

METAMORPHOSIS



JUST THE FACTS

One of the differences between leadership and management is leaders have people who follow them, while managers have people who work for them. Leading people, as opposed to pushing them, has a

significant effect on the culture you create.

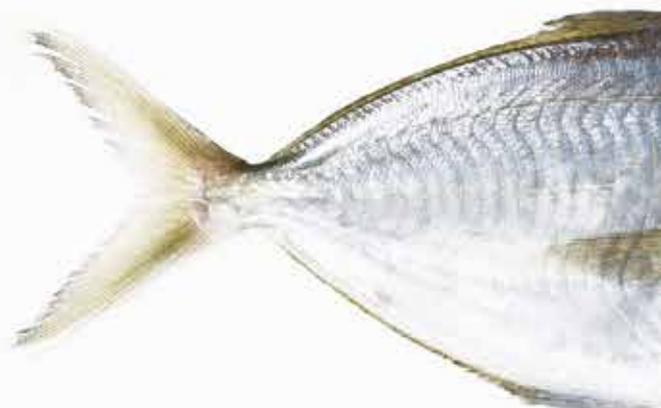
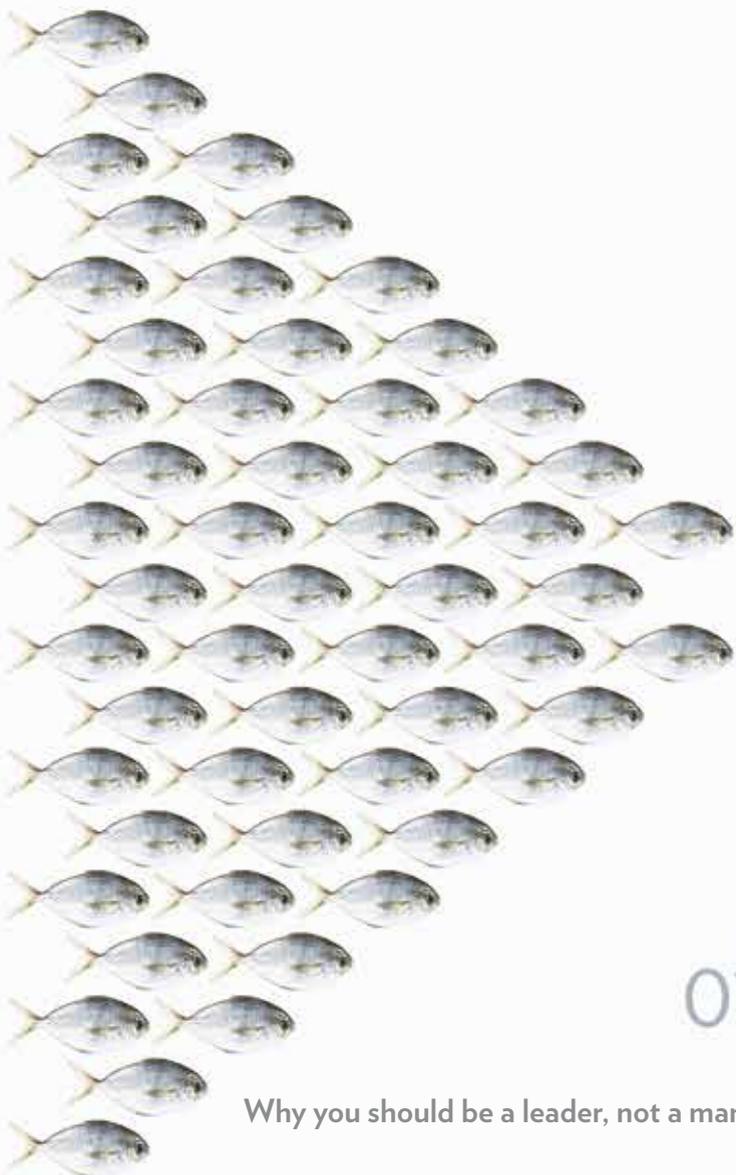
For quality improvement to take hold, you must create an environment in which people feel safe and appreciated. A leadership style of

management is more likely to create the culture needed to build a strong foundation for quality.

The author offers six key strategies to move beyond management and into leadership.

