

## Size doesn't matter: Little fish can be leaders too

Jennifer Dootson, d-wise, Manchester, UK

### ABSTRACT

The expectation of working culture today is that there is flexibility. More and more people are working remotely, more and more are working flexible hours. Organisations are offering these opportunities to employees but to what detriment? Can true leaders be identified when employees are isolated in an office of one? The following considers what it means to be a leader, how being a leader translates into the modern working world and also provides insight into how you can become a leader, whether remote or in a position not naturally associated with the mainstream concept of "leadership".

### INTRODUCTION

At one point or another in our careers we will all face the challenge of low engagement. Often this comes from a lack of "power" within the organisation, the perception that we are not in control of what it is that we are doing, where we are heading, the goals and targets that we are creating and achieving. Working for an organisation, unless it is your organisation, can often feel like you are working towards someone else's goals and leaves you unfulfilled. Why do I mention this? Because leadership will reinvigorate you. The ability to lead will move you to the next stage in your career and will give you the drive to be the most successful version of yourself.

### WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Leadership is something that is earned. Leadership is something that everyone can obtain – do not be fooled into thinking that only people with a certain outlook on life, people with a certain "je ne sais quoi", people at the top of the organisation are the only ones that can be leaders. This just isn't true. Yes, these people can and are often leaders but to think that only a certain type of person can be a leader is like suggesting that only a certain type of person can ride a bike. We all learn in different ways, and we all become successful in different ways. So what exactly is leadership. It seems prudent to have an "official" definition to work from.

*"the action of leading a group of people or an organization, or the ability to do this."*

What is interesting about leadership is that it can be seen and utilised in both a positive and negative way. It can be perceived as guidance or direction when viewed positively but can be seen as command, control, authority when viewed negatively.

### CAN ANYONE BE A LEADER?

As mentioned above, you'll read that not everyone can be a leader. This isn't true and by the end of this paper you will hopefully not only understand why but have the tools and ability to use them to become a leader yourself. Let's dispel some myths...

Myth number one: you cannot be a leader when you work remotely.

FALSE

People have been leading remotely for a VERY long time. Julius Caesar didn't Skype his army to give them a quick pep-talk when they were in battle. He developed reliable networks of people. He provided people with the knowledge and confidence that a good job could be done even in his absence. And his teams were successful. Leaders have been leading remotely for much longer than they have been leading sat behind a desk in the same office 50 yards away. Being remote is not an excuse, neither is it a hindrance. It just requires a different approach to leadership, one which is much more strategic. One which we will go into more detail about below.

Myth number two: Unless you're at the top, you can't be a leader

FALSE

## PhUSE 2016

Gmail was created and the project was led by a developer within Google called Paul Buchheit. He realised that there was a need for a much quicker interface than those provided by other email services and set about utilising Javascript and integrated it with HTML to provide a solution to this problem. Paul was not a high level leader, he did not sit at “C-suite” level. What he did have was a solution to a problem and the conviction to lead the solution to fruition. Without leaders at all levels, organisations would limit their innovative capabilities. The fact of the matter is, you are actually more likely to be innovative and lead a solution to a problem at a lower level because you have the time capabilities to work on said solution.

### LEADING AND MANAGING ARE DIFFERENT THINGS

Leaders are innovative. Leaders are not afraid to put themselves out there and take a stance on something that they believe in. They have conviction, they have purpose, and above all they are strategic. Managers can be leaders but not all managers are leaders. Managers are content “going with the flow”, following the path of the organisation but not adding to it, not directing it. Leaders can take the vision of the organisation and use it to their advantage. Being a leader is about identifying a problem within the organisation and providing and “leading” the solution to that problem. Now the good bit...

### HOW TO BECOME A LEADER

The below diagrams depict generally the different attitudes and behaviours related to spotting a problem. The majority of people will identify a problem and then bring it to the attention of their direct manager. It may be a small problem, it may be a problem that with work-arounds is liveable, or it may be a big problem. The key is that the person will identify the problem and then pass it on.

Bring to managers attention



Identify problem

1. Identification of a problem is the first step to leadership, but that step alone will not make you a leader.

There are some people who move beyond the first step and not only identify a problem but can also identify a solution before taking it to their direct manager.

