

# Are Managers And Leaders Really Different?

By Lane Sloan, a Silver Fox Advisor

When I taught Strategic Leadership, the students had to read John Kotter's 1990 article on "What Leaders Really Do." Kotter was very effective in setting out different functions for leaders and managers such as leaders align people as opposed to managers who organize and staff. Over the years, there has been debate on whether one can perform both roles as though they are two distinct types of people. According to Kotter, the essence of the difference is managers deal with complexity whereas leaders focus on change. So on this basis one might think leaders and managers are different. Over time, managers seem to have lost their gravitas as we deal in a world of accelerating change.



Recently, I saw that the New Cambridge Advanced Dictionary defines a leader as "a person in control of a group, country, or situation". Control is a rather funny word to use for leaders. Control is really more of a managerial notion on controlling resources including staff and not per se the foundation of leadership where people follow naturally a vision. We seem to be running amok on intermingling the concept of managers and leaders without a clear understanding of their similarities and differences.

In my opinion, the concept of management and leaders are clearly different, but there is opportunity for significant overlap. For me, the key is that managers are derived authority from organizations. They are delegated a distinct role with certain responsibilities and authority that includes directing employees who report to them. Leaders have followers as opposed to obedient employees who perform in order to keep their jobs. People follow because they are inspired by the leader's vision and direction, which supports their needs in some meaningful way.

Managers are given the authority and responsibility to achieve organizational objectives. Likewise, people follow leaders to achieve envisioned results. A manager can be a leader and vice versa a leader can be a manager. If a manager in an organization has people following them because they are inspired by the direction, leadership is being demonstrated. Likewise, if a leader exists in an organization, by definition followers have been inspired to pursue a course of action. Of course, a leader does not need assigned responsibilities in an organization to have followers. And a manager in an organization may not be exhibiting leadership skills even though people follow their direction.

So what is the takeaway? In today's dynamically changing world, to achieve great results, it is critical that managers be great leaders. It is also critical that those not in positions with managerial authority also exhibit leadership. Thus, I think focusing on leadership is a strong agenda for organizations seeking high performance. ♦