



The Fast Track from Manager to Leader

The Purpose of Executive Coaching [Part III]

By Charlie Lang, Executive Coach & Trainer @ Progress-U Limited

How do you know if you are simply a manager or a leader as well?

The great Peter F. Drucker once said, "Management is doing things right, leadership is doing the right things." John Sculley offered an even more detailed comparison: "Leadership is often confused with other things, specifically management. As I see it, leadership revolves around vision, ideas, direction, and has more to do with inspiring people as to direction and goals than with day-to-day implementation. One can't lead unless one can leverage more than his own capabilities . . . You have to be capable of inspiring other people to do things without actually sitting on top of them with a checklist – that's management, not leadership."

I find that these two quotes give us a good idea of how a manager is different from a leader. Of course, a leader must not cease to be a manager in order to be a leader – it's just that he needs to develop additional competencies to become an effective leader. Are good management skills a prerequisite to being a good leader? Not necessarily, though these skills are highly useful.

So what does it take to become an effective leader?

Karen* is the managing director of the regional headquarters of a multinational company. She was pirated from a competitor where she was a successful sales director responsible for both the marketing and sales departments.

Less than half a year into her new job, she felt extremely stressed and drained of energy. She had never experienced this before – in fact, she was known for being a power woman, always positive and energetic. She couldn't quite understand what was going on. She worked long hours, as in her previous jobs, and was fully committed to achieve excellent results.

Unfortunately, the results didn't develop as expected and the workload seemed to increase by the day. What happened?

When Karen finally contacted me to figure out what was going on and how I could help her, I asked her to describe her typical working day in as much detail as possible. I also inquired about the way she communicated and interacted with the other senior managers. Finally, I asked her what components of her job are most important for her to be a successful managing director.

Based on her answers and the previously mentioned definitions of management and leadership, Karen appeared to function as a manager, not as a leader, in her new company.

The Fast Track from Manager to Leader

We also talked about how things worked out so well in her previous position. It turned out that her boss was a strong leader who took over the leadership aspect of her role as a sales director so she could focus on managing the daily work and supporting the key account managers in winning important orders. Together, they produced a winning combination of leadership and management.

She suddenly realized that this important function of her previous boss – which she took for granted at that time – was missing, and that it was her responsibility to take over this task.

Within the first 3 months, we focused on creating a clear direction for the regional headquarters, which we developed together with the senior management team:

- A vision statement (Where do we want to go?)
- A mission statement (Why do we want to go there? What is the purpose?)
- A value statement (Which principles should guide us on our way?)

Based on the vision, Karen and her directors decided on a strategy that would most likely make the vision a reality.

While completing the direction, we worked on her communication skills, especially when talking in front of larger internal or external groups. Karen also noticed that even though one of her strengths was her ability to create good rapport almost instantly, she sometimes had problems sustaining relationships. She realized that she rarely coached her reports, which caused frustration and decreased engagement.

As a consequence, we practiced coaching skills, feedback and feed-forward, as well as how to make employee participation more effective.

It was also important for Karen to learn that she had to let go of being the “super manager”, as a former colleague described her. This was not her main job anymore. As she already had a good knowledge of the capabilities of each of her reports, she was able to delegate more management tasks. Also, she followed my advice to employ a capable personal assistant to free her from everyday tasks.

As a result, after 9 months of coaching, Karen's and her company's situation changed dramatically:

The Fast Track from Manager to Leader

For Karen:

- She still worked long hours, but found it much more enjoyable.
- She became as energized as she used to be.
- She made the shift from being a “super manager” to being a “super leader.”

For her company:

- Engagement (we made an employee satisfaction inquiry at the beginning and after 9 months) greatly improved.
- Retention, especially of the high performers, considerably improved.
- The financial results showed a new positive trend after approximately 6 months.

Karen decided to continue having coaching sessions to further strengthen her leadership competencies. Also, she noticed that coaching helped her when making important decisions because she had an unbiased yet understanding sparring partner who challenged her thoughts and expanded her awareness.

Of course, professional executive coaching is not the only way to develop leadership competencies, but it is perhaps the fastest and most effective way. Cases like Karen's clearly prove the potential value of coaching.

* Details have been changed to protect the identity of our clients.

In Part IV of this series, we will explain how executive coaching can help successful managers change disruptive behaviors

Purpose Statement: The basic purpose of executive coaching is to help the coachee in his development in order to further improve his performance and make better decisions to maximize his success and, subsequently, the success of his organization.