

Chapter 1

Taking the Lead

In This Chapter

- ▶ Appreciating the need for leaders
 - ▶ Understanding why people turn to (and into) leaders
 - ▶ Spotting opportunities to take the lead
 - ▶ Implementing change and leading different types of teams
-

Leadership is common sense; but unfortunately not always common practice. With the right information gleaned from my experience of working closely with thousands of managers, and some practice and thought on your part, leading can become as natural as riding a bike (even if you do experience a few wobbles along the way)!

If you couple your common sense to this book's numerous tips, prompts, guidelines, memory joggers and even (dare I say it) pearls of wisdom, you can become the great leader you aspire to be. You can literally get your ducks in a row – just like on the front cover – reflected by your staff wanting to follow you without you having to look behind to check whether they're still there. Carry out the exercises and implement the advice throughout the book, and you can turn effective leadership into your personal common practice.

In this chapter, I describe the importance of leaders, how and why you should step up to become a leader and how to lead different teams and implement workplace change successfully.

Appreciating Why the Work of Leaders Isn't Easy

Why is effective leadership not more often put into practice? Well, too many managers don't demonstrate great leadership because they don't think enough about the situation that they and their people are in: they rush in and get things wrong or fail to act when people are looking for leadership. You've probably all too often experienced situations in which you get too much, too little or the wrong type of leadership.



Leaders can have too much or too little presence!

In defence of leaders, although leadership is common sense, leading people isn't easy. People are complex and have different needs, motives, abilities and expectations. Human flexibility and adaptability are great strengths, but people can also be unpredictable and changeable: their moods may alter, reflecting whether they're happy, sad, enthusiastic, angry or depressed. People's emotional states affect their approach to work and their performance at work.

Part of your role as a leader is to get the best from people who work for and with you; you have to consider all these issues in deciding how best to lead individuals and teams.

Leaders also have to champion and look after the needs of their organisation whether it's a business, charity, public sector service or whatever. You have to enthuse about and promote the purpose and objectives of your organisation, department and/or team (depending on your position), the products or services you and your team provide, reconcile differences in priorities between your team and other teams, and so on.

Bearing these challenges in mind, leadership is difficult!

You may not know how to handle the leadership dilemmas that these and many other challenges throw up for you, and that's probably why you bought this book! In this chapter, you find out more about the challenges and opportunities of being a leader – and discover insights into how to address the problems. I also provide directions to other relevant chapters that allow you to explore leadership in depth.

Looking for Leadership . . . and Leaders

Life in general, and especially in the workplace, seems to be becoming more uncertain and complex for most people. The old adage of 'a job for life' no longer applies to most people as private and public-sector organisations change, downsize and merge.

In such uncertain times people look for leadership and leaders, but don't always find what they need. This section helps you to discover more about the typical situations being experienced by thousands if not millions of workers every day, and why people are looking for leadership and leaders.

Cooking the stew rather than being in one!

Many people become anxious or agitated when they experience workplace complexity and uncertainty: they are, as we say, 'in a bit of a stew'. People can be mixed up, het up, cut up, or shut up when they're in a stew! Here are some of the more common work situations in which people experience getting in a stew, and how being in a stew affects them:

- ✔ **Too much work to do:** Such as when a company's sales order book is bursting at the seams. The pressure to satisfy customer demand pushes capacity, systems and people to their limits causing mistakes and problems.
- ✔ **Too little work to do:** Such as when a company's sales order book is getting empty. When people have too little work to do over long periods, they start worrying about when the next big order is coming.
- ✔ **Too few people to do the work:** Such as when a company is growing quickly and can't recruit the right people or following people being made redundant due to the company cutting costs. When people have too much work to do over long periods of time they struggle to cope, become exhausted or even 'burn out'.
- ✔ **Too many people to do the work:** Such as following a merger between two companies. People are concerned or worried about their job security and meeting their personal financial commitments.
- ✔ **Too many system or structural changes:** Such as people suffering from initiative overload and becoming confused about what they should be doing and how they should be working.
- ✔ **Too few system or process changes:** Such as people struggling to complete their work due to outdated and archaic systems not providing them with the right information at the right time to do their job well.