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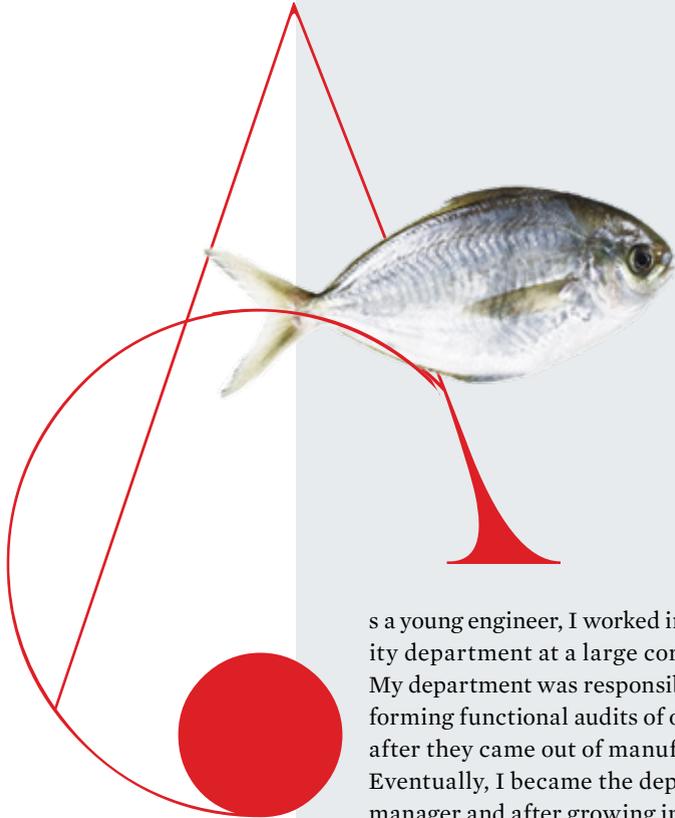
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Why you should be a leader, not a manager, and 6 strategies for success by Joseph Diele

MANAGER



s a young engineer, I worked in the quality department at a large corporation. My department was responsible for performing functional audits of our products after they came out of manufacturing. Eventually, I became the department manager and after growing into the role, things seemed to be going well.

When the longtime quality director left, a new director was brought in from one of the top organizations in our industry. As he got more involved, we had a few discussions and, based on his many years of management experience, he impressed me as someone who really understood people. He recognized that I was new to management and offered to help anytime.

One day, he said that he had been watching me and was going to make a change. Feeling the department was running well, I wasn't sure what he was talking about. He said, "I've decided to move you over to manage the safety department."

"Safety?" I asked. "I know nothing about safety."

"Exactly!" he said. He noticed that every decision made in my department went through me. "All your people feel they must check with you first before doing anything," he said. "It's time you learn how to lead. The safety team is experienced and can manage itself. All you need to do is lead it."

When I got past the shock, it was clear this was going to be a major change. At first,

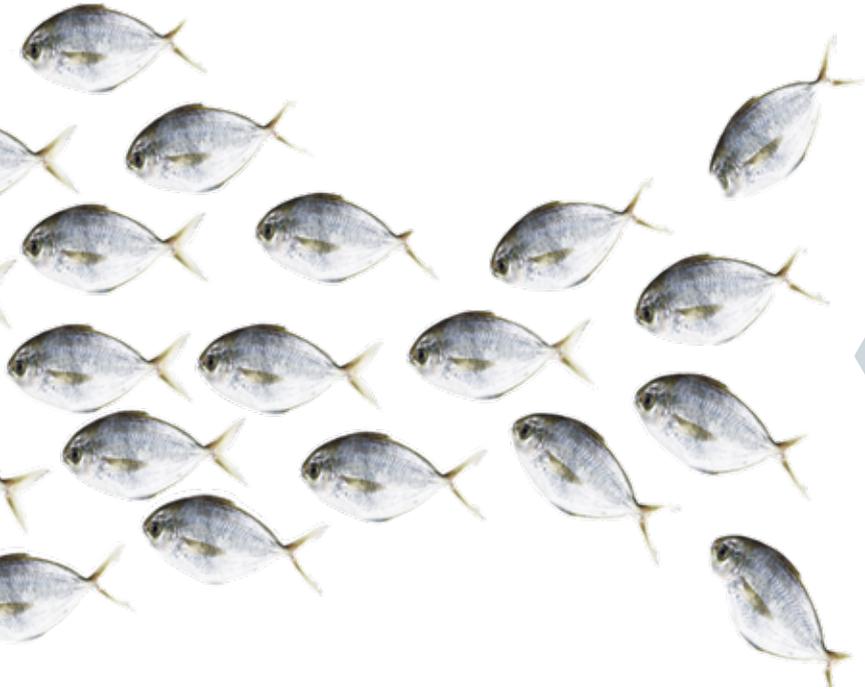
I had no idea how to be useful. After a stressful first week of trying to learn the ropes, I sat down with the team and was honest. We discussed my lack of experience in safety, and I looked to the team to handle the daily work. We talked about its issues and concerns, and what would make things better or more efficient. It turned out the new director was correct—the team absolutely knew how to manage the safety work.

