

# THE MAKING OF GOOD MANAGERS

The best managers are those who develop leadership abilities in themselves and in others says Patrick Lybaert, visiting faculty member at RSM's Executive Education & Organisational Development department (EEOD) and leadership-development consultant with the Executive Leadership Foundation he established. **Text** Joe Figueiredo

Lybaert was once baffled by a CEO he met at a conference who proudly confessed to spending hours responding to questions from sales managers with pages of detailed expert advice. Why would the head of a large company, he wondered, who should be concerned with the bigger strategic picture, be spending so much time on operational matters – the domain and responsibility of the sales department?

And what of the managers who make decisions and review their outcome, but never the decision process? They chair meetings, but never ask the participants at the end of the meeting to evaluate how the meeting went. Acting as if the end justifies the means, these managers fail to find fundamental faults with a 'process', and continue to make the same mistakes.

Still other managers feel the need to carry their Blackberries everywhere they go. No wonder they feel overwhelmed – and ironically scarcely have the time for what is crucial. Is it reasonable to surmise then, that many managers are lacking leadership?

## Full-body leadership

Lybaert begins by clarifying terminologies. A manager is a function, he explains, whereas a leader is the embodiment of a set of attributes we strive to achieve, and which could be applied to any function.

“Leadership means creating the right conditions and environment to encourage others to grow, develop and achieve,” says Lybaert. “A leader also strives to become a better person.” And perhaps most notably, he says, a good manager is also a leader. Lybaert identifies five subtypes of leadership (or management):

- *Leading by the head:* where managers provide focus, engage the workplace in strategic dialogues and motivate people into recognising market signals while stimulating creativity and change.
- *Leading by the feet:* where managers translate strategy into an operating plan; an objective into an action plan; and have the discipline and flexibility to execute it, thereby constantly challenging processes and systems.
- *Leading by the heart:* where managers foster passion, pride and inspiration, thus driving the company's mission, vision and values.
- *Leading by the hands:* where managers effectively improve and measure people's performance, while empowering them to improve in the future.
- *Leading by the guts:* where a manager exemplifies a leader's personal strengths, authentic vision, values and goals, and has the courage to do difficult things and set an example.

## The wrong baggage

Leadership is what enables managers to guide, delegate, inspire, motivate and trust, says Lybaert. Managers who lack these capabilities typically involve themselves in what is not their work, especially when they cannot deal with new technologies and methods. “In this situation they suddenly feel inferior and distrust their subordinates,” Lybaert explains. “The fear of losing control leads them to frantically attempt to achieve something concrete, in the hope it will save them from drowning.”



► Patrick Lybaert

Organisational psychologist by training and management consultant by profession, Patrick Lybaert combines the scientific with the practical in the RSM EEOD programme he teaches on the Essentials of Leadership.



Not only are these managers being inefficient and ineffective by immersing themselves in minutiae, they are also undermining the authority of their subordinates and showing distrust. “Somebody once said, when trust increases, things are achieved quicker and at a lower cost,” says Lybaert.

But how can so many managers lack such essential skills? In the current business culture, says Lybaert, managers are appointed on the basis of their prior achievements, not their managerial and leadership skills. This problem usually appears when they first become managers. “If first-time managers do not lose this results-driven mentality and start learning to act as managers and showing leadership, they are going to carry this unwanted ‘baggage’ with them as they progress up the management ladder,” he warns.

Time is another issue. Lybaert spends his time continuously reminding executives of business guru Peter Drucker’s

advice on time management: distinguish between what is urgent and what is important. Discriminate and prioritise.

“Managers should spend 60-80 per cent of their time dealing with important issues. Typically, they should make time for strategic dialogues with their people on such matters as self-development, innovation, networking and critical process reviews,” he insists. One way to save time and improve efficiency and effectiveness is through team-building and internal and external networking.

Another common problem facing managers is finding the balance between their working and private lives. It is important to commit 100 per cent to all aspects of your life. “When you are at work, be there 100 per cent,” he says. “When you are with your family, be there 100 per cent; when you are focusing on your personal growth, be there 100 per cent; when you are with your friends, be there 100 per cent; and when you participate in the community, be there 100 per cent. Ideally, we should also

ensure that the different parts our lives are mutually enriching, he says. In that sense, balancing is also integrating.”

### Know thyself

Older managers are often confronted with mid-life transitions. If they don’t understand that process and are not prepared to deal with it effectively, says Lybaert, they can find themselves inflexible, discontent, confused and making poor or irrational decisions – at which point they should seek outside help.

Another phenomenon is the ‘paradox of success’, says Lybaert. He explains this phenomenon through something called the four levels of learning: unconscious incompetence (“I don’t know that I cannot drive a car”); conscious incompetence (“I step into a car and discover I cannot drive”); conscious competence (“I learn how to drive and become aware of this capability”); and finally, unconscious competence (“I drive without noticing my capability”).

Many managers who have achieved unconscious competence can become complacent and slip back – unawares – to the first level. They no longer function well because they have not bothered with self-evaluation or refreshing their skills with ‘top up’ training.

“The only way to maintain quality levels is through continual feedback, evaluation and adjustment,” Patrick recommends, because what contributed to your success in the past is not necessarily a good foundation for future success. “Things – even good things – do not always remain constant,” he says. “Managers must be prepared for change.” ■

**For more on RSM Executive Education and Organisational Development:**

**WEB** [www.rsm.nl/home/lexeced](http://www.rsm.nl/home/lexeced)