

LEADERSHIP & CULTURE

Are you a Leader? Or a Manager?

By Leyla Hussein • 17 September 2019



"Managers light a fire under people; leaders light a fire in people." Kathy Austin said that, and I think about it more than I would like to admit.

Do you agree with her? I find myself arguing the difference between a manager and a leader constantly. Both are positions of authority, and the line meant to separate them has a habit of smudging until you genuinely cannot tell whether you are leading someone or simply managing them. That distinction matters more than it sounds.

Leaders vs Managers

Here is why. You cannot lead a team into hitting their deadlines, and you certainly cannot manage a team into feeling motivated. People do not run that way. The two things pull on completely different parts of us.

In [The Chimp Paradox](#), Professor Steve Peters describes how we evolved over millennia to survive whatever surrounded us. The encouraging read of that is you are not fixed. You can reprogramme yourself into a leader or a manager as the moment demands. It takes time and effort, but it is absolutely learnable.

We are driven by emotion. Emotional ties push us to do better, whether the reward is money or a way of living, and we are inspired most by people we can relate to, the ones who faced something similar to us and came out climbing faster and further than we are now. That pull is leadership, and it is real.

But wanting is not doing. We need management to keep us on track in a world that wants a thousand things finished yesterday, because time is precious and inspiration is slippery. We all know that jolt of feeling ready to change something about ourselves, right now, instantly. And we all know what usually happens next. The day swallows it, and we quietly tell ourselves next time. That gap is exactly what management exists to close. A manager reminds you what lit you up and gets you to act on it there and then, before the day steals it back. We want leaders. We do not always realise we need managers just as much.

The Real Difference

So what is the actual difference? [Leaders inspire.](#) They mine their own experience for stories that move you. [Managers align.](#) They line you up with your goals and make those goals reachable.

Striking the Balance

My conclusion is that success in anything needs both, held in balance rather than treated as rivals. Inspire and align, and people achieve. Leave out either one, and you are only ever doing half the job.

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