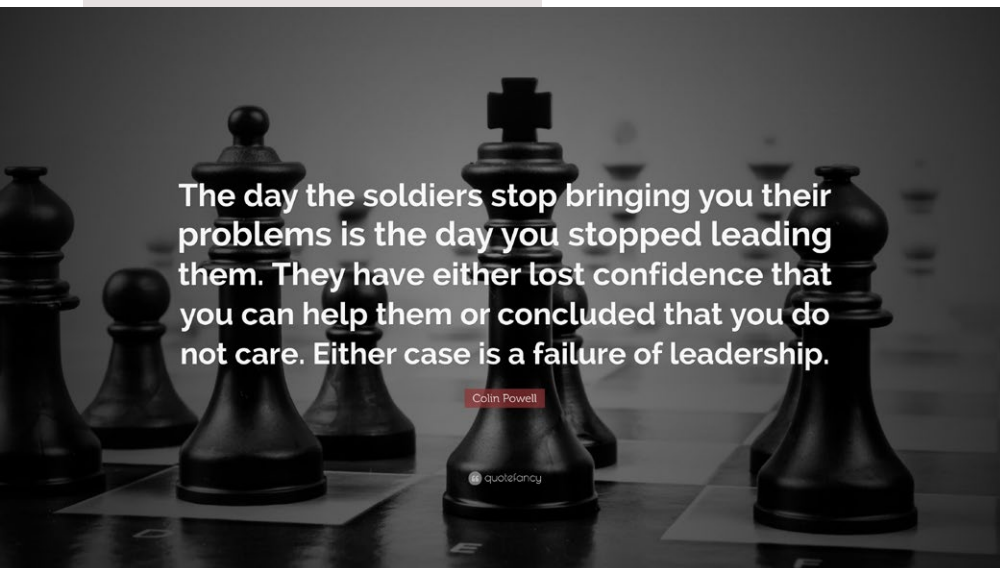


Lead more and manage less?

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The day the soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help them or concluded that you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.

Colin Powell

quotefancy

"I cannot trust a man to control others who cannot control himself."

~ Robert E Lee

"Rank does not confer privilege or give power"

~ Peter F Drucker

In this article, I want to examine the belief that leadership and management are synonyms. While management is all about improving systems and processes for organisational performance, leadership in the fire service entails critical decision making, often in dynamic, potentially life-threatening situations with consequential risks. Effective fire service leaders ask the right questions and think strategically in making well-informed conclusions upon which they can act. In addition, fire service leaders develop, maintain and motivate teams.

A manager is a member of an organisation with the responsibility of carrying out the four important functions of management ie planning, organising, leading and controlling. But are all managers leaders?

Unfortunately, not all managers are leaders. Some managers have poor leadership qualities and employees

follow orders from their managers because they are obligated to do so, not necessarily because they are influenced or inspired by the leader.

Leaders are followed because of their personality, behaviour and beliefs. A leader personally invests in tasks and projects and demonstrates a high level of passion for work. Leaders take a great deal of interest in the success of their followers, enabling them to reach their goals to expectation. In the fire service and in fact any other disciplined service, ambition can thrust an objective or a project forward. When balanced with integrity, ambition pushes individuals and teams to their greatest potential.

Fire service leaders must also possess tenacity balanced by flexibility. Finding a solution to an extraordinary problem or successfully completing an apparently insurmountable task often demands unassailable willpower to keep going and searching for solutions. Abstract thinking and the ability to reconfigure an approach, rather than stubbornly sticking to one not working, must accompany such tenacity.

Fire service leaders carry weighty responsibilities. If lacking sufficient

self-confidence, doubt can paralyse them and their subordinates from acting. They must possess the emotional fortitude to weather setbacks and still lead the next charge forward. The confidence and ability of those led are greatly affected by whether leaders trust themselves to tackle the mission ahead, making this trait indispensable in leadership.

Ultimately, strong leadership projects confidence. All this assist in developing and establishing the element of command presence.

Having had the privilege to work with some excellent leaders in the fire service, apart from having a vision and the ability to think strategically and critically, they were all able to interact with other people in a genuine way. They were very skilled at building and sustaining a culture that not only appeals to people but that deliberately pursues and stimulates collaboration between them.

While it is not the intention of this article to discount the benefits of systems management and there are many, it hopes to raise a concern about institutional blind spots that inhibit sound judgment in leadership.

As leaders, should we not pause and think deeply about whether we are losing the appropriate leadership philosophy to the lure of building and controlling management systems? The answer, in my opinion, is to find balance between these poles. ▲