

Column Title: **As The Saw Turns**

Article Title: **The Difference Between a Manager and a Leader**

Recently, I have spent some time looking back at the people that have influenced my career – the people I have worked with and worked for. Those that have been ‘managers’ and those have been ‘leaders’. There is a difference. In fact, coincidentally, I ran across an article that dealt with this very topic. It’s interesting enough that I felt it was worth sharing here. Much of the following is from an article by Patrick Morley, President of Man In The Mirror:

In 1977 Abraham Zaleznik published what became a landmark article in the world of management literature.

According to Harvard Business Review editors, Zaleznik uncovered a flaw in the structure-and-control-oriented management theory of the time: the failure to lift the human spirit to envision a different future and create a sense of meaning in one’s work. It radically changed the way managers and leaders look at things. Zaleznik theorized that leading and managing are not merely different skill sets, but represent attributes of fundamentally *different kinds of people*.

While it would be silly to over-generalize from these distinctions, here’s a summary of what Zaleznik had to say:

- The best word for **managers** is balance; the best word for **leaders** is change.
- **Managers** want to smooth things out; **leaders** want to shake things up.
- **Managers** think about how to oversee the existing order of things; **leaders** think about how to shape the future.
- **Managers** think about execution; **leaders** go for ideas.

- **Managers** seek control; **leaders** seek out risk.
- **Managers** seek stability and, therefore, prefer to act quickly to solve problems; **leaders** handle ambiguity well and can delay closure.
- **Managers** focus on problem-solving and achieving the results to which the organization is committed; **leaders** incite people to think about what could be.
- **Managers** view work as a process of compromises so that everyone can be a winner; **leaders** look for opportunities for large gains at the risk of failure.
- **Managers** tend to be social but not as emotionally involved; **leaders** have high emotional intelligence and empathy.
- **Managers** send “signals;” **leaders** send “messages.”
- **Managers** focus on following the correct procedures to resolve an issue (the process); **leaders** focus on the substance of an issue.

As you can see, Zaleznik found fundamental differences between leaders and managers. Organizations need both, of course, and the potential for running off the most competent managers or the most innovative leaders is a legitimate concern. The question is how to make a place for both. How can we help leaders and managers not only co-exist, but appreciate and support each other?

In 1990, however, Harvard management guru John Kotter argued that executives could be both leader and manager. He said that *one person* can and should embody *both* characteristics -- that management and leadership complement each other.

Managing and leading are not necessarily mutually exclusive functions and roles. Instead of trying to type someone as a leader or manager, perhaps we could call them all executives, then with a propensity for leading or managing.

Bottom line? People are much more complex and difficult to slot as “this” or “that.” No doubt you could picture yourself doing all or any of the above depending on the needs of the moment.

Whether you think leaders and managers are fundamentally different kind of people, or that leadership and management are merely different roles that can be played by the same person -- both leading and managing are essential success factors.

So how about you? Are you more manager or more leader? What does your company or department need right now? Are you the one to provide it? If not, who can you recruit to co-labor with you?

See you on the show floor!

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