People look for leadership and leaders in these situations because they're searching for how to get out of the stew: they want to exert influence (to 'cook the stew' if you like, rather than drown in it) by contributing to overcoming the problems and difficulties. After all, they know about their own problems; they may even be experts in how to solve them!



I encourage you to demonstrate appropriate leadership in these situations whether doing so is your job or not. When people are looking for leaders, step forward and show leadership even when you're just one of the people experiencing the situation.

Find out more about stepping forward and demonstrating leadership in the later section 'Filling the vacuum with the right fluff (stuff)', and discover the purpose and meaning of leadership in Chapter 2.

Experiencing leadership . . . or perhaps not!

You know that feeling when you desperately need a taxi to get you to an important appointment or to get you home, and yet you can't find one? Well, you can experience the same frustration when you need a leader!

I suggest that when people want to see great leadership in turbulent times – such as during the current economic problems – they tend to get more management instead.

Please don't misunderstand me: I'm not saying that management itself is bad, because both effective leadership and management are necessary to run an organisation well; but too much management and not enough leadership isn't only bad, it can be a catastrophe! Jump into Chapter 3 to discover the most important aspects of and differences between leading and managing people.

One of the consequences of the economic downturn for many companies is that profits fall due to a drop in orders and margins are squeezed as competition for potential work increases. Faced with this situation, senior managers typically act to control expenditure more tightly by restricting decisions to spend money. They fail, however, to realise the following:

- ✔ Their greater emphasis on managing costs may undermine some of the values or principles on which they're running the company.
- ✔ Management of the company may increase at the expense of leadership!

Read the later sidebar 'Looking after the pennies rather than the pounds' for a typical example of over-managing and under-leading a company.



Looking after the pennies rather than the pounds

The directors of a manufacturing firm had to make difficult decisions when the company experienced a big downturn in the market. As orders dried up and expenditure was running too high for the level of sales, decisions were made to reduce costs by making employees redundant and introducing tighter controls on expenditure.

The directors informed all managers that all decisions involving more than a few pounds

expenditure had to be agreed with the relevant director before the decision could be taken and actioned. As a result, almost all decisions involving overtime, overseas travel and so on had to be referred up to director level.

Many managers thought that directors were 'penny pinching' but, worse still, interpreted the actions of the directors to mean that they, the managers, couldn't be trusted to make the right decision on expenditure. Managers also

thought that their credibility with their staff was undermined because they were unable to make decisions quickly due to having to involve their director in making decisions.

In the months before this situation, the directors had been emphasising that they wanted to empower managers and expected them to show more leadership of their teams. Managers interpreted directors' actions on managing

expenditure more tightly as disempowering rather than empowering them. At a time when managers looked for leadership from directors through directors trusting them to look after the interests of the business, all they got was more management. 'Look after the pennies (yourself) rather than trust other leaders to look after the pounds' was perceived to be the new motto of directors!

Seeing Yourself as a Leader

Like everyone you work with, you have the potential to be a great leader by having a positive influence on the way people around you think, feel and act. I'm sure that you've already demonstrated leadership ability if you take time to think about it. Complete the following exercise and recognise that you've already been a leader.



Take a few minutes to think about and write brief notes on one or more of the following scenarios in a notebook. These scenarios may have occurred in any aspect of your life: at home, education, work and so on:

- ✓ I was really enthusiastic about something, and someone caught or was infected by my enthusiasm.
- ✓ I stood up for something or someone I believed in when it or the person was being wrongly criticised.
- ✓ I did something that I knew was right to do when I doubted my ability to do it.
- ✓ I helped someone to understand the difference between right and wrong.
- ✓ I influenced someone to raise his standards.
- ✓ I challenged someone who was behaving in an unacceptable way to change his behaviour.

Realising that you've already taken the lead in situations in the past helps you to be confident to step up and take the lead again.

Filling the vacuum with the right fluff (stuff)

Have you noticed that a vacuum forms when a manager doesn't demonstrate leadership? You may think that this question is peculiar because a vacuum is full of nothing, and how do you notice nothing forming?! Well, unlike toothache, you do notice some things when they're absent:

- ✓ Your team has no direction.
- ✓ Your team lacks energy and commitment, and people are apathetic.
- ✓ Decisions aren't made and problems don't get solved.
- ✓ High standards don't exist.
- ✓ Things generally don't get better.



When the above situations occur, you may catch your colleagues looking around for someone to do something: people are waiting to be led!

