

THE BENEFIT OF MANAGER TRAINING IN A LEADERSHIP-CENTRIC ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

The line between leadership and management skills has been blurred to the point where the two disciplines are often seen as being one-in-the-same. Examination of specific functions reveals that each role requires distinctly different skill sets. Personalities and perspectives of effective managers can be compared closely to those of great diplomats, while good leaders often behave more like artists. Drawing from academic and business writing, this paper looks at the organizational needs of vision and productivity and presents an argument for a more intentional approach to training in, and recognition of, those skills specifically related to managing teams of people.

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Organizational interest in the development of leadership and management skills is strong. The value of management and leadership training shows signs of increased momentum as executives at U.S. firms begin to navigate their companies beyond the recession. After a more than 50-year emphasis on the importance management skills, the popular focus for executive training has begun to shift toward leadership abilities. Phrases such as “training managers to be leaders” have entered the corporate vernacular and seem to indicate that management is a stepping-stone to leadership. On the other hand, many in the business press—and some academic journals—have blended the two skill sets, blurring the lines separating what should be considered two distinctly different disciplines. The purpose of this paper is to present a case for the need to recognize the **distinct divide between effective management and effective leadership**, and to advocate for increased emphasis on the benefits of training managers to become better managers.

PHRASES SUCH AS “TRAINING MANAGERS TO BE LEADERS” SEEM TO INDICATE THAT MANAGEMENT IS A STEPPING-STONE TO LEADERSHIP.

HEIGHTENED AWARENESS

A variety of metrics point to heightened awareness of the need to sharpen skills in management training AND leadership development areas. As 2012 enters the 4th quarter:

- The number of books published each year with the word Leader or Manager in the title has taken a huge jump since 2009. (Figure 1)

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- There were 168-million new blog posts tagged with *management* and nearly 68-million tagged with *leadership* in the 12-month period ending October 2012.¹
- The number of Internet home pages with some form of the words *manager* or *leader* in the title totals more than 70-million.²

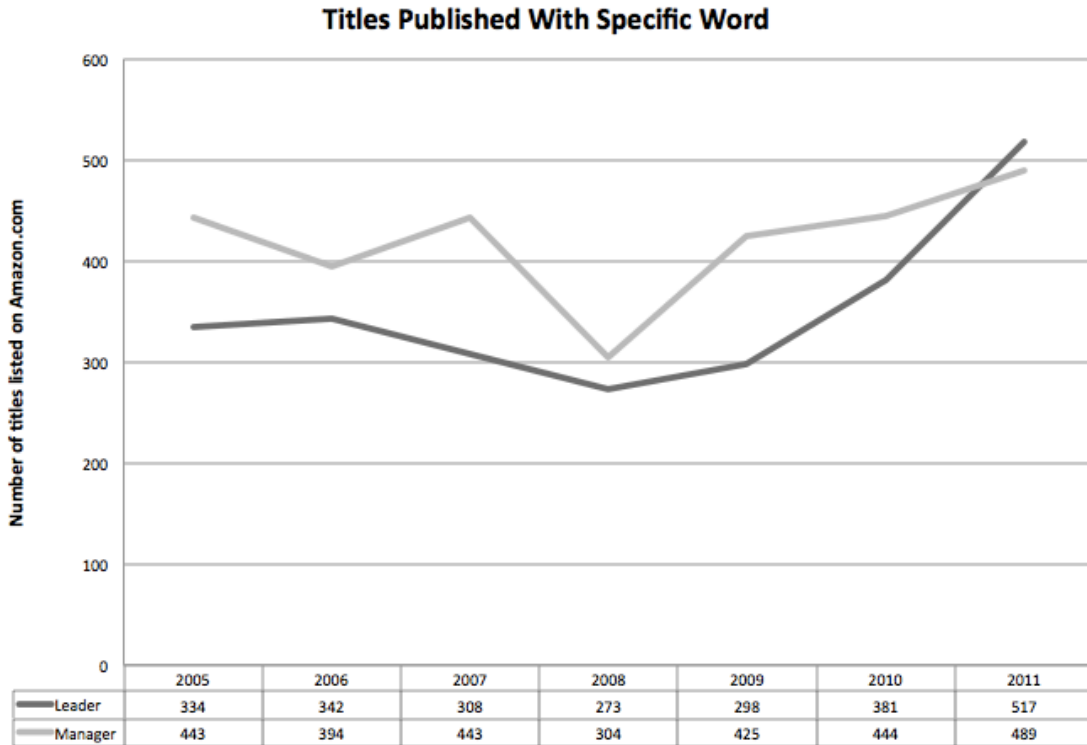


Figure 1 - Amazon.com data compiled by the author on October 27, 2012

Training budgets at U.S. firms are returning to pre-2008 levels, with companies investing an average of \$682 per learner in 2010. The uptick represents a two percent increase over 2009 levels and follows a 21 percent drop in training budgets between 2007 and 2009. (O'Leonard, 2011) *The Corporate Learning Factbook® 2011* reports that “. . . companies remain cautious about their spending, but many have shifted their attention beyond efficiency and are now

