



articles

Leadership: 5 practices of effective leaders

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Management vs Leadership

There are a host of definitions of management and leadership – and certainly too many to mention in this article! At =mc we use one of the simplest definitions offered by management guru Peter Drucker:

- **Leadership:** from an ancient Greek word meaning pathmaker
- **Management:** from an ancient Greek word meaning pathfollower

At a senior level, managers are increasingly being asked to provide leadership. As indicated above, the approach of a manager and a leader are distinct and different.

At =mc we've translated these approaches into characteristics as outlined below in terms of some key shared activities such as planning and people management.

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Issue	Manager	Leader
Planning	Detail and sequence	Overview and result
Thinking	Risk assess and rational	Challenge and intuitive
People	Supervise and support	Motivate and encourage
Change	Maintain status quo	Promote change
Resources	Allocate and monitor	Identify and seek out
Focus	Detail	Big picture

The implication of the pathmaker/pathfollower distinction is that as managers we have to be concerned with organising stable systems, ensuring quality, and identifying and implementing best practice. Whereas as leaders we need to be concerned about creativity and innovation, making positive changes and seeking to challenge and push boundaries.

Five practices of effective leaders

If you think there are a lot of definitions of leadership then you might be very concerned by the number of models there are to explain what leaders actually do!

However, there is a simple model that works effectively within a range of public bodies and charities we've worked with. The model is the Kouzes and Posner Five Leadership Practices, developed in the last 15 years from original work by Tom Peters.

This model argues, based on a research project with successful leaders, that they must demonstrate at least some of at five key 'practices' to be successful. The specific practices and their characteristics can vary according to different situations, but at some point you'll need to access them all.

The model is based on solid research Kouzes and Pozner, combining two perspectives which were gathered over an initial five year period. The research involved asking leaders and followers questions around:

- what qualities individual leaders believed they needed when they were at their most successful
- what qualities those who were being led believed were important when they felt themselves being well led

Analysis of the data revealed an underlying pattern of agreement – between leaders and those being led – about the leadership behaviours that emerged when people were accomplishing extraordinary things in organisations. These were then codified as the five practices of leadership.

When working at their best leaders said they challenged, inspired, enabled, modelled and encouraged. And they did this through committing themselves to particular sets of behaviour linked to these values. Importantly Kouzes and Posner argued that these leadership behaviours were an observable and learnable set of practices, available to anyone prepared to spend time developing them.

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Note that Kouzes and Posner call them practices – that is these qualities only manifest themselves when people actually do them.

Below we outline the five practices and their implications for leaders.

Challenge the process

The research found that leaders thrive on and learn from adversity and difficult situations. They are risk takers who regard failure – where not caused by poor performance – as a useful chance to learn and innovate. They are also early adopters of innovation. They seek out things that appear to work and then insist that they are improved. They challenge 24/7!

This practice suggests that we shouldn't be content to do 'business as usual'. As a leader you need to:

- Seek challenging opportunities to change, grow, innovate, and improve
- Experiment, take risks, and learn from the accompanying mistakes

Consider what part of your organisation's work you need to challenge. How many ideas do you have to implement? Are you prepared to take risks?

Inspire a shared vision

Kouzes and Posner found in their research that people are motivated most not by fear or reward, but by ideas that capture their imagination. This is not so much about having a vision, but communicating it effectively so that others take it on board. Great leaders are future orientated and seek to energise others by passion, enthusiasm and emotion. They want to bring people on board with this sense of shared purpose.

They will:

- Envision an uplifting and ennobling future
- Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes and dreams

It's easy to concentrate too much on crafting the perfect words for a vision and mission statement, and not enough on communicating it. Can you repeat – or even remember – your organisation's mission? How hard do you try to share it with others?

Enable others to act

Leaders don't seek to achieve it all themselves – they achieve results through others. But they do this not by simply repeating the vision mantra – encouragement and exhortation isn't enough. People must feel able to act and then must be supported to put their ideas into action. Collaboration and relationship-based work is central to success. As a leader you will need to:

- Foster collaboration by promoting co-operative goals and building trust
- Strengthen others by sharing information and power and by increasing their discretion and visibility
- Who in your team or organisation needs help and encouragement to act? What would help them to act?

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Model the way

Modelling means being prepared to go first, living the behaviours you want others to adopt before asking them to adopt them. People will believe not what they hear leaders say, but what they see their leaders consistently do. Great leaders should serve as an example to others:

- Set an example for others by behaving in ways that are consistent with your stated values
- Plan small wins that promote consistent progress and build

Do you tighten your own belt before asking others to cut back on expenditure? If you're in fundraising, do you donate to your own cause as an example of modelling the way for donors?

Encourage the heart

Finally Kouzes and Posner established that people act best of all when they are passionate about what they're doing. Leaders unleash the enthusiasm of their followers with stories and passions of their own. They enjoy celebrating successes – even small ones – and will tend to tackle difficult projects through recognising others' contributions. They:

- Recognise individual contributions to the success of every project
- Celebrate team accomplishments regularly

Have a think about your last staff newsletter or conference – did it meet this encouragement criterion? Was it exciting – or dull and safe? What could you do to encourage the heart at an organisational level?

By identifying your strengths and weaknesses in your leadership practice, it is possible to identify a relatively small number of areas you need to work on. Through awareness, coaching, practice and feedback, you can quickly make the transition from effective manager to outstanding leader.

What's next?

If you've found this article helpful and you would like more information, please call +44 (0)20 7978 1516 and speak to one of our experienced management consultants.

Kouzes and Posner also developed a 360° assessment questionnaire – the Leadership Practices Inventory. This tool scores leadership behaviour against the five practices and forms an important part of =mc's Strategic Leadership Programme. Explore your strengths and weaknesses as a leader, and introduce tools, techniques and approaches to develop and communicate strategy and change. [Click here for more information.](#)

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