



# Leader vs. Manager : False Dichotomy?

by Howard M. Guttman

Business organizations tend to treat leadership in one-dimensional terms. Many executives consider leadership to be a positional attribute rather than a set of attitudes and behaviors. Leadership is for the anointed few, the denizens of the C-suite, the “them” and not “us” of organizational life.

In his book, *On Becoming a Leader*, management guru Warren Bennis juxtaposed the role of manager with that of leader. Some of his comparisons include:

• The manager administers;	the leader innovates.
• The manager maintains;	the leader develops.
• The manager focuses on systems and structure;	the leader focuses on people.
• The manager relies on control;	the leader inspires trust.
• The manager imitates;	the leader originates.
• The manager accepts the status quo;	the leader challenges it.
• The manager is the classic good soldier;	the leader is his or her own person.

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While the leader/manager juxtaposition makes for interesting reading, there are difficulties with the formulation. For one, the delineations are too clean cut: Managers/leaders come off as opposites, when in fact successful managers must also be leaders. If, as Bennis contends, managers are systems bound rather than people oriented; if they focus on control more than on inspiring trust; and if they are imitators, not originators; they are unlikely to be successful—or to be long for today’s skinned-down organization.

More importantly, the old manager/leader dichotomy no longer applies to today’s complex, high-wired organization. Everyone must become a leader within his or her area of responsibility. True, not everyone is expected to look into the future and do big-picture strategic thinking, but no matter what ecological niche one occupies organizationally, we must all look beyond the horizon to anticipate future problems and opportunities. To Bennis’s point about the status quo: Any manager stuck in “now” won’t take his or her function “there.” Think about any job in an organization, and chances are that it’s very different now than it was even a few years ago. There’s player churn, technology shifts, resource and supply dislocation and change, new consumer and service demands, etc. What status quo?

It’s time to reframe the old leader/manager paradigm. There is a new breed of leader-manager emerging, especially in horizontal, high-performing organizations. These leader-managers think of themselves as owners of the business they run. They keep a sharp eye on the bottom line—not only on the budgets they manage, but on the continuing value they bring to the organization. They take calculated risks; look for ways to innovate, engage, and develop their people to become both “good soldiers” and superb leaders; challenge the status quo; and ratchet up performance.

In *Great Business Teams*, I quoted a comment made by David Epstein, former CEO of Novartis Oncology. “When I turn around,” he said, “what I want to see is leaders, not followers.” Managers were fine in a bygone era. Now it’s leader-managers down through the ranks who will push the envelope, bring productive energy to their tasks, and keep their organization ahead of the curve. If you turn around and see managers, it’s time to move to the horizontal, high-performance model—or head to an organization that embraces it. You’ll find teams of leaders, along with greater excitement and likelihood of reward.

