

## The Roles of Leaders and Managers

*by Jon Craighead*

Recently I was asked to distinguish the primary differences regarding the roles and responsibilities of leaders and managers. The major differences occur in the areas of change and complexity. Depending on the size and dimension of the organization, the leader's job is primarily dealing with change. The manager's job is to manage the daily complexities of a challenging business activity.

Change can be a peril which often occurs at the speed of light with little warning. The leader's role is to focus on changes such as, but not limited to, strategic planning, product development, and financial forecasting. This role is made problematical by two significant uncertainties: one, a dynamic market environment, and secondly the natural propensity to resist changes, both organizationally and individually.

*Psychological Resistance to Change:* Generally we are more comfortable with the familiar than the unfamiliar. Organizational leaders have an inclination to rely on past and proven successes and are often stymied when past practices are no longer effective. Such thinking creates unpreparedness and results in surprises that can be very costly to the organization. The leader's job is to prepare and keep the organization stable. Change is usually a challenge to stability.

*Physical Resistance to Change:* Change is met with opposition physically. In a process called homeostasis, the body reacts naturally to any change to its normal state of being: when we become overheated we sweat, and when we become chilled we shiver. When medical transplants are inserted, there is a protocol of medications applied to prevent rejection of the new organ, since the body reacts to and deals with the change by automatic rejection. The leader's major responsibility is to guide the organization through the difficult waters of inevitable change. And when necessary, he or she must skillfully use change to an advantage and avoid its destabilizing effect on the enterprise.

The manager's job is to guide the organization through its daily operational complexities. Managers' responsibilities include, but are not limited to, timelines, budget targets, on-time shipping, customer satisfaction, technology, and operational efficiency. Technology is something we rely on more critically than ever, and yet by its very nature demands constant attention and care. Frequently the marketplace causes dramatic and unexpected shifts in demands and requirements, which requires

immediate attention. The manager's "boots on the ground" allows a firsthand alertness to when and how these shifts are taking place. The alert manager can provide a needed quick response. By so doing the manager is able to keep the organization in a competitive operational position despite a potential disabling effect.

Additionally the manager is responsible for insuring that physical and financial resources are being wisely utilized, as well as warding off the effects of adverse threats to the organization such as extreme weather conditions, competition, and customer dissatisfaction. Such skillful responses can keep the company viable and moving forward. The manager must also be constantly on the alert to all of the above, as if driving an automobile at high speeds on a major roadway. He or she must be looking forward, backward, and sideways with hands firmly on the steering wheel of the enterprise. Not doing so is like driving your car without wearing your seat belt – it's not a problem until you have an accident.

Of course, complexity and change intervene dynamically and are often inseparable. Both the leader and manager must masterfully react and deal with this phenomenon. The size of the organization determines the extent of separation of these roles. A multinational enterprise with large numbers of personnel, enormous revenue, multiple currencies and cultural differences can look quite different from a smaller company with fewer people and less differences. On the other hand, these companies may share more similarities than one might imagine, due to the major difference being mostly the result of scale. Nevertheless, in all respects the importance of each of the roles of leader and manager is undeniably important. No organization can be successful unless these two responsibilities are coordinated and aligned. This is true whether the leader is one of many or holds the role of both leader and manager. The organization's success depends on both responsibilities being done *indefatigably*.