

Leadership is an attitude

In *Being a leader and being 'in charge'* I argued that being in charge and being a leader aren't the same thing. Nelson Mandela was a leader but, for much of his later life, he was not in charge; politicians are in charge, but few rarely show even a shred of leadership.

Do any amount of research and you'll discover many definitions of leadership—almost all of them different and most of them mutually contradictory. Why is there such a confusion about something apparently as obvious an idea as leadership? The other day, I was discussing leadership with some people who had recently had 'leadership training', so I asked them the simple question, 'What is leadership?'. None of them could give me a coherent definition. That's like going on a cookery course and not being able to give a definition—any definition—of what 'cooking' is.

I don't know why this is the case. So, instead, I take the line that, whilst there may be no such thing as the 'right' definition of leadership, wouldn't it be helpful to find a useful definition?

A big problem is the widespread smearing of the concepts of leadership and management. Myles Downey, author of *Effective coaching*, says "Leadership: the element of the (manager's) role that is concerned with the future. It is concerned with creating a vision...". Is leadership really just a component of management? Were Gandhi's or Churchill's leadership qualities byproducts of their being managers? Of course leaders may create visions, but that isn't the defining characteristic of leadership. Be careful not to fall into the trap of saying "because leaders do X, X must be leadership".

"Great managers look inward. They look inside the company, into each individual... Great leaders, in contrast, look outward. They look out at the competition, out at the future..." (Marcus Buckingham, *First discover your strengths*, an otherwise useful book). I would like to suggest that management and leadership are qualitatively entirely different things, certainly not like the two sides of one coin. And certainly not defined by the focus of one's attention.

The problem with Downey's and Buckingham's definitions, and many others—even if they were true—is that they do not help the would-be leader be a better leader. What is needed is a useful definition and, in this short article, I will get to the point quickly.

Management is a job and leadership is an attitude.

Management is a set of behaviours and activities, whereas leadership is an approach to people, it's how you treat people, it's how you are.

Management is what you do, leadership is a mindset. If leadership were a job, the widely accepted saying, 'leaders create leaders', couldn't be true, as everyone would end up fighting to drive the bus.

Bear with me. If leadership is an attitude, the idea of training leadership is a difficult one. How do you train attitude? At emotional intelligence at work, we recognise that there is much which leaders need to know in order to understand how best to develop their approach; it is necessary to compare the leadership styles of others and learn from them; and there is value in sharing experience with others.

In *Effective leadership* I cite the motto of the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, *Serve to lead*. What this means is that if a trainee officer thinks they are going to lead a squad of soldiers, they had better be in service to them first. Being in service is an attitude, of course. Service is something the British think they dislike doing, though they're happy to demand it from everyone else. They mistake it for servility or servitude. However, in truth, it is nothing to do with abasing oneself, it is simply about making the other person more important than you. Officers eat last.

Leadership is communicated by far more than observable behaviour. A lot of it is subconscious and much of the rest is nonverbal. Attempting to inculcate leadership 'skills' in managers by telling them what to do or say completely misses the point, and the fact that there are people who, in good faith I am sure, seek to do this doesn't negate the point. A robot playing chess is not a real flesh and blood grand master just because it can play chess better than he or she can.

Some managers manage process, but most managers manage people. Managing people isn't leadership, but it is something that will be done far better by a manager who is also a leader. Managers who are leaders behave differently from managers who aren't leaders. But the different behaviour does not define leadership. It arises from leadership.

So here is my useful definition of leadership:

Management is a job—a set of activities and tasks.
Being in charge is a role—a set of responsibilities and duties.
Leadership is an attitude—a set of beliefs and emotions.

Jeremy Marchant