

Transitioning from Manager to Leader

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You're a fantastic manager and now you're ready for a step up. So you respond to an opening for a new job with leadership potential. You send your resume, detailing your numerous accomplishments, technical skills and years of experience supervising global teams, project planning and implementations. You're perfect for the job! Or, so you thought... Instead, you don't even hear back. Perhaps it wasn't a new job but a different position within your company, or a project that you wanted to lead.

What happened? What did they miss about you? Why have you been overlooked for advancement and leadership opportunities? Frustration sets in -- you know you're capable of the job; why didn't they see that? How can you communicate your leadership abilities more clearly?

Many professionals struggle with the transition from management to leadership. While you believe that you have developed the skills and the experience, the real issue lies in that you haven't changed others' perceptions of you. You haven't taken the next step to set yourself apart.

There are simple steps you can take to more clearly demonstrate your leadership abilities and to distinguish yourself as a leader. Whether attending a meeting, eating in the cafeteria or writing your resume, you can begin to make that transition in the minds of others. But first, you have to be clear in your own mind about what makes a leader and whether you really want to embark on that journey.

Leader vs. Manager

What makes a leader? Is it a compilation of certain behaviors? Is it style? Is it a certain way of communicating? What do leaders do that makes people perceive them as leaders?

In order to answer these questions, let's first look at what makes a good manager. We've all had poor managers, so we know a good one right away. It's someone who inspires us, who cares about what we do and how we do it. It's someone for whom everyone wants to work - the person who makes the group work as a successful team. If you're lucky enough to be on that team, coming to work is fun and challenging. You work hard, but you get results.

Given that description, isn't a manager also a leader? Are these not leadership skills? What would keep a great manager from being seen as a potential candidate for leadership?

Leaders do share many of the traits of a great manager. They inspire. They motivate. However, leaders take it all a step further. Leaders are enthusiastic, optimistic and articulate when talking about plans, hopes and successes. Their genuine enthusiasm energizes and attracts others. It brings visions to life. Leaders sincerely believe in what they are saying and they demonstrate their personal convictions through their behaviors. This is what gives them the confidence to make unpopular judgment calls and to sell ideas that contradict the status quo. It's what enables them to inspire others to follow them down a difficult road while keeping up the group's morale. Leadership is not just a bigger paycheck or a higher location on the org chart, it's a different perspective.

Do you have what it takes? Look inside yourself and ask yourself some of these questions:

- ◆ What is my personal agenda?
- ◆ What do I want to prove?

- ◆ What mission in life obsesses me?
- ◆ What is my burning passion?

The answers to these questions will help you decide if a leadership journey is really a path on which you want to embark.

Crossing the Divide

Once you know that you're committed to the leadership journey, it's time to communicate your passion to others. If you're missing out on leadership opportunities simply because people don't think of you as 'leadership material,' it may be time to look at your behaviors to determine how to shift them in order to more clearly demonstrate your leadership capabilities. We all know that we are judged by what we do and say. Those judgments cause others to conclude whether we are just great managers - or potential leaders. Let's look at some simple scenarios that will illustrate how your behavior influences people's perception.

In a Meeting...

For most professionals, meetings are a common occurrence. Sometimes we forget that our behavior in meetings plays a significant role in how we are perceived by those who have the potential to advance us. Consider the following three scenarios during which you meet with senior management. And if you think you have been passed over for a potential leadership position, ask yourself which of the following scenarios represents your typical behavior?

Scenario One: Through your body language and your comments, you make it clear that you view the other presentations negatively. You sit with your arms crossed. You fail to offer constructive remarks. You leave the meeting complaining about how things were handled.

What do you think management concludes about you? Hopefully, we all know that this type of behavior is no way to win the support of management. You are not seen as a team player or as a positive addition to the larger group. In fact, you're seen as a drain on the team.

Scenario Two: You come to the meeting prepared. You present your remarks. You answer questions. You point out negative issues. You offer solutions that benefit your team. Once you are finished with your part of the meeting, you sit quietly and let the meeting move on.

What conclusions is top management drawing now? Yes, their view of you has improved. Now you appear well informed and as someone who is looking out for the team. You may be seen as a great manager, but how about a leader? What's missing?

Scenario Three: You look and act interested as the meeting progresses. Instead of raising negative issues, you ask for clarification. You ask permission to play devil's advocate before talking about issues that you see as negative. You put the discussion in the broader, enterprise context. You ask how these issues will affect other groups outside of your own.

Now what do you think management is concluding? You bet! Now you're demonstrating leadership behaviors. You are outwardly focused instead of inwardly focused. You see the larger picture and are concerned about how it will be impacted. Now you have that extra 'something' that management is seeking.

