



# BOSS or LEADER, Which Are You?

Those titles might seem interchangeable, but they're not — and it can make all the difference to your company. BY MARK OKUN

**T**he hot business topic today is the boss vs. leader persona, which brings to mind a quote by management expert Ken Blanchard, author of such best-sellers as *One Minute Manager* and *Raving Fans*: “In the past a leader was a boss. Today’s leaders must be partners with their people... they no longer can lead solely based on positional power.”

The similarities in actions and strategies of being a boss carry over from industry to industry, workplace to workplace. It’s like many of these folks went to the same boss school! It is no wonder then that the truly exceptional leaders within companies and industries stand out.

Bosses can be owners of companies or they can also be managers and supervisors. To excel in a leadership position, every “boss” must have the help and the buy-in of their staff.

In this article I’d like to present ways to move from boss to leader, so let’s compare the two.

Boss is both a noun and a verb — and that might be where the confusion starts in the way we

• **BOSS** (noun) a person who employs or superintends workers; a manager.

• **BOSS** (verb) to be master of or over; manage; direct; control, to order about, especially in an arrogant manner, to be too domineering and authoritative.

• **LEADER** (noun) a person that leads; a guiding or directing head, as of an army, movement, group or business.

interpret the role. People I have spoken with seem to relate the title “boss” with the definition of the verb first, and then possibly the noun.

The difference between a boss and a leader goes way beyond changing the title. When exploring the steps in being a good leader, the following points come to mind.

Communication is the bedrock of great leadership and great businesses. Developing the skills of a good communicator is a fundamental requirement of leadership. Within that communication, there is both internal and external dialogue. The latter may consist of group presentations or one-on-one interactions, but the most impactful dialogue that helps make the jump from a boss to a leader is internal self-talk.

#### INTERNAL DIALOGUE

This “self-talk” is our inner voice, the one you are hearing right now. Yes, that one. There have been many articles written about positive self-talk and the achievements that continuous positive internal

chatter has on a person’s impact and growth. Self-deprecating internal chatter has no place in the head of a leader. You know the phrases, “I can’t do this, what a dummy, etc.”

While I agree positive self-talk and being optimistic is a powerful resource, it is unrealistic to put a Pollyanna spin on everything. More significantly, keeping your self-talk truthful is the key in getting the results you want. Put your self-talk to a test and question your thoughts: Is what I am thinking accurate? Is this the most positive way to frame this thought? What actions can I take to change the way I feel about what I am thinking? What you say to yourself has a major influence on your actions and what you say aloud to others — including the people you lead.

In 1937 Napoleon Hill published *Think & Grow Rich* and while the tenor of this well-known book may be dated, the principles and suggested actions still ring true in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One of the impactful sections is on auto-suggestion, using your internal voice with a positive dialogue to assist in shaping your external dialogue and outward actions. It is proven that when you expect success, health, happiness, or even business outcomes, you will get a better result.

#### EXTERNAL DIALOGUE

In order to make the shift from boss to leader, communicate clearly and often with staff in both planned and naturally occurring meetings. This open and continuous type of group communication builds bonds and aids leaders (owners/managers) in conveying high levels of understanding of the expectations desired while fostering trust in the process and building enthusiasm.

Before you get all pep rally, put down the pomps; not every meeting is a cheerleading session. The wins and losses get equal billing in these meetings. Negative aspects communicated to a group must only focus on operation and procedure. Groups are not great environments for individual learning experiences.

Having group meetings scheduled at regular intervals provide a great benefit. Whether it’s once or twice a week or once a month depends on the goals of the store, the group size, and the dynamic. What’s most important is consistency in both message delivery and the format. Consistency reinforces the commitment of reaching both company goals and the people within the organization.

#### ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATIONS

While group communication expresses goals and links outcomes to group behaviors, one-on-one conversation is tailored to the specific person. It can entail giving guidance and advice that relates just to that person and their growth. This type of personal interaction is between two people who want to get the same results, therefore in this encounter the “we” persona of the leader must eclipse the “I” persona of the boss. In order to get positive results, “we” must do it.

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#### WAFFLES ARE FOR BREAKFAST, NOT LEADERS

Be consistent when adhering to policies and procedures; this is the place for efficiency. By “consistent,” I don’t mean rigid. Be flexible in listening to new ideas that may smooth out a process or remove a speedbump on the road to completing goals and having happy customers.

