

# **The Only Trait of a Leader**

*A field guide to success  
for new engineers, scientists,  
and technologists*

**by  
John E. West**

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It is not the purpose of this text to reprint all available information on leadership skills and techniques for technology professionals, but instead to complement, amplify, and supplement other texts. You are urged to read all of the available material to learn as much as possible and tailor the information presented here and elsewhere to your individual needs.

**This is a sample from the new book “The Only Trait of a Leader,” by John E. West.**

If you're interested in learning more, check out full details on the web site, [www.onlytraitofaleader.com](http://www.onlytraitofaleader.com). There you can download samples of other chapters, or buy the entire book in PDF or print form.

Thanks for reading!

## Chapter 2

# Enlightened Technology Leadership and Managing People

This chapter covers some of the principles of the philosophy of enlightened technology leadership that will apply to you as you move up in your organization, gaining responsibility for and authority over larger and larger groups of people and projects. The principles in this chapter don't replace what we've already discussed. The previous chapter outlines the overarching philosophy of enlightened technology leadership. The principles apply to everyone at all levels of experience and success.

If you can learn to apply those principles to your life in such a way that they become a heart-learned part of everything you do, then almost always you will be given the opportunity to advance in your organization. This will happen because you'll stand out as someone with "potential" and "the right attitude."

Not everyone will take this opportunity. Not everyone should take this opportunity. Some folks feel a very strong individual desire to stay on the front lines of individual creativity without the burdens of being responsible for others, and this is perfectly fine—heck, statistically it's required. Everyone can't be in charge. But if you do

feel called to contribute as part of your organization's executing team (sometimes referred to as "management," more below), you'll have the opportunity to create or sustain a culture of change, creativity, and empowerment.

The principles in this chapter will show you how. Start learning these principles now, along with the core principles in the last chapter. You usually aren't given a lot of warning before you are promoted and need to apply them. It could happen tomorrow ... are you ready?

## **Oh, Mr. Webster...**

First, we need some definitions to make this chapter work. The trouble is that the words "management" and "manager" have become so overloaded. In one context, they simply refer to the body of executives who are responsible for making the decisions and operating your organization. In another context, the words refer to the principles and those who apply them. The term thinks of people as resources to be placed against tasks and motivated to perform against schedules and milestones, whether they supervise other people or not.

The term I'll use to refer to the folks in charge is the "executing team". Don't misread that as Executive Team, that group of folks in the executive suite with passes to the private boxes at sports stadiums. In this book the phrase executing team will refer to anyone who's leading a project or people or making decisions on the directions of the organization (you know, folks who "execute" the mission of the team). This really broad definition captures everyone from team leaders to presidents, and is what people sometimes mean when they say "management" or "management team."

But when I say "management" I'll be referring to the acts of—or processes related to—stimulating, motivating, and guiding people through the organizational red tape to get actual work done.

This book is about leadership. Management has a place, and leaders need to know the skills of management (managers likewise need to know the skills of leadership, but too often don't). Leading is where the magic is, though, and that's where you should focus your lifelong learning energies. By the time you are managing a project, you've already worked all the fun out of it. Well, I have anyway.

## **So, you're a "manager"**

First of all, don't be. A manger, that is.

As we discussed in the last chapter, leaders and managers differ in their approach to motivating people. Management is about directing and prodding people (the way the shepherd and his sheep dogs prod the sheep); it's about keeping a group of people within a predefined set of parameters to produce a product or service in the way that it has always been produced. It can require a lot of effort on the manager's part; the manager *pushes* those around him to produce. (Not that the manager is a bully, but the idea of *pushing* here is to be contrasted with what happens when people are led: they follow under their own energy.)

Management is a necessary part of most organizations, and there are definite functions in which it can exist successfully apart from leadership. For example, in technology companies, the infrastructure teams (those responsible for the physical plant, manufacturing facilities, office space, etc.) and operators (often hourly workers who monitor terminals in large computer centers for signs of trouble and call in administrators to address the problems) are in charge of functions that can be successfully managed. Innovation isn't usually expected, even in really forward-thinking organizations.

However, even these functions can be led from success to excellence by someone willing to do the job differently than it's always been done. People inclined only to management are a dime a dozen, and there are precious few functions that can be only

managed and still achieve success. A leader, on the other hand, is a much scarcer commodity, and his or her leadership can be used anywhere to advantage.

I personally think that managers are a dime a dozen because management appears easy. And, it is easy to do at the low level of performance at which most people practice this craft. Good managers are as rare as giant, perfect gemstones. Once you've gotten a feel for leadership, you should study this craft as well. Do both well, and you can be president of your world.

## **Technology is for creative types**

In most technology companies, services like facilities or physical-plant management are provided to support the creative force behind the company. Creative? Yup!

Despite all the press from the art community that would indicate they have the lock on the world's creative output, technology professionals are creative people. We create the products, services, and technologies that will shape how we meet, greet, and interact with one another and with our environment in the future. I have found that creative people do not respond well to management.

Management creates boxes and moves people and tasks around within them. Boxes do not lead to innovation and creation. They don't create the kinds of environments in which a single lightning bolt of an idea can shape an entire industry.

A small part of the creative environment can be nurtured by the physical workplace itself. This is why Silicon Valley companies provide free soda and snacks, pool tables and video games, and other premium services to their employees. But the biggest part is the intellectual and emotional environment that leaders create. This is why hugely innovative new companies can still innovate on TV trays in their Mom's garage, and why brilliant new approaches to fundamental problems sometimes rocket out of the sometimes depressingly under-funded facilities of major university and government labs.

**Thanks for reading this excerpt from the new book “The Only Trait of a Leader.”**

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