

With a shift in focus,
managers can become leaders.

WHEN CONSCIOUSLY TRANSITIONING managers into leaders, it's vitally important to get things right. Managers sometimes trip on their way up, but senior leaders can mitigate this stumbling with an aggressive strategy.

Managers are typically promoted into leadership roles with the thought that their effectiveness will continue. But rather than assume, senior leaders are wise to put into place a two-pronged approach. The first prong is to place the right candidate. The old cliché applies: "Hire for attitude and train for ability."

The second prong is to *cultivate* the well-selected candidate. This involves extensive training opportunities and environments that promote growth.

Transitioning managers into leaders should ideally start long before the switch is flipped. Early on, candidates should be "groomed" through extensive training, cross-program experiences and leadership development. Preferably, the training, experience and development will culminate by equipping the candidate-leader with a view and an understanding of the "leadership landscape." Placing an incumbent leader in a productive environment is less precise.

The context of leadership can be polarizing, ambiguous, volatile and complex. So out of necessity, strong support systems must be in place. A network of colleagues to model the way and offer reassurance along with mentors, coaches and careful monitoring will serve as the classic challenge/support system to promote a productive transition while cultivating new leaders.

Five Shifts

New leaders changing roles should focus on shifting or transitioning in five broad areas:

1. From Production to Outcomes. The immediate challenge for managers is to shift their thinking and operating from a "making widgets" mindset to an influencing outcomes mindset. It is inherent in the leadership process that the leader influences the outcome. As the new leader begins working with department heads and stakeholders, they need

to be operating from a new perspective, a long-term view via short-term, stepping stone implementation. The role of the leader is to influence the long term with organizational strategy in mind.

Rather than making and counting widgets, a new leader must have both eyes toward efficiencies now and necessary adaptations toward the future.

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2. From Specialist to Visionary. Managers thrive as specialists. They know their department, their people and their function. But that's not enough for a leader. Leaders must know the language of all departments. They must be able to translate information, patterns and trends from departments into the language of efficiencies, profit and direction. The vision of the organization is up to the leadership. No one else will

take the reins here. Leaders must harness what is known now with the trends they see in the telescope and provide direction. Vision can be complex and multifaceted, but nothing can beat everyone pulling in the same direction. This can be one big advantage that will be difficult for competitors to duplicate.

3. From One to All. Managers have the responsibility to manage the day-to-day on the floor. They are embedded with the staff. Leaders don't manage things as much as they lead direction. Whereas a manager focuses on employee engagement, a leader has a focus of workforce engagement.

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A new leader may have lingering “departmental biases” that show up as baggage that slows meetings and other processes down. The classic mistake is for new leaders to over-manage and under-lead, especially their previous function. Colleagues need to give the new leader their patience while he or she cultivates an open-minded shift from managing one department to serving all departments in the organization.

4. From Solving Problems to Seeing Problems Before they Develop. Strictly speaking, managers and leaders are keen problem-solvers. But one of the finer points of leadership—and where leaders earn their keep—is seeing problems *before*

they happen. If a leader can identify slowed growth or a decline in earnings early on—and proactively put things in place to avoid the dreaded “workforce planning”—this “seeing” can save everyone.

5. From Worker to Learner. Leadership is not about knowing; it’s about learning. New leaders typify the shift from a working manager to a learning leader. As they work to cultivate an open mind and flexibility, they must also demonstrate a commitment to relentless self-improvement—which means applying continuous learning toward competency, excellence and greatness.

When new developing leaders are hand-selected, cultivated and afforded the organizational backing necessary for success, it’s more than an exercise in succession. It’s a testament to a leadership strat-

egy and a state-of-the-art demonstration of a leadership culture. Over time, the effort builds into the ultimate competitive advantage. ■

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