

O Leader, Where Art Thou?



Use these insights
to maximize your
leadership skills.

By Chris Keeshan

Nonprofit organizations require strong, effective leadership. But making the transition from manager to leader can be difficult, especially if role differences aren't understood.

While it's true that some people are born leaders, most leaders are self-taught. Understanding the differing roles of managers and leaders is vital to making the transition from effective manager to successful leader.

How Managers and Leaders Differ

Boston Philharmonic Orchestra Conductor Benjamin Zander once said, "Never doubt the capacity of the people you lead to accomplish whatever you dream for them." In *On Becoming a Leader*, Warren Bennis said, "The single defining quality of leaders is the capacity to create and realize a vision."

Foremost, leaders are dreamers and visionaries. But leaders are also motivators who marshal resources to move the organization toward the dream.¹

Traditionally, it has been assumed that managers were also leaders, but reality has proven that being a

manager doesn't equate to being a leader. What are some of the differences?

- **Managers establish systems, rules, and procedures** to help organizations run efficiently. **Leaders provide guidance, strategies, and inspiration** that move organizations in the right directions.

"Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things."

- **Managers are present-oriented**, concerned with current operations, costs, and performance. **Leaders share these concerns but are also future-oriented** — always positioning their organization to take advantage of emerging opportunities and adapting to change.

- **Managers optimize** existing resources. **Leaders create** new resources.

- **Managers influence** from their position in the organizational hierarchy. **Leaders can affect results** from anywhere in an organization.

People who serve on nonprofit

boards often wish to be viewed as leaders. In reality, most are better managers than leaders. Board members are often excellent managers, having years of experience with management functions like planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, and problem solving.²

Unfortunately, most people aren't good at being leaders and managers at the same time. The roles require different mindsets. Managers are concerned with getting things done — right here and now. Leaders set future direction and are always asking, "Where do we want to go?" Peter F. Drucker understood the difference between management and leadership when he said, "Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things."

But leaders and managers need each other, and are powerless without each other. Leaders need people who can carry out the organization's vision and goals. Managers need leaders who establish the organization's direction and align, motivate, and inspire people to work toward the desired outcome.

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It's vital that a nonprofit board have an effective leader in its top slot, and a board also benefits when it has leaders filling other board positions. Capable leaders can work effectively with other leaders, managers, staff, and volunteers.

Aspects of Leadership

If you're motivated to be an outstanding leader, you can analyze your capabilities and optimize your leadership style. Five important aspects of leadership³ include:

Personal Leadership. Those with strong personal values and integrity lead by example and influence others simply by living and working in compatibility with their values and goals.

Knowledge Leadership. A knowledge leader tempers passion and emotional forces with facts and reason. Knowledge leaders make sure they have the best and most recent information when making critical decisions.

Interpersonal Leadership. This is the most intimate and direct type of leadership. Interpersonal leaders interact with board members, staff, and volunteers to inspire, encourage, and empower them. To do so, they must have excellent listening, speaking, and coaching skills.

Team Leadership. Team leaders are coordinators, linking individual and team performance to the organization's goals, mission, vision, and values.

Organizational Leadership. This kind of leadership involves understanding organizations as systems that interact in specific ways within themselves and with other organizations. Organizational leaders influence internal leaders and contributors by upholding values

and vision. They also work side by side with leaders of other organizations to achieve mutual goals.

Each of these five aspects of leadership complements and supports the others. You may already excel in one or more of these leadership styles. Your challenge is to develop your capabilities in all five areas to best serve your organization.

Steps to Becoming a Leader

While there are many avenues to mastering leadership skills, here are some good beginning steps:

1. Read literature on leadership, including biographies of great leaders, theories of leadership, and current research in nonprofit leadership. (See "Resources to Begin the Journey" on this page.)

2. Seek out successful leaders in your community, and study their habits.

3. Assess your leadership capabilities, and develop a self-improvement plan with specific goals.

4. Set aside time in your schedule for self-reflection.

5. If you're reluctant to take chances, set some risk-taking goals. Do one new thing each day until you become comfortable with taking risks and creating change. ■

Footnotes

¹Nanus, Burt, and Stephen M. Dobbs, *Leaders Who Make a Difference: Essential Strategies for Meeting the Nonprofit Challenge*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers (www.josseybass.com).

²Romig, Dennis A., *Side by Side Leadership: Achieving Outstanding Results Together*, Marietta, GA.: Bard Press (www.bardpress.com).

³Light, Mark, *The Strategic Board: The Step-By-Step Guide to High Impact Board Governance*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (www.wiley.com).

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Resources to Begin the Journey

Use these *Nonprofit World* articles (www.snpo.org/members) to enhance your skills in the five realms of high-impact leadership:

To strengthen your *personal leadership* skills and lead with integrity and purpose:

- **Secrets of the Charismatic Leader** (Vol. 22, No. 4)
- **Do You Need a Coach?** (Vol. 17, No. 5)
- **Five Secrets Every Leader Should Know** (Vol. 23, No. 3)

For *knowledge leadership*, including staying on top of the latest trends:

- **Do You Have What It Takes to Be a Chief Learning Officer?** (Vol. 16, No. 2)
- **Advance to the Future or Retreat to the Familiar?** (Vol. 22, No. 6)
- **If You're Not Growing, You're Dying** (Vol. 22, No. 5)

To be sure your *interpersonal leadership* is the best it can be:

- **On Your Feet and Speaking: An Absolute Requirement for Today's Nonprofit Leader** (Vol. 13, No. 5)
- **How Do You Come Across to Others?** (Vol. 23, No. 3)
- **Face to Face: The Only Way to Make a Real Impact** (Vol. 14, No. 1)

To become an outstanding *team leader*:

- **The Key to Building Productive Teams** (Vol. 21, No. 4)
- **Teams: The Essence of Quality** (Vol. 13, No. 3)
- **Zen and the Art of Team Building** (Vol. 20, No. 1)

To hone your *organizational leadership* abilities:

- **Are You a Collaborative Leader?** (Vol. 15, No. 2)
- **Eight Ways to Improve Leadership Team Meetings** (Vol. 23, No. 3)
- **How Do Leaders of Nonprofit Partnerships Foster Collaboration?** (Vol. 22, No. 3)