Leader & Leadership



Leader and leadership do not necessarily go hand-in-hand!

So many people seem to think that “leaders have leadership” and that “having leadership makes you a leader”.

There are a lot of people out there who have a lot of leadership but are clearly not leaders and conversely there are a lot of leaders out there who show little or no leadership.

The word Leader seems to have appeared first and comes from the Old German word “Ledere”; used for a person who “shows other people the path to take and guides them safely along the journey”.

The word leadership seems to have appeared much later in the early nineteenth century; the suffix “ship” coming from Old English (sciepe) and meaning, according to the Meriam Webster dictionary, the state or condition of being something – this would appear to mean that leadership is “the state or condition of being a leader”.

The suffix “ship” is found in words such as sportsmanship, friendship or craftmanship and is used to describe the “incarnation” of an act; a tennis player who admits a fault and loses a point, someone who went out of their way to help someone else or a carpenter producing a sculpted table. In each “act” the person has somehow incarnated the essence of the activity itself.

So, why do leader and leadership need to be separated?

Trying to define the words leader or leadership is a bit of a nightmare.

In the recent book, "Who Cares Wins" leadership is defined as, "*influencing, inspiring, and directing the performance of people towards the achievement of important and valuable goals – and creating the sense of success in the short and the long term*".

In fact, most leadership definitions include the words (or variations on) "influence", "achieve", "success", and "goals".

The GLOBE study defined leadership as "*the ability to influence others to contribute to the realisation of the objectives of the "organisation" of which they are a member*".

And the word "influence," appeared in many of the works of the early leadership gurus (Tannembaum, Hersey, Blanchard, House ….)

Virtually all leadership definitions seem to boil down to, a person influences others to get something accomplished. The key word being "influence"; not telling, not ordering, not forcing, not coercing – influencing.

Finding a common theme or thread for the word leader is a little more difficult, and many leader descriptions talk about "characteristics" such as having empathy, being non-judgmental, listening, empowering, facilitating, etc.

However, there seems to some (some) agreement that a leader is "someone who has a vision of how something can be significantly better, or improved, and who inspires and federates others to move towards this vision.

In fact, the one word that seems to appear in all leader descriptions is "vision", which, maybe, brings leader back to its origins with "showing & guiding".

Leadership is something that is accessible to everyone, we all have a capacity to influence others, and the opportunities are everywhere:

Let’s imagine that you are out in the mountains with some friends, and the group has decided to be on the summit before 2.00 pm to have time to get back down before it gets dark. It’s a lovely day and you have spent so much time looking at the scenery and the wildlife that you now risk missing your deadline. You get everyone’s attention and start to discuss how they see the rest of the day spanning out; “do we carry on as we are and risk getting caught in the dark, do we stop looking at the scenery and “yomp” our way to the top or do we do something else?”

Another situation: you are at work with colleagues and it’s the twenty-fifth minute of your fifteen-minute coffee break; there is a heated discussion with regards to the current project and the fact that the deadlines are too short. You suggest to your colleagues that we take look at how we could organise ourselves to use our time better.

In the above situations, you are not “the leader” and it is how you incarnate your leadership, that may get the “buy-in” from your friends to continue to carry on the walk or from your colleagues to look at how you are organised.

Being or becoming a leader is also probably, but less obviously, also accessible to everyone, the starting point appears to be, having a vision, having somewhere to “lead” people to, and not just to the top of a mountain or a more efficient organisation.

I come across a lot of people with a clear leadership capacity, but who have no desire to become someone “on a mission”.

I also come across a lot of, so-called, leaders who either have no vision, or who are “enforcing” some kind of new

vision.

So, does this mean that leader & leadership do not necessarily go hand-in-hand”?