¹ Data compiled by the author on Google.com

² IBID

looking toward innovation in their learning environments.” This focus on innovative training ideas has resulted in executives asking about return on investment (ROI) prior to launching a learning program, a move that the report’s author suggests will result in a closer alignment between organizational goals and learning objectives. (O’Leonard)

Post-recession budget cuts for training and development efforts were mirrored by a marked decrease in Internet searches between 2004 and 2012 for the keywords “management training” and “leadership training.” Searches on Google for the term “management training” dropped by 63% over the 8-year period, and by 54% for the keywords “leadership training.” (Figure 2) Relevant to our discussion of the distinction between management and leadership training, it should be noted that the decline in Google searches for “management training” was far more precipitous than the drop in queries for “leadership training.” 58 index points separated the two terms in 2004. That spread had closed to 18 points by 2012, suggesting—perhaps—that management skills, in comparison, were seen as providing less ROI.

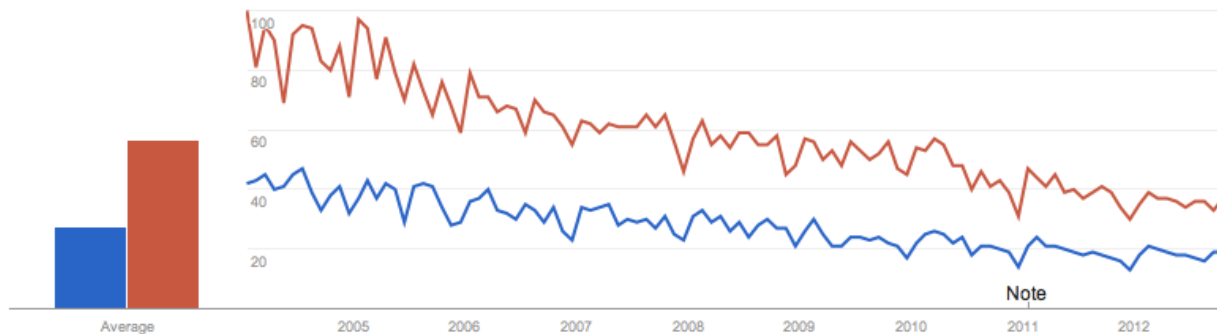


Figure 2 - Keyword search history. Blue indicates Leadership Training; Orange indicates Management Training. Data compiled by the author from Google Trends on October 27, 2012

The *value gap* between leadership and management training is also evident in the number of book titles published in the darkest months of the recession. Books with the word *manager* in the title took a plunge in 2008 while those with *leader* in the title held relatively steady and

subsequently increased each year following. (Figure 1) Editorial directors, whose job it is to discern consumer appetites for specific subjects, clearly saw a value shift in 2008 away from management topics in favor of books on leadership.

MANAGER-LEADER DISTINCTION

The set of abilities for effective management couldn't be more different than the skills needed to be an effective leader. The leader's objective is based in a desire to break from the status quo and to create a new reality. Managerial goals arise out the necessity to maintain a functional equilibrium. Managers solve problems. Leaders—often—cause problems. In *Managers and Leaders*, a 1977 Harvard Business Review article, Abraham Zaleznik wrote “. . . managers and leaders are very different kinds of people. They differ in motivation, personal history and in how they think and act.” (Zaleznik, 1977)

Contrary to more recent suggestions that managers should learn to be leaders, Zaleznik celebrates the differences and praises managers for their abilities. “Managers continually need to coordinate and balance opposing views. Interestingly enough, this type of work has much in common with what diplomats and mediators do.” As an example, Zaleznik points to former U.S. diplomat Henry Kissinger as an “outstanding practitioner” of management skills.

If successful managers rely on harmony and order, the opposite can be said of great leaders. Leaders are at odds with order. Their personalities clamor for change. Great leaders, according to Zaleznik “. . . tend to feel separate from their environment. They may work *in* organizations, but they never *belong* to them. Their sense of who they are does not depend on memberships, work roles, or other social indicators of identity.” [Emphasis added]

This black and white distinction is not something every expert supports. Business colloquialism tends to favor an all-in-one definition where leadership and management are interchangeable. Writing in *Cutting-Edge Leadership*, Dr. Ronald Rigglo relegates the distinction to one of semantics. “Successful and effective leaders and managers must do the same things. They need to set direction for followers and organizations, motivate, develop good working relationships with followers, be positive role models, and focus on goals.” (Ronald E. Riggio, 2009)

THE SUCCESSFUL MANAGER HAS MUCH IN COMMON WITH WHAT
DIPLOMATS AND MEDIATORS DO.