Bring to managers attention



Identify solution

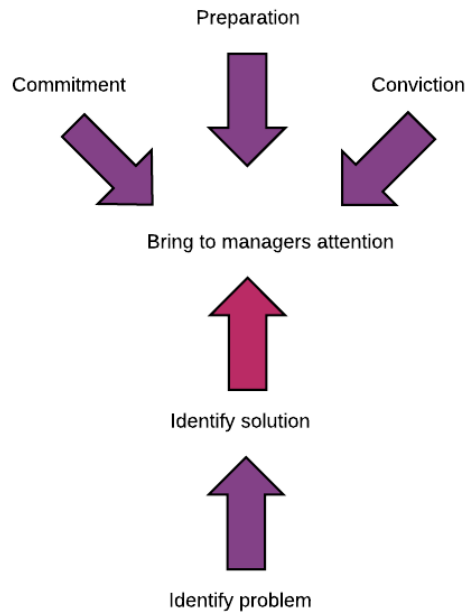


Identify problem

## PhUSE 2016

2. Providing a solution is the second step to leadership. No one ever became a leader by just pointing out the things that were wrong. Leaders often lead because they can sell their ideas, which “leads” us to the next point.

Sadly, identifying a problem and providing a solution will not make you a leader, otherwise it would be easy and we would all setting out leading the good fight to fix the wrongs within the industry and our companies. Leaders are clever, they are strategic. The key to leading within your organisation is to not only identify a problem, and provide a solution, but to be clever enough to then package that problem/solution to align with the company goals and visions.



3. The real key to leadership is being able to strategically plan ahead. Know the company vision, prepare your ideas/plans/solutions ahead of time and know exactly how everything fits. If you can sell it, they will buy it.
4. You have to have commitment. Know that there might be setbacks and accept that this is a part of becoming a leader. Leaders do not give up at the first sign of a problem. They do not back down when a barrier is put in their way. This commitment will also manifest itself as responsibility and ownership of a solution
5. Have conviction, be convincing, talk about your solution as though it is the most important thing to the success of the organisation. Not everyone is charismatic but everyone can fake it. Be convincing and believe in the solutions that you are providing.

### JUST ONE MORE THING...

Although not included in the above list we cannot forget the importance of networking. You do not have to be in the same location as others to network. Network strategically, plan where you want to be and who can help you get there. Often it may be who has the most to gain (or the least to lose) from the solution that you are providing. Nonetheless, think about who you talk to. Get buy in from those that matter in the early stages and then they can be advocates in the later stages or in instances when you may hit a roadblock.

### CONCLUSION

When written on paper it seems quite straight formulaic and straight forward to become a leader. Do not be fooled. Becoming a leader will not happen overnight. It takes time, effort, and commitment but the good news is that not only is it worth it but it becomes easier the more you do it. Start off with leading something small, possibly a change to internal policy or process and then work your way into bigger things. A systems implementation, a technical overhaul - once people have buy in and see that your vision aligns with that of the organisation and that you have the ability to deliver on the projects that you commit to then the organisation will be asking you to lead.

And when you are leading, you have the “power”, and when you have the power, you are much more engaged, and when you are engaged you are much more likely to be not only successful but the best version of yourself. To conclude, be Present, understand the company goals and visions and align your solutions with these. Enlist the

## PhUSE 2016

support of your network, you will need people to believe in you, leaders need followers. Never give up – you will hit roadblocks but they are there to challenge your commitment and conviction, don't let them. Inspire, take every opportunity to put your solution centre stage and help others to see your vision. And finally, be Strategic, play the long game, becoming a leader does not happen overnight, it will take time for others to have the belief in your ideas and be willing to follow.

### REFERENCES

<http://www.levo.com/articles/career-advice/being-a-leader-how-to-face-it-all>

### RECOMMENDED READING

Godin, S. (2008) Tribes : We need you to lead us. Piatkus Books, London.

Baldoni J. (2011) Lead with Purpose : Giving Your Organisation a Reason to Believe in itself. American Management Association. New York

### CONTACT INFORMATION

Your comments and questions are valued and encouraged. Contact the author at:

Jennifer Dootson

d-wise

Peter House

Oxford St

Manchester, M1 5AN

Work Phone : 07585 950 539

Email : [Jennifer.dootson@d-wise.com](mailto:Jennifer.dootson@d-wise.com)

Brand and product names are trademarks of their respective companies.