

Management Checklist

Leading from the middle

This is an excerpt from a [Chartered Management Institute](#) checklist providing practical advice and guidance enabling managers to check out how to do a range of tasks quickly and efficiently using concise, tried and tested information.

Introduction

Leadership is often seen as key to improved performance. It is needed at all levels in an organisation - not just the top. Think about situations you have seen and you may recall people who were at the bottom of the hierarchy, or in positions with no formal authority, but were still able to provide a lead for others.

Most people would agree that leadership can be developed, and that there are some definable leadership skills which can help managers to get the most from their team. Many organisations now run programmes to improve the leadership skills of staff at all levels from Supervisor through to Managing Director.

Definition

There is no commonly agreed definition for leadership, but a suggested one is: the capacity to establish direction, to influence and align others towards a common aim, to motivate and commit others to action, and to encourage them to feel responsible for their performance.

Action checklist

1. Be clear about the difference between management and leadership

There is some disagreement about the differences between management and leadership, and some experts consider that there is no distinction (for example, Henry Mintzberg). But many others think the two should be separated, while most would agree that managers and supervisors need at least some leadership ability. While definitions of both areas and their argued differences vary, you need to be clear and think out your own approach to the subject before you can work to improve what many consider to be important leadership skills.

A common approach to the difference (and one taken here) is that:

- ✓ management is really about the day-to-day running of a function - about getting the right people in the right place. It involves many administrative tasks
- ✓ leadership is about creating a vision for that function and gaining people's commitment. There are few certainties with leadership.

2. Be clear about where you are now

Are you comfortable with the idea of being a leader? If not, where do you think your weaknesses lie? Many people - especially those who have been promoted because they have a technical skill - feel uncomfortable about leadership. But think about yourself as a leader; consider whether you think that leadership is alien to your character; whether you may lack the authority and respect to be a leader; or whether you feel that it is only more senior managers who should be leaders.

Remember that everyone can learn how to develop their leadership potential - authority and respect are there to be earned. Today, people at all levels are expected to show leadership qualities.

3. Recognise the different leadership needs of people

Work at developing a range of appropriate leadership styles - matching your leadership style to the situation and the people. Different staff will need different kinds of leadership:

- ✓ with people who fail to take responsibility, you will need to take a directional style, giving strict targets and ensuring that you monitor these
- ✓ staff who lack confidence, but show potential, will benefit from a coaching approach - they need you to be directive and supportive, to explain what needs to be done, but to reinforce their positive behaviour and get them to take responsibility
- ✓ with talented but underachieving employees, lead through communication, and get them performing better through involving them in the decision making, and supporting them in taking the initiative
- ✓ star performers who are already fully competent need to be appreciated, and left alone to get on with the job.

4. Build communication channels

Develop the right mix of communication, so that people get to know what you expect and when they have done well or badly, and feel that they are able to give you feedback on your own performance.

Most research into what makes a good leader stresses that leaders communicate - and communicate - all the time. They create a vision of where the department and organisation are going, and they do so by communicating it clearly and often, demonstrating it through actions and listening to their people.

5. Work hard at empowering your staff

You need to provide support and confidence to help staff to achieve things for themselves. Today's leader works at creating the right environment and circumstances so that staff can take real ownership of their work. Are you courageous enough to trust your people to do a good job, and to show faith in them. If you are, and can still give them a sense of vision and guidance when they need it, then they will see you as their leader.

The full Management Checklist is part of a series 'CheckPoint' service offered by the Chartered Management Institute. Focusing on issues relating to people management and personal effectiveness, further information can be viewed at www.managers.org.uk/checkpoint or by calling (0)1536 207 373 to request a sample of what Checkpoint has to offer.