

What's a Good Leader or Manager to Do?

Some [77 percent of Americans polled in 2011](#) think the lack of good leadership has reached crisis proportions. Business and other organizational leaders and managers know that their roles evolve and that their responsibilities are frequently modified by their current situation. Therefore, the best leaders anticipate at least one crisis a year. But bloggers, management gurus, consultants, researchers, and students—as well as leaders and managers alike—continue to debate the roles of good leaders or managers in the complex environments that most organizations face today.

My favorite description of leadership comes from an old quote by Henry Kissinger, “The task of the leader is to get (his) people from where they are to where they have not been.” Does this task require the help of others? Yes. Does it require leaders, managers, and “followers”? Yes.

I have been reflecting on questions about leaders’ and managers’ roles recently for two reasons: (1) the writing of the 2013–2014 Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence revisions (which, incidentally, kept me from writing a September *Insights* column) and (2) an extensive discussion by the [Harvard Business Review \(HBR\) LinkedIn group](#) about differentiators that separate a leader from a manager. As of October 5, 2012, that discussion had already generated well over 300 comments. While I don’t claim to be able to summarize 300 comments, I would say many contributors seem to agree that there is some overlap in roles and responsibilities (leaders must also be managers) but that leaders are responsible for setting organizational vision and direction, while managers are responsible for directing the people and resources to make it happen. This is a classic strategy-versus-operations definition.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter in a very [recent HBR blog](#) characterizes emerging leaders as having one thing in common: charisma. She goes on to say that charisma alone is not enough and that even “water walkers . . . have stones holding them up while they walk on the water—that is, support systems just below the surface.”

One of the frequently referenced commentaries on leaders and managers is several decades old, from the 1989 book *On Becoming a Leader* by Warren Bennis. He composed a list of differences:

- The manager administers; the leader innovates.
- The manager is a copy; the leader is an original.
- The manager maintains; the leader develops.
- The manager focuses on systems and structure; the leader focuses on people.
- The manager relies on control; the leader inspires trust.
- The manager has a short-range view; the leader has a long-range perspective.
- The manager asks how and when; the leader asks what and why.
- The manager has his or her eye always on the bottom line; the leader’s eye is on the horizon.
- The manager imitates; the leader originates.
- The manager accepts the status quo; the leader challenges it.
- The manager is the classic good soldier; the leader is his or her own person.
- The manager does things right; the leader does the right thing.

One could summarize many of these points through the concepts of management being transactional and leadership being transformational. Most would agree that the roles of leader and manager are not as clearly delineated today. The classic image of management being focused on budget, execution, and control, while leadership focuses solely on change and innovation is no

longer true, especially with the increasing role of the knowledge worker and the decreasing role of the non-skilled assembly-line worker. Today's managers and leaders have roles in executing and innovating.

The U.S. Army's [January 2011 Company Command](#) contains an interesting discussion of leaders versus managers in a military setting. It starts with the comment, "We lead people; we manage things. Good officership requires an implicit balance of both." Among many comments that follow is the argument that leaders must be able to manage. One contributor states, "One truly leads when management is combined with providing purpose through clear and concise guidance, motivation through personal example, and positive character traits."

The Gallup organization has done significant research on the role of leaders and leadership. In its 2008 book *Strengths Based Leadership*, it reports what 10,000 randomly selected "followers" say they need from the most influential leaders in their lives. The results show four basic needs: trust, compassion, stability, and hope. These are not words that generally describe the command-and-control leader of legendary proportion that we as a society worshipped in the past.

Empowered people (whose intellectual contributions we need) and the rise of social media outlets, where anyone can voice an opinion about a leader and start a "revolt," have made shared governance and leadership a reality for all leaders and executives. This means that leadership is now exercised at multiple levels throughout an organization, not just at the top. Indeed, all employees are expected to be leaders in their own span of the operation.

So, what's a good leader to do?

This is the question we pondered as we considered the 2013–2014 Criteria for Performance Excellence revisions to item 1.1 on senior leadership. The senior leader's role now must include verbs like *guide*, *promote*, *communicate*, *encourage*, *demonstrate*, and *participate*, in addition to the expected verbs like *set*, *create*, and *deploy*.

Here are some key expectations of senior leaders, as stated in the near final draft of the 2013–2014 Criteria:

- Set, communicate, and deploy organizational vision and values
- Demonstrate the values, and legal and ethical behavior
- Create an environment for mission and strategy accomplishment, innovation, and learning
- Set and demonstrate a focus on the customer
- Guide succession planning and participate in the development of future leaders
- Participate in workforce reward and recognition
- Communicate, communicate, communicate

In my opinion, *that's* what a good leader's to do.