Step forward and fill the vacuum – instead of wasting your time looking for leadership – by doing the following.

- ✓ Reflect on past occasions when you demonstrated leadership; you took the lead then and you can do so now!
- ✓ Listen to your colleagues' moans and groans; they give you a clue to what they think needs to be done, but don't let any negativity dampen your enthusiasm and commitment to improving the situation.
- ✓ Approach your manager about what you think needs to be done; if you're not sure, use your common sense! Work with your manager rather than undermine him.
- ✓ Stay upbeat and positive because your enthusiasm rubs off on colleagues who then want to support you to improve things.

Check out Chapter 4 to find out how to develop your self-confidence to fill leadership vacuums.

Transforming starts with you

Many years – or was it eons? – ago, I used to think that developing leaders primarily involved focusing leaders on how to get the best from their followers. All leaders needed to learn, I thought, was how to get followers to follow them!



Leading people starts with leading yourself; you have to look inwards at yourself before you look outwards towards the people you work with.

The main reason for my change in viewpoint and practice is that I believe that, like every leader, you need really to know and understand yourself. For example, you need to identify:

- ✓ The values that are important to you, because these influence the standards you set for yourself and other people.
- ✓ Your motives, assumptions and mindset, and appreciate how they affect the way you think, feel and act.
- ✓ How your behaviour is likely to impact on others and how they interact with you as their leader.



Don't worry that you're not yet the finished (leadership) article: all leaders are a 'work in progress' because they never stop encountering new situations, dilemmas and challenges.

Take a look at the later section 'Knowing what you're about' to find out what 'understanding yourself' means in practice, or dive into Chapters 4 and 5 if you can't wait to start working on yourself to become the leader you aspire to be.

Rising to all leadership occasions

Although the first occasion in which you need to rise to being a leader is your first appointment to a leadership position, more opportunities exist for you to rise to the occasion than you may imagine – so you've no excuse for not becoming a great leader! (If you're a new leader and in a hurry to discover how to survive being thrown in the deep end, avoid being seen as an 'imposter', succeed in leading your friends and much, much more, read Chapter 6 now.)

These occasions enable you to practise, fine-tune and hone your skills in leading people. Opportunities are lurking around every corner: for example, in team meetings, project meetings, performance and work reviews, reporting procedures, visits to customers and suppliers, informal conversations in corridors and chats with colleagues down the pub.

You have opportunities to show leadership when you're dissatisfied with the standard of work, or with colleagues' performance or behaviour such as their timekeeping or behaviour in meetings.

I take a look here specifically at meetings, to help you spot opportunities for taking the lead. You've probably sat in meetings in which:

- ✓ The meeting started late due to people waiting for someone to arrive.
- ✓ The conversation drifted off the subject.
- ✓ Subjects or issues were discussed but no decisions were made.
- ✓ Decisions were made but it wasn't clear who would take action.
- ✓ Deadlines weren't set for actions to be taken.
- ✓ People weren't held accountable for taking actions that had been agreed at previous meetings.

No doubt you've also heard colleagues (outside of the meeting) moaning to each other about how badly a meeting was run, even though they didn't raise the point in the meeting.

Every meeting in which you experience one or more of the above instances is an opportunity to show leadership by positively influencing the way your work colleagues think, feel and act in the meeting.



Take the lead in encouraging your colleagues to examine and improve the effectiveness of meetings by doing one or more of the following:

- ✓ Always demonstrating good practice in meetings.
- ✓ Pointing out – constructively – when any of the items in the previous list occur and, if necessary, how the instance influences the effectiveness of the meeting.
- ✓ Inviting colleagues at the start of the meeting to share their expectations regarding how they want to work together for the meeting to be productive.
- ✓ Asking colleagues to review how effective the meeting was with regard to achieving the purpose or objectives of the meeting.



Give yourself permission to take the lead and seize the moment to practise honing your leadership skills. Always act with integrity by showing that you have a genuine interest in your colleagues and are working with them to bring about changes for everyone's benefit, to avoid them thinking that you're just promoting yourself or acting in your own self-interest.

Seizing opportunities also enables you to expand your sphere of influence in your organisation. You find out more about how to expand your sphere of influence in Chapter 7.

