

# Where Have All the Leaders Gone?

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A current concern of many of our local corporate clients is management succession, with planning being limited by a dearth of leaders in the organization. This drives significant investment in management/ leadership training.

## THE MANAGER VS. LEADER QUANDARY

Much discussion centers on the alleged distinction between leaders and managers as well as whether there is value in accentuating this distinction. In Leadership 101, it might be articulated this way, “Managers manage tasks. Leaders lead people.”

Importantly, an underlying reality is that leaders are almost always made, not born. And, given the current business environment, it has become quite important for managers at all levels of the organization to enhance their leadership skill sets.

Two common issues are worth highlighting. Managers have often attained their positions due to their expertise rather than their management abilities, and formal training to develop management skills and strategies has not occurred. Second, many organizations provide selected team members with formalized management training, but these individuals are subsequently unable to effectively handle leadership positions.

Some leadership gurus have been working with educators and parents to begin nurturing leadership at an early age. For example, in the last decade, Stephen Covey’s *7 Habits for Highly Effective People* has been extended to teachers and students of all ages. Primary schools in Asia are slowly answering the call to equip students with 21st century skills.

Whether you use leader and manager interchangeably or recognize importance in distinguishing these titles, effective communication stands out as a unifying issue that must be addressed. This underscores the popularity of management and leadership training; however, these programs often fail to make an impact due to abstraction and

inadequate incorporation of experiential learning.

What is needed is a practical, practice-based approach to developing potential leaders. This may be particularly true for Thais given the traditional pedagogy emphasizing rote memorization and deemphasizing critical thinking.

A challenge for new managers and leaders is access to mentoring, especially given the requirements of most executive leaders to actively engage in critical projects. Senior managers tend to be spread thin, and coaching may not be their forte or inclination.

So, how can leaders and/or managers develop themselves “remotely” and with “virtual” support?

## SUBSTANCE OVER SEMANTICS

At this point in the discussion, to remove potential stigmas attached to the label of manager as well as to avoid any bias in favor of the term leader, I propose a collaboration that represents a role that I think most could practically achieve and should strive for – Lead Manager.

I offer four best practices based on BlessingWhite’s research involving a broad sample of today’s ASEAN professionals.

### 1. Lead managers validate their team members’ needs for autonomy and achievement.

Most employees highly value coaching from their managers and opportunities for personal growth. Keeping current is valued significantly by many of your team members, and this need should be validated.

### 2. Lead managers should ask questions, actively listen and sustain confidence.

These strategies are critical to motivating high performance and maximizing employee contribution. Overcoming resistance involves the same essential skills, stressing the importance of honing emotional intelligence.

### 3. Lead managers provide actionable information and communicate benefits.

Be MOST – Meaningful, Objective, Specific and Timely – when setting and supporting goals or when delegating responsibility. Your direct reports want to feel that they play significant roles in accomplishing the mission of the organization, and they look to you to engender this mood in the workplace.

### 4. Lead managers must take responsibility for building a community among their team members.

This best practice is tied to the needs of today’s professionals for collegial support and sharing as well as professional identification. Being authentic is a key success factor in increasing engagement.

Ultimately, a lead manager is defined by the ability to excite others to exceptional performance. London Business School Professors Robert Goffee and Gareth Jones challenge lead managers with the query, “Why should anyone be led by you?” The professors’ experiences with developing the leaders of top global companies gave rise to the CASE model, which reminds lead managers that their followers are looking to them to provide Community, Authenticity, Significance and Excitement. This knowledge is designed to generate behaviors that inspire people to achieve greatness.

## DELIVERABLES

Whether one subscribes to the close directive supervision style typical in Thailand or the democratic participative approach preferred by Western cultures, the goal is to seamlessly blend the relational aspect commonly associated with leadership to motivate, coach and build trust with the functional role of management that ensures proper planning, budgeting, evaluating and facilitating activities.

And, when you are considering whether to use leader, manager or some clever combination, it might be best to invoke the adage - actions speak louder than words. ■

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