Leadership vs. Management | Focus on Leadership and Management

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Leadership and management are two of the more frequently used terms related to the operation and success of any organization, regardless of its products and/or services. This is especially so in the nonprofit arena, where doing more with less has been the rule over the past several decades. Libraries and information centers are very much a part of this environment, and must be well led and well managed if they are to continue to survive and thrive. It is our expectation that this column will define, delineate, and develop those topics sufficiently to provide a valued learning experience for our readers.

It is quite appropriate to begin a new series about the topics of leadership and management comparing the two terms, and identifying the differences that distinguish them and the similarities that bind them. Although there are many times when articles, even in the best of business publications, will couch these terms in a more correlating manner, there is no question that each needs its own interpretation and its own space.

A commonly accepted definition of leadership refers to someone who guides or influences others; while management connotes the process of directing or administering. Both have very defined meanings which well support the validity of their independence.

There are a myriad of authors who have written books, articles, and blogs on leadership, all looking at it separate from its management counterpart. Probably the most well-known writer on both is Warren Bennis, who takes the bold step of attempting to compare the two with absolute values individually attributed to them. He identifies the functions of a manager, in part, as one who administers, initiates, maintains, focuses on systems, relies on control, wants immediate results, asks how and when, has an eye on the status quo. His approach to leaders, on the other hand,
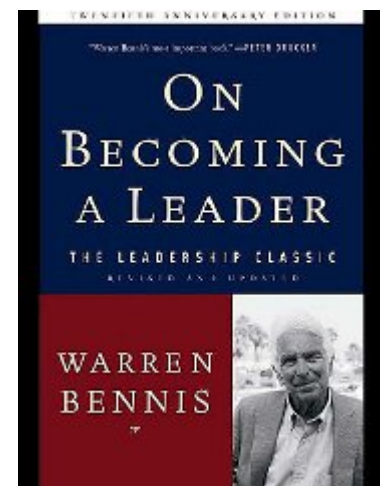
identifies them as those who innovate, originate, initiate, develop, focus on people, inspire trust, have a long range view, ask what and why, have their eye on the horizon, and challenge the status quo.

Bennis is best known for identifying managers as those who do things right, and leaders as those who do the right things. It is too important not to assign these definitions into such general categories, without focusing on the true value of each. It suffices to say, however, that this comparison goes a long way in adding to the understanding and view that leaders and managers have about their individual duties and responsibilities.

Bennis is not the only business author to pen his thoughts on these two subjects. Such writers as John Kotter, Burt Nanus, and Abraham Zaleznik have also tried their hand at delineating the variances between management and leadership. Such distinctions as their nature (leadership is more subjective, while management is more objective), their longevity, (leadership has been with us for ages, while the concepts of management are barely a century old), their focus (leadership is more visionary, while management is practiced in real-time), and their level of proficiency (leadership can pervade an organization, while management is left to the top tiers), all demonstrate the importance of each as forces in the operation of any organization.
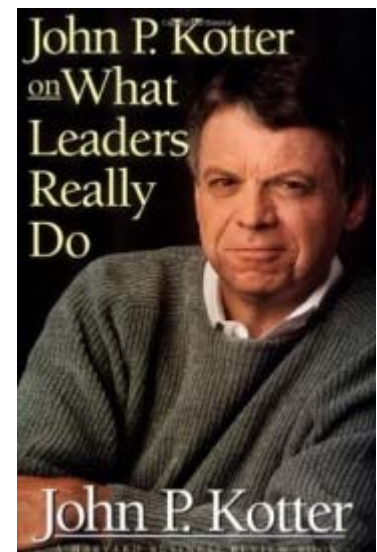
There is also concern that leadership is more of an art, while management is closer to being a science. Furthering this thought for a moment, it continues the tradition that greater structure is imbedded in management, and greater flexibility is grounded in leadership. This comparison of terms and concepts can generate more confusion, as much as it can engender more clarity.

When it is all said and done, there are many terms used to identify leaders and managers that are more synonymous than differentiating. Motivating various levels of staff, encouraging productivity and creativity, maintaining organizational stability, and balancing external change with internal culture, are some of the ways leadership and management are inextricably linked. To be a strong leader and/or manager, individuals must adhere to rigorous personal development, believe in their own

humility, constantly grow from a continuum of experiences, and always be guided by their own instincts and values.

One of the most debated elements in the leadership/management scenario is answering the question can a leader also be a manager and visa versa. We all know many managers, who can also be considered leaders. We have also seen leadership skills in those who are not managers. Do you need to be both in order to succeed? The answer is emphatically no. That said, however, success can be more easily achieved if a suitable number of human attributes in both leading and managing could be developed at multiple staffing levels.

Many organizations pride themselves on encouraging leadership skills in their staffs throughout their employment levels. Chairing committees, leading teams, and initiating new products and services are ways in which a leader can be nurtured. Participating in management development programs also provides an avenue of growth in an organization, especially when it involves planning, staffing, and financial elements. Many of these functions are not fully delineated or emphasized in professional education programs, and must be learned through work experience and outside volunteer activities. This is especially true in the field of library and information science, and poses an ongoing challenge to new and past graduates.

Where do you fit in all of this? Is leadership your focus, without wanting to take on the responsibilities of a manager; is management in your future, whether or not leadership opportunities are available; or are you committed to being both a leader and a manager as your professional career progresses? Share your ideas!

Lead the Change is a library leadership seminar that brings together library thought leaders to show participants how today's top libraries are leading change and transforming their communities. Attendees are lead through a series of exercises to help bridge key thoughts to individual leadership objectives to help them harness their ideas, their innovation and their ability to lead.

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