Leading People and Teams

Loads of people look to you for leadership: everyone who reports to you, your boss, your customers (inside or outside your organisation), members of your project team if you have one and so on. For you to cope with the different expectations, and perhaps demands, of all these people and demonstrate great leadership you have to get a few key things clear. In this section you discover what these are and where you can find more about them in this book to enable you to work on becoming a great leader.

Knowing what you're about

Your boss and your team expect you to know what you're about! If you don't know, your colleagues are going to find out that you don't know sooner or later. You need to be clear about the following.

- ✓ **Your team's purpose and direction:** To avoid being seen as a 'wanderer' who's unsure about where you're taking the team.
- ✓ **What you expect your team to achieve:** To avoid being seen as an unfocused 'squanderer' who wastes your own and others' time on the wrong priorities.
- ✓ **The values that are important to you:** To avoid being seen as a 'ponderer' who's indecisive about the standards you expect from people.

I mention in the earlier section 'Transforming starts with you' that leading people starts with leading yourself, but what does this mean in practice?

Leading yourself means finding out about yourself and then putting your increased self-knowledge to good use.

One of the dangers of not being aware of your own tendencies and biases is that you can end up adopting inappropriate approaches to leading people based upon whether you do or don't believe that people are generally trustworthy.

When you believe that people are generally trustworthy, you expect them to be reliable and do a good job. You're therefore likely to give people a lot of autonomy over how they do their work, and adopt a light-handed approach to monitoring them and their work. In comparison, when you believe people to be generally untrustworthy, you closely monitor and check up on them, and even question them more thoroughly about how they're spending their time.



The two different views about people's trustworthiness reflect two different approaches to leadership: each approach has a significantly different impact on how people work for their leader depending upon whether people like to be micro-managed or not! Be aware of your own tendencies and preferences, and their implications on your approach to leading people. Choose the appropriate approach based on your assessment of each situation including whether or not your staff have the skills and commitment to work autonomously.



Increase your self-knowledge by clarifying your values and questioning your beliefs, assumptions and so on, and use your increased knowledge to gain valuable insights into any potential implications for how you lead people. Go to Chapter 5 to discover how to clarify your values and question your assumptions, and dip into Chapter 4 to discover how developing your skills in reflecting can help you to increase your self-awareness and self-knowledge.

Work through Chapter 7 to clarify the purpose of your job and your team, the objectives you want to achieve and tips for how to be a high performer through achieving your objectives.



Increasing your self-knowledge enables you to be authentic: the people who work with and for you respect you when they perceive you as being genuine, especially when you act with integrity and have a genuine interest in them.

Engaging people in work and change

You may be satisfied if your team comply with what you want them to do, but I challenge whether you're setting your sights high enough if your aim is only for people to be compliant. People who are committed do more: they, as Americans tend to say, 'go the extra mile'!

If you're fortunate enough to have bags of charisma and staff are throwing themselves at your feet wanting to please you, you're already experiencing colleagues 'going the extra mile'! If you don't have to climb over bodies all the time, you may still gain the commitment of, at least, some people by enthusing or inspiring them.

Everyone knows that you can catch (and transmit) bugs and germs off (and to) other people: I propose that you can also catch and transmit energy or enthusiasm. Have you ever been in a group of lethargic or negative people and felt your energy draining from you, or been in the company of someone who was enthusiastic and bubbly and felt enthused or uplifted? Then you've experienced people being infected by other people's energy.

As well as being enthused or inspired by relating to a positive enthusiastic person, people can also become enthused about an idea, purpose, objective or task that resonates with them. Such items can become so meaningful, important and worthwhile that people commit to them.



Gain the commitment of every member of your team to do the team's work and achieve its objectives by doing the following:

- ✓ Inspiring them by being positive and enthusiastic so that your enthusiasm rubs off on team members.
- ✓ Advocating the importance of your team's work – its purpose – and the objectives that your team have to achieve to contribute to your organisation's success.
- ✓ Engaging team members in meaningful conversations so that everyone is involved in enhancing each other's understanding and commitment to work better together towards achieving their objectives.

Discover the power of engaging leadership in Chapter 8, and how to become an engaging leader in Chapter 9.