Listening to its issues, concerns and what typically got in the way of the team doing its jobs helped develop trust. Based on our discussion, I focused on knocking down obstacles, getting it better visibility across the groups it supported and simply helping individual team members to be successful.

This change was my first "wow" moment of awareness about the difference between managing and leading. As it turned out, the change was good for all of us. I was able to get the safety team more visibility and support, and getting to know each team member helped me guide them toward their career aspirations.

Learning more about leadership became my passion, which led me to enroll in graduate school. The degree program focused on the science of management, with a heavy emphasis on leadership and transformational change. It was progressive and unique at a time when everyone was going after an MBA.

One night in class, the professor gave everyone an eight-inch piece of string



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and told us to straighten it out perpendicular to ourselves. He then instructed, “Now take the end of the string closest to you and push it across the table with no help from your other hand.” As you can imagine, everyone struggled. The string went anywhere but forward. The professor watched, unsurprised. After a few minutes, he said “Stop! Now, straighten out the string in front of you again. Grab the end of the string farthest from you and pull the string to the end of the table.”

Of course, everyone accomplished this in seconds. The professor explained that the two exercises showed the contrast between management and leadership. The first exercise represented the old philosophy of management in which managers were told to push their employees to ensure their work got done. The second exercise showed that leading employees is much more productive than pushing them.

These two simple exercises have stayed with me throughout my years in management. As I learned more about the differences between management and leadership, that exercise was my second “wow” moment of awareness. It inspired me to develop a better understanding of people and how to make them highly productive and successful.

While these experiences do not make me a leadership expert, they undoubtedly have made me a better manager. A leadership style of management is more likely to create the culture needed to build a strong foundation for quality. Leading people, as opposed to pushing them, could make a significant difference in the type of culture you create.

Addressing today’s management problem

There is a huge problem with how individual contributors get moved into management today. Because technical expertise has become the measure of success in most industries, promotion into management becomes a means for retaining top technical talent. Technical expertise is not limited to

hardware or software. It can be financial, sales, nursing or operations expertise, for example. Most of my career has been in the technology industry, so I can say with confidence that this is the case at many tech companies.

In my first management role, I most certainly drove my team crazy. Because I knew (or at least thought I knew) how everything should be done technically, I micromanaged the team on how to do just about everything. I demanded more from it technically than it was ready for. But the biggest issue was that, up to that point, nobody had taught me how to be a manager.

If you do not know any better, every problem becomes a technical problem—even when it’s not. This happens every day in the tech world and not just at the first level of management. It happens all the way up the management chain. In fact, company founders often are a few brilliant minds with an innovative idea.

I was truly fortunate that someone knew and cared enough to make me aware of this early in my management career. It made enough of an impression on me that I continued to get formal management training. I have since tried to help managers who report to me so they do not make the same mistakes.

But who is helping all of today’s managers who get thrust into management because they were the most technical person in the room or organization? I am talking about some truly brilliant people (technically) who may not have a clue how to be a manager (or at least a good manager). When the benchmark that everyone is measured against is technical expertise, why would anyone waste time learning about management? Just tell your people what to do and let them know when they didn’t meet your expectations. Without some type of management training, most of them don’t know what they don’t know.

Let's use software quality as an example. Today, most organizations want to hire someone technical to lead the software development and quality assurance teams. But their selection criteria are upside down. Having a software background certainly does not hurt, but what these teams really need is a good leader who understands the big picture and how to inspire people.

It also is important for the leader to know enough about quality to prevent defects, instead of searching for them. A good leader can bring in the technical skills she or he may be lacking to ensure coders are coding correctly, for example. But if the software leader is in the weeds checking lines of code or creating testing frameworks, it is doubtful she or he is focusing on the things that contribute to that high cost of poor quality or building a culture that makes the team more productive.

