



Moving From Manager to Leader

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It's time to work on YOU so sit back and listen to practical, actionable advice to accelerate your progress.

Making the leap from someone who effectively manages people to becoming a truly inspirational business leader is one of the most difficult career steps to take. However, if you want to advance in your career, you'll need to make that transition successfully.

Today, you'll learn how to shift from manager to leader. By the end of this session, you'll learn the real difference between a manager and a leader, how to adapt your management style to lead in different situations, and how to become a visionary thinker that inspires success in your organisation.

"Managers light a fire under people; leaders light a fire in people." Those are the words of Business Coach, Kathy Austin.

You have undoubtedly developed valuable skills in your management position, such as managing people, projects, budgets, and timelines. These skills focus on detail-oriented action points and tend to be centered around solving problems and delivering project outcomes. To move from manager to leader, you will need to widen your strategic outlook and build further upon your existing people management skills. This shift doesn't mean that the skills you have developed and used in the past are not useful, but it might be that they are not the skills you need to focus on for the next move into a leadership role.

As Career transition expert Michael Watkins puts it in his research published in Harvard Business Review [1]:

"They must learn to move from specialist to generalist.....they also need to transform themselves from bricklayers into organizational architects; from problem

solvers into agenda setters; and from warriors intent on beating the competition into diplomats who engage with a full range of stakeholders. Finally, leaders must move out from the wings and get used to living on center stage in the full spotlight.”

Making the transition from manager to leader is a process that requires training and commitment, but the final result is well worth the effort. Let's take a closer look at how to take your leadership to the next level.

Great leaders learn to delegate.

When managers progress to the position of business leader, they need to spend less energy on fixing problems and more time setting the agenda on which problems the company should look to solve.

A manager's primary role is to recruit, train, and manage people specialising in teams working on specific business functions. An enterprise leader's task, on the other hand, is to incorporate the collective expertise of those teams to address major organisational issues.

To do that, leaders have to let go of many of the minutiae of details and free their minds and time to focus on higher-level matters.

That involves delegating. Even if staying entirely involved in all elements of the business were possible, it would drastically limit your team's ability to expand their own skill sets and experience.

Leaders must surround themselves with talented people and trust them to execute business functions. Allowing your staff to take on different initiatives will free up time on your calendar for you to focus on higher-level activities that are more important.

Great leaders develop their employees' abilities and talents and form teams dedicated to attaining common objectives.

Strategic thinking and making decisions

Making strategic decisions to lead an organisation is far more complex than managers' decisions, which focus on more routine choices and judgments. Strategic decisions—such as entering a new market, releasing a new product, or acquiring another company—have far-reaching implications for the entire organisation and its future performance. Business strategists argue that what distinguishes a strategic decision is that it has two key characteristics: executives may actively affect future outcomes after the decision is made, and the success of the decision is judged by whether it gives you a competitive edge.

In his Harvard Business Review article, What Makes Strategic Decisions Different, professor of strategy and international business Phil Rosenzweig [2] says:

“Business executives aren’t like shoppers picking a product or investors choosing a stock, simply making a choice that leads to one outcome or another. By the way they lead and communicate, and through their ability to inspire and encourage, executives can influence outcomes. That’s the definition of “management.” Moreover, they are in charge of organizations that compete vigorously with others; doing better than rivals is vital. That’s where strategy comes in.”

Strategic decisions can also involve responding to significant shifts in technology, the economy, or consumer behaviour. Some practical techniques you can work on to improve strategic thinking and decision-making are:

Using an open-minded approach: People frequently approach a problem with a solution in mind, which is generally because this strategy has previously worked in similar situations. Keep in mind that past success does not guarantee future success.

Constantly Question: Ask good questions of yourself, of others, and of planned actions. That will help you find issues, discover more opportunities, develop better relationships, and improve your strategic decisions. As Constantinos Markides, Professor of Strategic Leadership at London Business School, puts it:

Designing a winning strategy is the art of asking questions, experimenting and then constantly renewing the thinking process by questioning the answers.

Comprehension: Strategic thinking requires you to view a situation from multiple perspectives and try and understand the choices you make, and their full impact to gain a greater understanding and make the best possible decision.

Working with and Inspiring others

“Time spent understanding people is never wasted.” That’s according to Duck Duck Go’s Engineering Director Cate Huston.

Leaders often become role models and influence the people who work in their organisation. The intensity of the attention this generates is something that leaders need to get used to and for which they must prepare themselves. People in the company will look to leaders for direction, motivation, and to set examples of appropriate behaviours and attitudes.

Great leaders are masters at inspiring others through their own passion and dedication. They don't solely appear to tell others what to do. As you progress from manager to leader, you will be able to convey your sense of purpose to your team. Employees who are genuinely motivated by inspirational leaders perform better. As Simon Sinek says in his book *Start With Why* [3]:

“WHY: Very few people or companies can clearly articulate WHY they do WHAT they do. When I say WHY, I don’t mean to make money—that’s a result. By WHY I mean what is your purpose, cause or belief? WHY does your company exist? WHY do you get out of bed every morning? And WHY should anyone care?”

Beyond inspiring others, being a leader involves much more in relationships and communication. Leaders must use diplomacy and are expected to manage relationships across the business. Strategic decisions affect different departments in different ways. For example, balancing the operations, sales, marketing, finance, and R&D departments requires excellent relationship and communication skills, plus the ability to work with other business leaders to understand competing issues within the organisation. Leaders will need to know how to make trade-offs and explain the rationale for decisions that impact others.

Beyond internal relationships, leaders will often need to manage relationships with external constituencies, including regulators, the media, investors, and NGOs.

Leaders need to develop and continually improve several key skills to shape both the internal and the external business environment to support strategic objectives. These include:

- Negotiation
- Persuasion
- Conflict management
- Alliance building
- Providing transparency

Good leaders also display strong emotional intelligence [4]; they understand their own emotions and biases and control the influence of emotions on their choices. Good EQ also lets them understand others and evaluate the talent on their teams. A study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* concluded a strong correlation between EQ and job performance.

Leaders can use their emotional intelligence to move into different management styles for different people and situations. Working on developing these skills and implementing them in your interactions with others can help to improve your ability as a communicator and increase your chances of success as you move from manager to leader.

Evaluation

We've explored some of the challenges managers face when transitioning into leadership. To become a leader, managers need to learn to delegate and not get too involved in day-to-day tasks and instead concentrate on long-term and overarching business strategies.

We've also discussed the skills that leaders need to develop to think strategically and make crucial decisions. In addition, we've looked at some of the communication skills leaders need to work on and develop to manage internal and external stakeholders and inspire employees within the organisation.

This week, we'd encourage you to think about your own 'why' questions. Why should your people feel motivated by you? Why should they trust you?

That's all for today. Thanks for listening.

[1] *How Managers Become Leaders*, Michael D. Watkins (2012)
<https://hbr.org/2012/06/how-managers-become-leaders>

[2] *What Makes Strategic Decisions Different*, Phil Rosenzweig (2013)
<https://hbr.org/search?term=phil%20rosenzweig>

[3] *Leader versus manager*, Simon Sinek (2019)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSUJwmPQEyg>

[4] *Emotional Intelligence Predicts Job Performance*, Sebastian Bailey (2015)
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/sebastianbailey/2015/03/05/emotional-intelligence-predicts-job-performance-the-7-traits-that-help-managers-relate/?sh=8242bf412402>