

7 Things Great Leaders Always Do (But Mere Managers Always Fear)

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Are you a great leader or just a mere manager? Here's how to tell the difference.

When I think about the difference between *great leaders* and *mere managers*, I think back to a day when I put my foot in my mouth.

I was working as a lawyer for a giant government bureaucracy then. One of my bosses had a fancy title, but everyone referred to him simply as a "manager." One day, he was grumbling a bit about his role. He was caught in a sort of bureaucratic no man's land--uninvolved in the big policy decisions, but also no longer doing the fun part of our work (trying cases in court).

Without thinking, I said something like, "That's why I'd never want your job. Just because they call someone a manager doesn't mean they get to be a leader."

This was a pretty stupid thing for me to say, but I still think my point was right. In some organizations, almost anyone can get promoted to management if they put in the time and play the right politics. Instead of trying to become a mere manager, therefore, why not aspire to *become a great leader*? Here are a few of the key differences:

1. A great leader connects daily work with great goals. A mere manager focuses only on the short-term.

It's easy to get caught focusing on things that are *urgent*, rather than *important*. A mere manager spends most energy on the daily grind, and harangues his people for not achieving short-term goals, regardless of their long-term importance.

A truly great leader on the other hand, could hardly *care less about TPS reports*, or whatever the equivalent is in his or her workplace (and probably has to work to hide his or her contempt for such bureaucratic goofiness).

What matters most to him or her--it is what truly matters most.

2. A great leader thinks of people as people. A mere manager sees only titles or organizational charts.

If you catch yourself referring to people on your team by their job titles as often as by their names, beware--you're on the road to becoming more of a manager than a leader. A real leader thinks of people individually and holistically, and tries hard to understand strengths and weaknesses, goals and interests.

I saw this all too often in the military, for example, where great leaders grew to know their soldiers, and lesser leaders referred to them generically, either by their ranks or occupational specialties. There might be nothing less humanizing than to hear an officer refer to his troops as a bunch of "11-Bang-Bangs" (slang for "11-Bravo," which is in turn the bureaucratic designation for an infantry soldier).

3. A great leader wants to earn respect. A mere manager wants to be liked.

Great leaders aren't always the most likable people. In the long run, great leaders recognize that their job is to get people to do things they might not want to do, in order to achieve goals they want to achieve.

Contrast that with "mere managers," who either want to be liked or try to convince themselves that they don't care. Great leaders know that cordiality is necessary, but also that they might sometimes have to sacrifice short-term likability in favor of long-term respect.

4. A real leader is thrilled when team members achieve great things. A mere manager is threatened.

In the grand scheme of things, a mere manager doesn't have much. He or she hasn't aspired to enough in life, and has taken on a bureaucratic role. Yet that's all he or she has, and as a result, the fear of losing it can be overwhelming. Thus, when a team member outgrows her role, a manager worries first about being outshone.

A true leader, on the other hand, takes his or her team members' accomplishments as a point of pride, and recognizes that the mark of a great leader isn't creating followers--but instead developing other leaders.

5. A great leader empowers people with honesty and transparency. A mere manager parcels out information as if it costs him personally.

We've all seen likely this issue firsthand. A great leader understands that all else being equal, transparency shows respect for your team and helps them do good work.

A mere manager, however, fears that sharing information can be tantamount to giving up leverage. So he or she

holds cards close to the vest--and undermines the team's performance in the process.

6. A great leader understands that if the team falls short, he is responsible. A mere manager blames the team.

Once more, it all comes down to fear. A mere manager hasn't actually earned anyone's respect, and so he or she is constantly afraid of losing power. If the team doesn't accomplish its goals, the mere manager is primarily concerned about losing his or her role on an organizational chart.

A true leader, on the other hand, recognizes that no matter why the team falls short, he or she is to blame. Even if he or she believes that a specific team member might have been the cause, the true leader shoulders the blame and spurs the team to do better.

7. A great leader cares mainly about results. A mere manager is more concerned with process.

To be fair, some organizations' management positions are designed to protect processes, not to empower people. Still, if you're reading this, I'm going to assume that we have something in common, and that this kind of role holds little appeal for you. Seriously, who cares about process when the results are positive?

You might also realize that this puts you in the minority of leaders. Regardless, the main rule that a true leader lives by is that [it's better to be resourceful](#), and that it's always easier to get forgiveness than permission.