A simple Google search on the word “turn managers into leaders”³ provides over 39-thousand instances where the specific phrase appears. There is even a web site titled *managersintoleaders.com*. The premier offering on the site is a 16-page document providing a list of “Nine Easy Ways to Turn Managers Into Leaders.” Transforming managers into leaders promises to:

- Radically improve staff morale,
- Put the fun back into your business, and
- Virtually eliminate employee turnover. (Koerner, 2009)

But, achieving those results among a group of individuals with unique perspectives, varying personal agendas and diverse abilities requires the deft application of workplace diplomacy—which is much more the purview of the manager than the leader.

³ Search conducted by the author on October 28, 2012

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Effective managers work well with people, and may even have an inner *need* to avoid solitary activity. (Zaleznik, 1977) Zaleznik suggests that effective managers have an aversion to risk and a natural sense of what is needed to get things done. Most effective leaders, on the other hand, have an aversion to the mundane. (Zaleznik, 1977) Leaders have a knack for communicating vision for an organization or project (HBR, 2001) but shared vision seldom includes the details for reaching the goal. Consider this analogy: **The person who stands up and yells “FIRE” in a burning theater is the leader. The one who directs people to the nearest exit, is the manager.**

Managers orchestrate reality to achieve an organization’s goals. Playing the role of diplomat, a manager looks at the desired outcome—communicated by a leader—and balances what needs to be done against available resources and limitations. Leaders describe the Promised Land, and managers execute the journey. Despite claims that the distinction is merely one of semantics, or that the value of management has been superseded in the 21st century by a need for leadership, the fact remains that organizations are still populated by people who function more effectively if they have someone *coordinating* their individual activities.

MANAGEMENT TRAINING 101

Rather than training managers to be leaders, organizations will find a greater ROI when the learning focus is directed toward improving management skills. The value of manager training is documented in a study described by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman in their book *First, Break All The Rules*.

The study involved a national retailer with 300 stores. The company's 37,000 employees were asked to answer 12 questions⁴ designed to measure their workplace engagement. The questions were answered on a five-point scale, with the highest possible agreement being a five and the lowest being a one. When the scores were tallied for each of the company's 300 locations, stores with the highest number of "5s" averaged 4.56 percent over their annual sales budget. Those with the fewest "5s" averaged 0.84 percent below budget. (Buckingham & Coffman, 1999) The authors found that the difference in performance was directly related to the ability of the local store manager to understand how to *manage* the individual talents his or her employees carried with them to work, every day. [Emphasis added]

One particularly telling piece of data from *First Break All The Rules* is the critical role played by each employee's immediate supervisor. An immediate supervisor who knows which activities add energy to each employee can, in a sense, protect his or her team from poor decisions made further up the management ladder. Conversely, companies with amazingly connected senior executives can lose good people through the miscues of one poorly trained manager. If there's a breakdown in employee commitment to the company, Buckingham and Coffman suggest, it's the fault of the manager: "People leave managers, not companies. So much money has been thrown at the challenge of keeping good people—in the form of better pay, better perks, and better training—when, in the end, turnover is mostly a manager issue." (Buckingham & Coffman)

The manager's most important task is to connect the resources he or she has—the people—with the organization's objectives. Company leaders present the vision; managers execute the

⁴ The questions are now known as the Q12 and are owned by The Gallup Organization.

plan. Managers often lose sight of this and focus their first attention on quality, customer service, safety, payroll issues and a host of other activities—all of which are dependent on the manager being able to create an environment where each employee is turning in his or her peak performance, every day.

There's certainly nothing wrong with looking for improvement in key performance indicators (KPI), but highly effective managers start at a more granular level than company-wide safety, service or quality goals. "The manager's unique contribution is to make other people more productive," writes Marcus Buckingham in *The One Thing You Need to Know*. A manager "will succeed or fail based on his ability to make his employees more productive." (Buckingham, 2005) Buckingham's research has found that managers whose employees have the highest productivity are those who "capitalize on what is unique about each person [as they] build a stronger sense of team." Great managers "identify, emphasize and celebrate" the uniqueness of everyone on their team. Doing so, writes Buckingham, will accelerate progress toward the bigger goals.

**“PEOPLE LEAVE MANAGERS,
NOT COMPANIES.”**

Effective managers focus on individuals. Very few workers are able to maintain consistent performance unaffected by the environment around them or the relationship they have with their direct supervisor. Some individuals require close supervision and regular feedback, while others flourish when the boss stays at arm's length.