One last important distinction is the difference between an untrained manager and a bad manager. For untrained managers, it is mostly a matter of getting them some formal management training, ideally before they are responsible for managing people. For bad managers who continue to use bully tactics, such as intimidation, this approach eventually will catch up to them—it always does. Either they cross a line and must be removed from management (or the organization), or it greatly affects productivity to the point that they are ineffective and cause people to leave. Employee turnover can be costly to any business.

How can technical managers who are untrained in management affect quality? Consider this list of demotivators that can negatively influence your culture:

- Most employees quit their boss, not the organization. If employees cannot trust their direct boss, at the very least they will be demotivated, but more likely, they will leave eventually.
- A bad culture sucks the productivity out of people and kills creativity. This is the top reason for high turnover.
- It is not unreasonable to occasionally expect long hours from your employees. But if "occasionally" turns into "ongoing" or "routine," that is a problem. Demanding more and more from your employees leads to burnout, more mistakes and higher absenteeism.
- Everyone looks for meaning in their job. People want to know they are contributing something. That is what makes the work rewarding. Give them a reason for what they are doing—a constancy of purpose, as W. Edwards Deming said.



READ MORE

For more information on leadership, visit the Learn About Quality page, "What Is Leadership?" at asq.org/quality-resources/leadership. It covers the two main types of leadership—operational and strategic—and the differences between management and leadership. It also offers a comprehensive list of ASQ leadership resources, including books, articles and webcasts.

- It is hard to hit the target when you don't know what the target is. This can be so frustrating for an employee. You should never have to guess whether you are working on the right thing or doing things right.
- Any type of harassment or bullying causes disengagement. These types of issues will continue to escalate until someone quits or is fired.

- Over-managing or babysitting employees who don't need it kills creativity and confidence. It drives people to either stop thinking or leave the organization.
- There is nothing worse than bringing a new employee onboard and having nothing ready for her or him, such as a workspace, initial tasks and training. All the enthusiasm the new employee came into the organization with will fade away quickly.
- Why establish processes, policies and procedures if they aren't enforced? It is especially bad when management continues to make exceptions or excuses for not following the very processes they wanted in place.
- If your employees can't trust you, they won't follow you. Don't make promises you can't keep. Do what you say you will do.

How many of these do you think could be the result of an untrained manager who is completely focused on technical work, deadlines and execution? How likely is it that these issues are contributing to a less-than-ideal culture? It's difficult to focus on quality improvement or to do your best work in environments in which these things happen.

Leadership vs. management

What is the difference between leadership and management? One of the main differences is that leaders have people who follow them, while managers have people who work for them. Another difference is that leaders tend to focus more on the future and possibilities, while managers focus on what must get done today. The list in Table 1 shows the traits of a leader compared to the traits of a manager.

Focusing on leadership skills does not mean completely disregarding management skills. The daily work still must get done—that is part of being in management. The real difference between a manager and a leader is less about getting the work done and more about how you approach getting it done.

