

About Leadership

Several times throughout my career, I have had collaborators approach me to discuss their careers. Generally, my first question was always to inquire about what they were looking for: are you looking for more money? Or are you looking for more responsibilities? Invariably, those seeking greater responsibilities discovered that the money would follow not long after. Why? Because they showed a desire to be leaders, and by assuming greater responsibilities, they eventually accessed leadership positions with a better salary. The same did not happen for those whose ambition was simply salary-based.

But what does it mean to be a leader? Who can be a leader and who cannot? This is one of those topics where you will find a vast amount of literature; in fact, you will find so many articles, books, and videos that it is practically impossible to read and understand them all.

For example, between 1995 and the year 2000, between 1,500 and 3,000 texts were published annually in the United States whose main theme was leadership. This range grew to 5,000 to 8,000 annual books between 2001 and 2008. With the arrival of the digital boom, the range moved to between 10,000 and 15,000 annual texts from 2009 to 2015.

Between 2016 and 2023, it grew again to 18,000 to 25,000 annual books. For 2024 and beyond, with the advent of AI and rapid content creation, it is estimated that publications exceed 30,000 texts per year.

In this article, I will give you my perspective regarding this passionate subject of leadership, based on my personal experience, and I hope they help you understand the basic principles so you can evaluate where you stand in the search for your own leadership style.

The Boss

I believe we have all worked under the direction of a supervisor or manager and can easily identify who are "bosses" and who are "leaders." "Bosses" are those who may be competent in their function and know how things are done, but they do not inspire their collaborators to continue growing. Among "bosses," we often find people who are unwilling to share their knowledge, as this represents an immediate challenge to their position. Let's not even talk about hiring someone with more experience or skills. "Bosses" tend to raise their voice or make threats when someone expresses doubts or suggests improvements to processes; do you remember any boss who fits this definition?

I can share with you that 30 years ago, when I began my career, this was the most common type of leadership. But, as I pointed out earlier, leaders have more texts and references to improve their skills to provide direction to their work teams and become better leaders.

However, remember that having a "boss" can also become a learning experience: more than once I have learned how I should not act if I really want to be a good leader.



The Leader

"Leaders" must be equally competent, but they inspire us to be truly better. They challenge our assumptions regarding the situations we encounter and help us overcome our weaknesses. A true "leader" is not afraid to incorporate more capable people into their team. They know that these people will help improve the level of execution of the work unit for which they are responsible. Their focus is on the result.

Being a leader is assuming the responsibility of directing a work team. This does not mean you are just responsible for them performing their assigned tasks on time and in the proper manner. It means you must communicate the mission, vision, and objectives of your company to them and secure their commitment to bring them to fruition. It means establishing the processes that ensure the fulfillment of objectives, reviewing results (key performance indicators), and providing the required direction to guide the team in the process of preventive and corrective actions when results deviate from the sought goal.

Detailed Observation and Active Listening

An important skill is detailed observation and active listening. First, a good leader must be able to observe how work is performed and identify who is having difficulties and who is more skilled at the same tasks. This can only be done if the leader is competent — a blind person cannot lead another blind person. There are tools, such as the "Ohno circle," that help focus observation. I invite you to investigate this tool if you are not familiar with it.

Based on detailed observation, the leader can define if standardized work is being followed or if it is necessary to make an improvement. But since this cannot be done without the collaboration of the associates, the leader must be able to establish effective communication with them. And the most important thing when having this communication is active listening: listening to understand, not to reply smartly.

A Safe Environment

Lately, I have found many references stating that, to be truly effective, leaders must also be able to create a safe environment where collaborators can express their concerns, doubts, and even improvement proposals without fear of being reprimanded or, worse yet, humiliated by their superiors. Here, the skill of active listening also comes in, but emotional control on the part of the leader is even more important. Even if the team has made errors with grave consequences, the leader cannot lose his composure or his cool. His duty is to listen actively, understand what happened, and define the action plan to follow, assigning tasks to members with the required sense of urgency, according to the magnitude of the problem faced.

The Leader as a Safeguard of Culture

An important aspect to remember is that the leader is always the guardian of the culture. Clearly, the culture in a company must always correspond with its values, as well as its mission and vision. Values are what guide the behaviors of the associates and, therefore, the main mission of the leader is to ensure that the behaviors of their direct collaborators are rigorously guided by those values. In fact, if behaviors are oriented by the company's values, achieving ideal results should be a relatively simple task. Therefore, the leader must ensure that processes and procedures are a good reflection of the values in such a way that they promote the correct behaviors.

In my research for this article, I found that current theories about leadership highlight 6 key aspects. In the next installment, I will share these six aspects with you, and we will develop them to expand our understanding of this topic.