In the Cafeteria...

What are some other ways you can demonstrate leadership potential? Start right now to distinguish yourself in your day-to-day interactions with people. The moments with people in your department and with those outside of your department are also fertile ground for judgments of you to be formed. Are you demonstrating leadership behavior? Let's find out...

How many people outside of your department do you know well enough for you to say hello to in the hallway? How many do you know well enough to pick up the phone and ask to have lunch with you? How many have you *actually asked* to have lunch with you?

These questions demonstrate another difference between a manager and a leader. A manager will know how to call to get information or data, but doesn't spend time building the critical relationships that cross the invisible boundaries between departments. A leader, however, knows that success requires the cooperation of many people in different parts of the company. A leader knows that he or she needs to understand those people - their objectives, resources, concerns, priorities and constraints. That kind of understanding comes from reaching out to others and spending casual, but valuable time with them. When you focus only on your group or department, you will likely forget the larger priorities and goals of the company. This view is too narrow and will obstruct you from leadership positions. However, if you choose to reach out to others within the company, your leadership attributes will become more apparent.

In Your Language...

Sometimes we hold ourselves back just through the words we use. To demonstrate your leadership capabilities and distinguish yourself for that new position or that new project, begin looking at the words you use. Take a look your resume and see if you *sound* like a leader.

Resume as You Wrote It:

Department Manager

- ◆ Managed and implemented Property Structure project
- ◆ Managed Credit Study
- ◆ Gathered, documented and filed information
- ◆ Managed year-end close activities

Same Resume as a Leader Would Write It:

Member of Department Leadership Staff

- ◆ Identified opportunity to re-design property structures.
 - Prepared ROI calculation
 - Presented idea to upper management
 - Formed team
 - Lead project to successful completion
- ◆ Responded to outside consultants on possibility of additional credits
 - Evaluated proposal
 - Reviewed and quantified savings to company
 - Prepared resource analysis

- Obtained approval from upper management
- Acted as liaison for duration of project to successful completion
- ◆ Identified need for documentation to support audit
 - Set up weekly meetings with auditors and internal team
 - Established purpose of documentation
 - Assigned responsibilities for collection
 - Reviewed results weekly
 - Met commitment set with auditors
- ◆ Coordinated year-end close activities
 - Established calendar with outside auditors
 - Identified owners of tasks
 - Conducted weekly status meetings
 - Summarized issues for upper management
 - Led closing meeting with upper management and team

Assuming you actually did everything in the second resume, the contents of both resumes are essentially the same. However, the use of leader-like language in the second version casts you in a very different light. Whether it gets you the job or not, it makes it much more apparent that you are committed to leadership and working on your leadership skills.

Following are a few dynamic leadership verbs that may be useful for you in writing your resume - for a leadership position:

Analyze	Build	Challenge
Charter	Coach	Collaborate
Commission	Confront	Control
Create	Decide	Define
Develop	Direct	Drive
Empower	Engage	Enhance
Enlist	Envision	Establish
Evaluate	Experiment	Form
Generate	Influence	Inspire

Involve	Lead	Model
Motivate	Negotiate	Originate
Pilot	Plan	Present
Recommend	Shape	Spearhead
Stimulate	Strategize	Strengthen

Start Your Journey

It's not always our skills that hold us back. We may have the greatest skills and still not be perceived by others as the person we think we are. By focusing on our behaviors and our words, we can begin to close the gap between the perception of *where* we are and *who* we are. As with any journey, it begins with the first step.

Look outside your current job and start taking leader-like steps. Try taking on a special project as the project lead rather than a member of the team. Ask to plan and coordinate a large meeting. If your department has regular presentations to other departments, volunteer to be a presenter. Start an informal discussion group on topics of interest. If you feel you can't express yourself adequately, sign up for a communication skills class. Every leader should know how to:

- ◆ Summarize
- ◆ Paraphrase
- ◆ Express personal feelings
- ◆ Admit mistakes
- ◆ Ask for clarification
- ◆ Solicit different views
- ◆ Respond non-defensively

These skills will give you the flexibility to respond to different situations effectively. By taking these types of actions, you will create the initial foundation for becoming a leader.

But don't stop there! Make sure you communicate your passion to lead with others. Expressing a casual interest in leading will not be sufficient. You must confidently back up your behavior with your words. Share your passion for leading with your manager, your peers, and your staff. Even if you don't get that next job or project, you have begun your journey and you are transforming internally to think and act as a leader. Your desire to challenge yourself and to look at other opportunities will lead you to bigger and better things.

To be a leader, live it every day in everything you do and you will make a difference in your life and the lives of others. Soon you'll find yourself on the other side of the great divide.

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