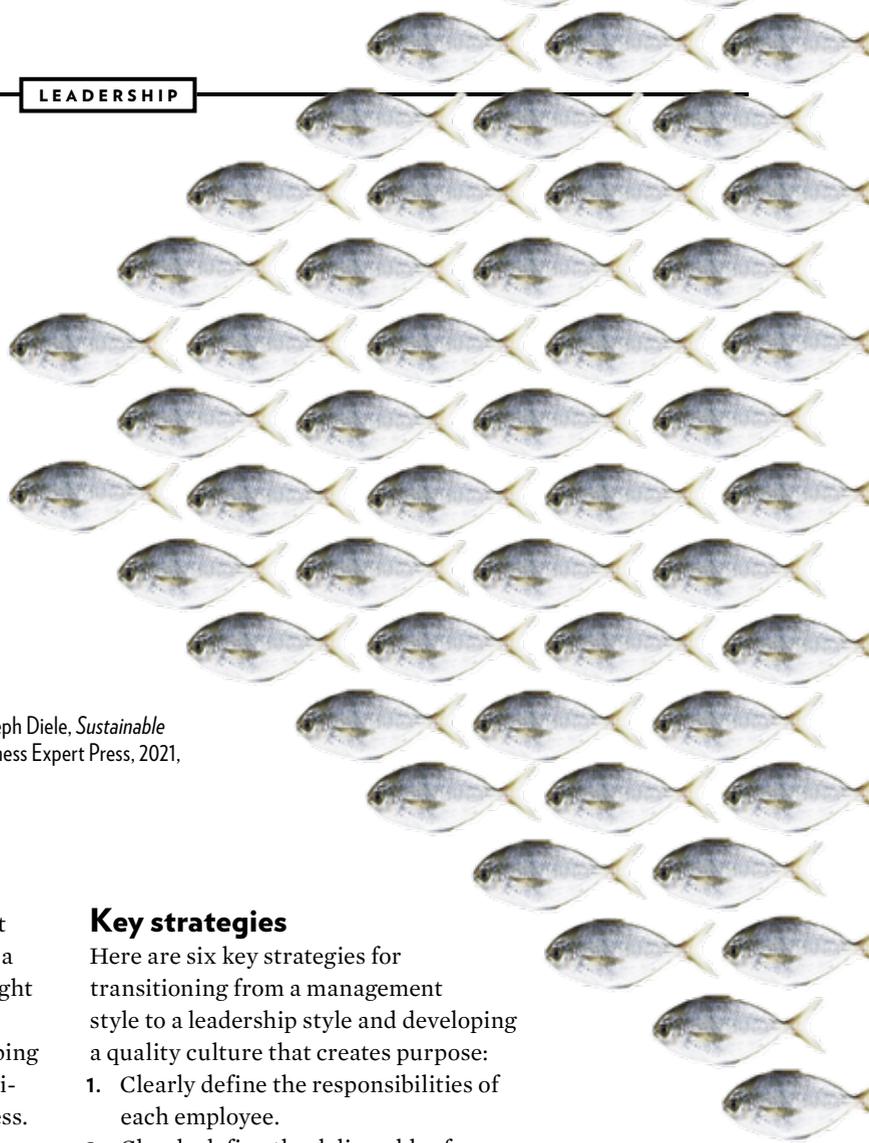
Rarely do I ever tell someone directly to do something. Unless it is an urgent situation, I always ask them or, better yet, use questions to guide them toward what must be done.

TABLE 1

Traits of a leader vs. traits of a manager

Leader	Manager
Creates vision	Creates goals
Pulls team	Pushes team
Coach/mentor	Directs
Role model	Routine
Empowering	Controlling
Change agent	Status quo
Takes risks	Controls risks
Builds relationships	Builds systems

Source: Joseph Diele, *Sustainable Quality*, Business Expert Press, 2021, pp. 121-127.



Make it a dialogue, not a monologue. I have found that often during these short discussions, the employee has a better idea or approach than me, although she or he might not have gotten there without the discussion.

Clearly defining tasks, monitoring progress and helping the team with issues are all management responsibilities. The key is to view the team's success as your success. It should be about what the team accomplishes, and the manager is part of the team. Every person is motivated differently. Get to know team members individually and what motivates each person. Try to rid your team of demotivators and find ways to make them excited about their role. Then help them when they need help, praise them when they go beyond your expectations, hold them accountable when they fall behind and inspire them always.

I had the pleasure of talking to a former employee of mine recently. He was an incredibly talented and hardworking young engineer. We worked together in a demanding and thankless environment, and I could see that the stress and demands were wearing on him. I came in each day wondering whether it would be the day he resigned.

So, while we were talking, I asked him why he lasted as long as he did. He told me, "It was because of you. I would have quit long before if it wasn't for you."

I share this not to pat myself on the back but to show that it is possible to create a bond with people so they will fight through tough times with you if they trust you. The old sales notion also holds true in management: People must know you before they like you, and like you before they trust you.

Key strategies

Here are six key strategies for transitioning from a management style to a leadership style and developing a quality culture that creates purpose:

1. Clearly define the responsibilities of each employee.
2. Clearly define the deliverables for those responsibilities.
3. Set goals for each employee, which can include required goals and stretch goals.
4. Create a shared understanding of how each employee's goals support the department and organizational goals.
5. Assess each employee's skills and performance against their responsibilities. Develop an action plan to help them improve.
6. Continuously look for opportunities to provide feedback, both formal and informal.

For quality improvement to take hold, you must create an environment in which people feel safe and appreciated. They must understand the overall direction of the organization and their role in it. When that happens, you can make continuous improvement sustainable. **QP**



Joseph Diele is a quality consultant for Diele-Wood Consulting in Westminster, CO. He received a master of science degree in management from Regis University in Denver. Diele is a member of ASQ and an MSI-certified Six Sigma Black Belt. He is the author of *Sustainable Quality* (Business Expert Press, 2021).