how their performance will be assessed, and they know how they are doing.

Managers who are leaders are as much or more concerned how goals are achieved as achieving the goals themselves and they inspire in their followers the values that pervade the operations and this leads to a clear positive departmental culture. In short 'people want to work here'.

Managers who are leaders give feedback. When they are giving feedback it is underpinned by the profound understanding that people learn how to do things from success. I will repeat that. People learn from success. Do people learn from mistakes and failure? The answer is yes. They learn what not to do so they know they must do something different, but not what that elusive something different is.

One aside on feedback: a consistent finding from research into managers who are regarded as leaders is they seek feedback and the people in their care give them feedback.

Treat people as adults

How else would you treat a person in your care other than as an adult? Some managers who are definitely not leaders treat people as children or as 'tools'.

Treating a person as either a child or a 'tool' results in one of two types of behaviour:

1. **Compliance.** The person does what they are told. They are not committed to what they are doing. They will agree. They do not take initiatives and they do not innovate.
2. **Resentment.** They may not show this to the manager but they will share it with other people and negativity in the organisation will arise. You can hear it when you visit departments. People complain about 'they', the ubiquitous 'they'. The 'they' may be managers, 'they' may be other departments and 'they' may be other people in the department.

Support Their Decisions

As a manager why wouldn't you? You have made clear the job and role accountabilities, you have trained the person to do it, you have given them feedback on what they have done well and coached them to improve when required. You have treated them as adults and as adults they can make decisions so you can support the decisions they make. Some people call this empowerment.

Editorial content

If you have any comments or suggestions about The People Bulletin, please contact [Lawrence Naman](#)

Content compiled by Alister Barclay, Lawrence Naman, Graham Simons. Thanks also to Helen Helmer.

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Conclusion

We believe Managing is an art and like art it is a beautiful and thoughtful approach to producing creative activity from the people that you have in your care. For that:

Give People Good Information, Treat People As Adults and Support Their Decisions.

www.learningpartners.co.uk

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