



Are you a leader or a manager?

How do you know?

Which one is better?

There is an ongoing debate in leadership discussions about what the difference is between being a leader and being a manager.

These concepts are almost always put in contrast to each other. You're either one or the other. Sometimes it's presented as leader vs. manager. Sometimes it's presented as boss vs. leader. You can find lists and lists like this- one from Profiles International.

You'll notice on both sides of the list, the items are almost polar opposite.

Between change and stability.

Between taking risks and minimizing risks.

At the bottom of this one is one of the most common ways people try to explain the difference between leaders and managers.

That good managers do things right and leaders do the right things.

You'll find visuals.

In this one where the leader is at the front and is pulling the team behind, the manager is standing behind the team directing them to do the work. In a bit of a stronger image you have the boss pointing to the staff saying, 'Go!' and the leader is in front of the line saying, 'Let's go.'

Sometimes the visuals and the text are combined. Without reading anything you can look at the pictures and tell what message is being sent. Same with this comic. Even if you don't read all of the words on it, you can look at the woman and look at the man and you can tell which is good and which is not so good.

The problem with trying to create this division between leader and manager, is 1) it's not very helpful to the work that we do and 2) it's not a realistic division between one or the other.

It is true that some people in leadership positions do not have supervisees or people they are managing in a traditional sense underneath them.

It is true that some managers do not have strong leadership skills.

But this is the case with some managers and some leaders.



It is also true that leaders can have amazing managerial skills, and managers can have really strong leadership skills.

So when we look at the many articles and visuals and charts and Venn diagrams that try to convince us that managing is bad and leading is good, it's important that we remember what our focus is, and that is to create and implement a vision and to reach our goals.

Much like with leadership styles the labels themselves matter less than the impact you're having.

In some situations you may take on more of a traditional managerial approach.

In other situations you may take on more of a leadership approach.

However, you choose to define it, whatever side of the chart you fall on for that particular task, wherever you are in the Venn diagram, our energy doesn't need to be placed there.

Our energy always is on implementing our vision and reaching our goals.

So are you a manager or a leader?

I hope your answer is both.

Or it depends.

That will serve you best.