One of the biggest challenges as a leader is leading people through an organisational change such as a restructure, change in systems and so on. This is because most people don't like, and react badly to, change especially if they feel that changes in the workplace are being imposed on them . . . and they may then take out their frustrations and anger on you! You may think that this reaction is unfair, especially when you have to implement changes with which you disagree!

If you want to improve your staff's behaviour or performance, and sustain that improvement, you need to be skilled in engaging people in order to gain their commitment to workplace change. If you get only their compliance, their performance may eventually deteriorate. Chapter 11 explains how to lead and coach people to achieve and sustain peak levels of performance. In addition, you can discover the need to develop a range of different leadership styles and how to modify your style to encourage people to change in different situations in Chapter 10.



Strive to have a big positive influence on the people you lead during periods of change because people are always looking to you, watching you and how you react to change. Dive into Chapter 12 to uncover how to be a 'change agent' rather than a victim of change.

If you're about to implement a change into your workplace or are currently consumed by problems with introducing changes, turn to Chapters 13 and 14 for guidance. I provide lots of tips on how to lead and implement change successfully, and how to be successful in sustaining such changes.

Leading all types of teams

Success in all organisations depends on teamwork because almost all work is now done in teams. (You can test this notion yourself by thinking about whether achieving success in your job is solely dependent on you and what you do.) Not only have teams proliferated in organisations over the last few decades, but they've also evolved into many different types – project, permanent, temporary and virtual teams – with each type posing different challenges, opportunities and problems for you as a team leader.

For example, project team leaders have the particular challenges of leading team members who belong to more than one team and so have multiple commitments. You discover how to handle this and other challenges in leading project teams in Chapter 16.

A project team can also be a virtual team with members rarely if ever meeting in person because they're scattered over large geographical areas, perhaps over different continents. Chapter 17 describes some of the typical hurdles facing you when leading a virtual team and provides tips on how to handle these challenges.



Whatever the nature of your team, make sure that you build it around the key characteristics shared by all great teams (dip into Chapter 15 to discover these attributes). Enjoy the wide range of roles you have to play – even if you find them challenging – in ensuring that your team is a high-performing one, for example:

- ✓ **Advocate:** Promoting your team's purpose and objectives to people within and outside your team, as well as enthusiastically promoting your company and its services or products to your customers.
- ✓ **Standard bearer:** Upholding and reinforcing your team's values and standards of behaviour and performance.
- ✓ **Cheerleader:** Encouraging and supporting your team to do well, and recognising success.
- ✓ **Facilitator:** Engaging team members in meaningful conversations to enhance understanding, make decisions, build commitment and solve problems.
- ✓ **'Agony aunt':** Acting as confidant to help individual team members with personal issues.

You can encourage team members to share responsibility and accountability for the team's success by involving them in assessing their team's effectiveness, and continually improving how well team members work together and how the team performs. Chapter 15 shows you how to conduct team self-assessments and engage team members in striving continually to improve performance.

Excelling in leading your senior leadership team

How you lead your senior team is crucial to how your whole organisation works (as well as to the performance of the senior team itself) because your senior leadership team is a role model for the entire organisation: middle managers are looking to and taking a lead from directors, and junior managers are looking to and taking a lead from middle managers.

As leader, you're the living, breathing, walking example of how you want your employees to be! You're constantly leading by example: promoting what you stand for, believe in and expect from others through your everyday actions and behaviours such as:

- ✓ What you pay attention to, for example, standards of behaviour, performance measures and key performance indicators.
- ✓ How you react or don't react to problems, failures and breaches of standards.
- ✓ How you allocate rewards, who you promote and why.



People are looking to you and taking more notice of what you do than what you say! Demonstrate excellence to promote excellence.

Encourage your senior leaders to take collective responsibility for the success of the organisation as well as the success of their own departments, especially if you notice that they have a parochial view of success (a 'silo' mentality). Chapter 18 describes helping senior managers out of this problem.

The highest performing (senior leadership) teams in my experience also encourage and value diversity: different perspectives, ways of thinking, ideas and so on. Team members have found out how to engage each other effectively to overcome the difficulties that may be experienced when confident, often strong, characters in the team have different views and opinions.

These members recognise that becoming skilled in engaging each other improves decision-making, problem-solving, commitment to act and accountability in their team. You can discover how to enhance your own and your senior leaders' skills in effectively engaging each other in Chapters 9 and 18.

<http://www.pbookshop.com>