



Are You a Boss or a Leader?



The daughter of a friend of mine recently quit her job at a retail commercial bank. When I asked her why, she said: “My boss meant well, even tried all sorts of cute stuff to motivate us, but I left because he had no clue about what motivates ME. He never stopped trying to motivate his staff with one-size-fits-all gimmicks, but it never occurred to him to ask what really motivates each one of us individually.”

Poor leadership like this is all too common, and not enough is done about it.

The problem: there are too many bosses, but too few leaders around. The difference is simple: leaders do whatever it takes to maximise their employees’ engagement; while bosses just want to enjoy the privileges of their position. While most organisations offer leadership training, it’s usually formulaic, and based on competency models and copy-cat role plays. To turn bosses into leaders, we must rethink our approach to leadership development. To begin with, let’s take a closer look at the differences between the two.

Leaders find limitless energy within themselves to create a better future

Bosses cling to the past and cope with the present

True leaders first envision a better future, and strive hard for as long as it takes to create it. The challenge with articulating a better future is that other people often resist it. To stay the course, you need limitless energy. Most bosses find it more comfortable to cope with the present instead of striving to create a better future.

On a rainy day in Bangalore, Ratan Tata saw a family of four spill onto the road, all dangerously piled atop a tiny scooter. Shaken by the accident, he asked himself – how can we make commuting safer for Indian families? When he announced his plans for a “Peoples Car,” opposing companies laughed it off, critics tore the idea apart, and cynics dismissed it as a big joke.

But he surged ahead, and in 2008, Tata Motors delivered the cheapest car in the world, the Nano.

Everyone sees the terrible and unsafe road conditions of India every day. It takes a leader like Tata to first envision a better future, and then find the energy to create it.

Leaders are clear about their purpose at all times

Bosses seldom have a purpose and live a reactive existence

Lasting energy comes first from clarity of purpose. When you know where you're headed, you feel energised and walk at a brisk pace. When you don't have a destination in mind, you wander about slowly, reacting to things as they come your way. The problem is that most people are unable to answer the question: what is your purpose?

Despite numerous rejections, obstacles and challenges, Howard Schultz finally managed to create the company "his father never had the chance to work for" – a company built on the principles of respect and dignity for all. He was seven when his father lost his truck driving job after an accident. The family of five that never earned more than \$20,000 a year now had no income, and huge medical bills to pay. It was then that young Howard decided to "not leave anyone behind." Starbucks became the first American company to provide full healthcare benefits even to part-time employees, and continues to spend more money on benefits than it does on buying coffee.

Leaders lead with values

Bosses command with position power

The second source of lasting energy is clarity on personal values. Values tell people what to do and how to behave when there are no ready answers. Leaders set the example with their own behavior in order to influence others.

How did Gandhi lead millions without ever holding political or military office? How did he fight the world's greatest power without firing a bullet or shedding a drop of blood? He had no authority or title, yet people willingly laid down their lives for him because he lived the values he espoused – humility, truth, and non-violence.

Leaders willingly recruit co-leaders and share both authority and responsibility

Bosses assign responsibility but do not share authority

Today's world is too complex for any one person to have all the answers. To succeed today, one must be willing to share leadership. Leadership is something that grows with sharing – the more you share it, the greater and more powerful it becomes. Mere bosses do not understand this.

Goldman Sachs has co-heads and even tri-heads for important positions. It is extremely difficult for most people to share leadership, but at Goldman it is now part of the company's DNA. At Goldman, if you are not prepared to share leadership, you might as well look for a job elsewhere.

Leaders successfully move from "I" to "We" and create conditions for collective success

Bosses stay fixated on "I" and create conditions to maximise personal success

Instead of worrying about how to maximise their personal power, or to create great results themselves, authentic leaders make it their full-time job to facilitate the success of others.

As Jim Collins reports in *Good To Great*, we don't hear about some of the best leaders in business history because they did nothing to build their personal celebrity status. Instead, they surrounded themselves with able co-leaders and worked tirelessly to support their people and build great organisations.

At the end of the day, leadership is the art of harnessing human energy towards the creation of a better future. And while leaders must energise teams and organisations, true leadership starts at home – with you. Finding your personal source of energy is a long journey – ask yourself a few questions to get started:

1. What few things are most important to me?
2. What kind of life do I want to live? A simple one, rich with everyday pleasures? Achieve great personal success? Lead others toward a better future?
3. What results do I want to bring about?
4. How do I want people to experience me?
5. What values will guide my behavior?
6. What situations cause me to feel strong emotions?