

Are You a Manager, a Leader or an Engaging Leader?

Learn the difference between managing and leading, and the leadership traits needed to engage, motivate and inspire people in the workplace.

If you have read any of the books written on employee engagement or seen the results of the numerous major studies conducted on the subject you will know that it is commonly accepted that an employee's level of engagement is directly related to the relationship they have with their immediate manager. In other words, we know that people don't leave companies, they leave managers!

However, using the term "manager" here is not accurate. Most people don't want a manager, what they really want is a leader. Understanding the difference between a manager and a leader is crucial when it comes to engagement. To explain the difference, here is part of a well known quote by legendary business leader Warren Bennis describing his views on the subject.

Managers	Leaders
Do things right	Do the right things
Administer	Innovate
Ask how and when	Ask what and why
Focus on systems	Focus on people

The truth is that there are very few real leaders in the workplace and even fewer engaging leaders! Leadership is not about a position description or a job title. It is about a mindset. I am sure you can think of people you have encountered in your life who were "unofficial" leaders "elected" by a group of people to represent them, perhaps at the same time ignoring the "official" leader. I could also go into the ongoing debate about whether leaders are born or made. For the purpose of this article I am going to assume that they can be made, although I will acknowledge that it helps if an individual has some natural leadership qualities to begin with.

One of the reasons that very few of our managers go on to become (engaging) leaders is in the way they are chosen for the role. Standard practice is to select the technically most competent person and put them in charge, whether they like it or not. There are two main problems with this method. Firstly, technical competence does not necessarily equal leadership competence and secondly, making someone perform a leadership role against their will, regardless of their level of skill, is unlikely to result in success. In the past we have also equated age and experience with leadership. Whilst it is true that there are many well respected mature leaders in the business world, don't overlook the benefits of the younger, less experienced but naturally gifted leader.

Another reason we lack engaging leaders is that there are not enough role models around for us to emulate. How can you be an engaging leader if you have never seen one in action? It is sad to say that many experienced employees have never worked for a truly engaging leader. I know personally that it was not until well into my career that I had firsthand experience of the power of an engaging leader and that experience has stayed with me. If you have never had that experience at work, then I suggest you start looking to other areas of your life for inspiration. You may have had an engaging teacher, an inspirational sports coach or even a charismatic neighbour or family member that you can use as a role model. Alternatively, you can use the "anti-model" approach to help you frame your own engaging leadership behaviours. In other words, do exactly the opposite of every disengaging leader you have encountered!

So, regardless of whether you've personally encountered an engaging leader or simply heard about them as mythical beings, there are some key attributes that make an engaging leader engaging. I call them the 3Cs of engaging leadership.

Character

A leader of character is someone who knows themselves and is not afraid to be themselves at all times. They are people who possess high levels of self awareness, clear values and firm beliefs that inform all the decisions they make.

Charisma

Charm, magnetism, presence. Call it what you will but charisma is a personal quality found in leaders who arouse fervent popular devotion and enthusiasm in their followers. Famous examples of charismatic leaders include John F Kennedy and Dr Martin Luther King.

Conviction

Engaging leaders have a strong belief in the path they have chosen, even if it is unpopular. They are someone who can stick with their beliefs even in times of crisis or when their decisions are put into question. They fight for what they believe in and on behalf of the people who follow them.

One way that engaging leaders demonstrate their character, charisma and conviction is through the use of a leadership mantra or motto, which can be defined as "a phrase meant to formally describe general motivation or intention". A leadership mantra should not be something as trite as "my door is always open", particularly when it isn't actually true! It needs to be something simple and straightforward that makes it clear to people exactly what you are about. If you think about the engaging leaders you have encountered you will probably find they each had their own expression that captured the essence of their leadership style.

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