A “boss” knows it all and tells their staff what to do; a “leader” is always learning from the people around them, shaping and incorporating ideas that have been shared into results.

Leaders make a decision and stick to it. Give the decision time to settle in and be accepted by the group — this allows time to measure the results. If a change is needed, then make the decision to do it.

When a decision is made or direction changed, those actions must be communicated to the group *in person*. This not only allows you to field questions but, more importantly, to share enthusiasm for the decision. Let an email reiterate and share the details of the changes. Let your staff know the what, when, why, and how of the decision in order to provide all the information to them and achieve their support. This also opens the door to for you to be influenced by the opinions of the people impacted directly by these decisions.



## LEADERS BUILD TEAMS

Lead from the front and walk your talk; being congruent is natural. Try this simple exercise: Say the word “yes” out loud, your head might already be moving up and down involuntarily. Now continue to say “yes,” but move your head right to left. It feels unnatural, doesn’t it? Do the same with the word “no.” This uncomfortable feeling you are experiencing is the feeling of being incongruent. When your audible words are out of sync with your physical actions, people can feel a disconnect due to this subconscious communication.

Bosses will typically push action from the rear, in a “telling” style. Leaders use a “demonstration” or “show me” style when introducing new ideas or desired activities. Leaders remove the words *I* and *you* when speaking of accomplishments or expressing team goals and replace them with the plural of *I*; they say *we*. Using *we* indicates everyone has a stake in the company’s success. Leaders are inclusive of their team, not exclusive. They cannot afford to have the adversarial mentality of an “us” vs. “them” mentality if they want to continue to grow their company, people, and themselves.

Bosses and Leaders have similar goals, but while a leader can be the boss, not all bosses can be leaders. It is the mechanics of how they strive toward the goals that is different. Leaders expect quality in job performance, and those expectations are supported with proper guidance and coaching. The results will always exceed a boss’s demand for compliance.



Mark Okun is Business Contributor to enLIGHTenment Magazine and President of Mark Okun Consulting & Performance Group. He has more than 30 years of hands-on retail experience training and coaching sales associates in the lighting and furniture industries. [Mark@bravointegratedmedia.com](mailto:Mark@bravointegratedmedia.com)

Leaders replace fear with enthusiasm and will coach performance, not mandate it. They are interested in the growth and the development of their team. A leader takes responsibility for the process that will get to the desired goals. A boss, on the other hand, wants that result at any cost and as quickly as possible. Bosses direct actions and demand results. As the great business and management thinker of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Peter Drucker said, “*Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.*”

A boss will direct the actions of their team so that it can best serve the boss, while a leader focuses on how their team – inclusive of themselves – can best serve the customer and the company. Similarly, it is very easy for a boss to say, “Do this” or “Don’t do that.” Being able to tell someone what to do is easy and can make you a boss.

If you want to be a leader, you must believe in yourself and your team, and trust in those around you to do the best they know how. A leader is dedicated to the success of the team and will coach performance based on behavior, actions, and numbers.

## IT’S NEVER TOO LATE

The positive effects of a leader over a boss results in greater productivity and creates a happy and enthusiastic work environment that the customer can experience. Use some of these steps in your journey from boss to leader:

**Eliminate micromanaging.** Give people the opportunity to grow. There is more than one way to get to any city and more than one way to get to a desired end. Guide your team, don’t control them. Don’t be afraid to fail, take a chance.

**Give deserved praise to your staff** and publicly take responsibility for the team’s failures as your own. We are all human beings and it is alright to show it. Understand that we all have weaknesses; accept the weakness and applaud the strength.

**Be a motivational mentor.** Expect great things and great things will happen. Invest in your own personal development in order to share it with others. When you increase your knowledge, you grow a little; when you share that same knowledge, you and your team grow a lot.

**Become totally committed to your personal and professional goals.** When you are a committed leader, nothing will stand in the way of achievement. If you have clearly communicated the goals with your words and actions, your team will follow. ❖

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**MONTER LITE**® Co., Inc

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Tel: 888-887-4233 Fax: 732-748-1288/732-709-1988

Website: [www.monterlite.com](http://www.monterlite.com)

General Email: [monterlite@aol.com](mailto:monterlite@aol.com)

Orders Email: [order@monterlite.com](mailto:order@monterlite.com)

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