

Leading Your Small Business Team to Victory

by

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In all businesses there are leaders and there are managers. Sometimes they are one in the same, such as the owner of a very small business who not only dreams up the idea for his or her business but also manages it on a day to day basis. In larger companies the leader and manager can be two (or more) different people.

Sports teams offer some great lessons in leading and managing. With any great sports team, there must be someone who paints the picture of victory from that of an unforeseen future; in essence, he or she is the visionary that inspires the team to be its best. Usually referred to as the “coach,” this is the person that team members desire to follow. He or she is inspiring, often charismatic, and like the Pied Piper “pulls” others along to follow the vision of a better tomorrow. The leader is a “big picture” person.

We can think of a manager as similar to the pitching coach in baseball and softball. This is the person who gets into the details of how something should be done. He or she develops a plan for achieving the organization’s goals within the parameters of his or her particular department, just as the pitching coach plans for how many innings the pitcher will pitch, and which pitches will be thrown to whom and when. The manager develops goals with timelines to make certain that the team gets to where it needs to be by a particular date. He or she takes care of the “people” side of the business. The manager makes certain that the players are where they’re supposed to be by a certain time and that they’re following the training goals developed at the beginning of the season. In other words, the manager is the person who attends to the details of getting from point A to point B, all within the context of the larger picture which the leader has envisioned.

Leadership can be defined as a social influence process where the leader asks for the voluntary participation of his or her subordinates in order to reach the organization’s goals. Notice the emphasis on “voluntary” participation. Management on the other hand is the act of managing, supervising, or controlling. When one controls, he or she is not necessarily expecting voluntary participation, but instead might need to use various forms of persuasion.

It’s helpful to know who plays each role in your organization. As a small business entrepreneur, are you strictly the leader or manager, or does your situation require that you be both, switching back and forth many times over the course of the day? Being both leader and manager requires a tremendous amount of flexibility and knowing when to be one or the other. It can be difficult to do this well. It’s easy to get too far in the details when developing a strategic direction for your organization. It’s also easy to completely ignore the details while developing a fabulous vision for your organization. No wonder small business owners feel so stressed!

As a small business owner, most likely there will be times when you'll be in each of these roles. A business cannot be its most successful without both! Of course, it's far more comfortable for everyone if you can get your employees' voluntary participation. However, we all know that at times it is not possible. Employees can be incredibly resistant to change and downright inflexible at times, especially when they're trying to follow someone else's dream. It is then, when your leadership skills aren't working well enough or fast enough or outside forces put obstacles in your way that you may have to put on your management hat and delve into the details to get the job done for the benefit of the business' future. It's similar to what a pitching coach does when he or she decides to put in the relief pitcher or to change the pitching game plan to reach the team's ultimate goal.

Small business entrepreneurs have a tendency to lean toward either a leadership style or management style. That doesn't mean that they can't or shouldn't improve their skills on both sides. Just as a baseball or softball team needs good coaches, managers, fielders, pitchers, and hitters, not to mention a bat boy or girl, a business needs balance too. As a business owner, if you find that you're unable to switch easily between these roles or don't have the desire to be in one of these roles, then you might consider hiring someone who can perform the role where your weakness lies. That person could be an employee or perhaps even a consultant. However it's accomplished, getting both the roles of leader and manager covered can balance the team and be the key that helps your business have its best season ever!