In *Managing People: The R Factor*, Allan Cohen insists that, “. . . managing others requires skill and art as well as careful analysis.” (Cohen, 1990) Effective management involves understanding of forces affecting individuals in specific situations, according to Cohen. Attention

to the details of process-level activity is not typically seen in great leaders, but such perspective is critical for great managers.

Leaders see the entire organization (or team) moving en masse toward the desired objective, while managers are mindful of each participant's specific contribution. Because of this, leaders can often appear aloof and clueless to the efforts of individual workers, especially those far removed from the leader's immediate sphere of influence. Great managers understand this and take necessary steps to praise individual players, not only to the worker's peers but up the management ladder, as well.

THE CRITICAL NEED FOR LEADERS AND MANAGERS

The need for leadership is so innate in human beings that any group of people finding itself without a leader will experience “. . . a period of immense tension and uncertainty.” (HBR, 2001) In an interview for the December 2001 issue of HBR, Dr. Lionel Tiger compared our human need for leadership with that of primate groups. In leaderless situations, all activity becomes subservient to the search for leadership and “. . . all of the group's energy is spent on internal jockeying for dominance.”

In his work with chimpanzees, Dr. Tiger found that the leader of a chimp troop can be identified by watching the others. The leader is not the one with the most bananas, “. . . it's the one who gets looked at.” Great leaders function as totems for their organizations, says Tiger, providing a singular focus for every individual to follow. Human beings are not monkeys and life in (most) organizations is a bit more complicated than that of the typical troop of chimpanzees. The totem-positioned leader can direct a company's focus, but managers are responsible for directing the day-to-day activities.

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The root of the word *manager* comes from two Latin words: *manus* (hand) and *agere* (to do). To manage, therefore, is to *do something with your hands*. (Adair, 2011) 21st century managers are seldom required to perform physically intensive work, but the intrinsic meaning remains. Managers are intimately involved in the hands-on activity of the organization for which they work. The definition speaks to a critical ground-level knowledge of day-to-day activities, such as would be impossible to effectively maintain from atop a totem.

Good managers are in the field, asking questions about the work, inspecting and instructing. Adair (2011) asserts that leaders and managers use different skills and play different roles. Managers have eight specific roles: Defining the task, planning, briefing, controlling and coordinating, evaluating, motivating, organizing, and setting an example. [Figure 3] Effective managers balance all eight and practice their application so that, “. . . functions become skills.” (Adair, 2011)

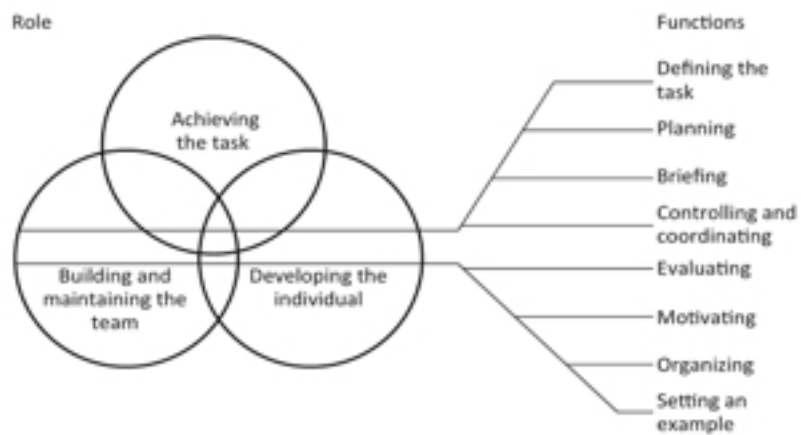


Figure 3 - Eight functions of a manager from John Adair's 100 Greatest Ideas for Being a Brilliant Manager

CONCLUSION

Distinctly identifiable skill sets are required for effective management and leadership. Organizations need *both* managers and leaders to achieve objectives. Leaders are needed to set objectives and stand as totems of collective vision; managers are necessary to coordinate the efforts of the company's diversely talented individuals. The tendency to refer to leadership roles as higher calling, or as an advanced stage of management, places inappropriate emphasis on one critical role over another. *If worker productivity is a key performance indicator, resources invested in training managers to manage can produce greater ROI than training them to lead.*

Jim Seybert helps companies and individuals maximize performance by focusing on what they do best. His consulting practice celebrated its 11th year of continuous service in October 2012, during which time he has had the privilege of assisting clients in a variety of industries, including: retail, manufacturing, public and private schools, government, publishing, tourism, construction, civil engineering, entertainment and healthcare.

Jim has been certified as a *SimplyStrengths*® trainer and *StandOut*® coach by The Marcus Buckingham Company, for which he is also recognized as an Ambassador. His monthly Internet column *Counter Intelligence* is distributed to more than 1500 readers around the globe. He is a frequent speaker and workshop leader for conferences and conventions.

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