

What Makes a Leader?

How You Can Lead From Anywhere in Your Organization

The traditional definitions of a manager and leader have become outdated. They are based on assumptions that decisions are made at the top and implemented at the bottom, and that information is fairly static so the boss knows most of what's going on. In our networked age, this model no longer serves us well. Each of us needs to lead in our role, wherever we are on an organization chart. Taking initiative, using our influence, and working hard on the areas that make us passionate are some of the ways to do this.

5 Common Excuses for Not Leading

1 ■ I can't lead. I don't have a position of authority.

This is based on the traditional view that "position" equals "authority." We might not have authority but we can all have influence – when we use our strengths, we are leading.

2 ■ I'm not a natural take-charge person.

Yes, there are "habitual leaders" who can take charge in any situation with good results; these are the people we think of as "natural leaders." Most of us are "situational leaders" who can lead when we are using our strengths and passions.

3 ■ I'm introverted so I don't influence others. Even the most introverted of us will influence 10,000 people in our lifetimes. Be intentional and you'll have more influence.

4 ■ If everyone is a leader, who is following? This is the wrong way of looking at leadership; consider, instead that it's like a soccer match, back and forth, back and forth.

5 ■ Leaders are born, not made. The historical view of leadership emphasized traits and charisma. New research confirms that behaviors are what matter and behaviors can be learned.

The Four Capabilities Leadership Framework

A team at MIT's Sloan School of Management spent four years researching what the key leadership capabilities are. We each prefer one style over the other, but leadership is a learned behavior, so we can be competent in each one.

Sense-making – Making sense of the world around us. Help people make a map of what is.

Relating – Developing key relationships within and across organizations. Leaders use inquiry, advocacy, and connecting.

Visioning – Creating a compelling idea of the future. Visioning answers, "Why am I doing this?" and provides a sense of meaning.

Inventing – Creating new ways of working together. Implement the steps needed to create the vision.

(Ancona, Senge, MIT Sloan, 2006)

