



To Lead or Not to Lead?

It's like walking a tightrope...or walking over hot coals? Everyone who has transitioned from being a team member to being the team leader can relate to the challenge. Even experienced leaders with the best intentions may have a difficult time guiding the team to become empowered.

When a person moves into a new leadership role, there is a natural transition period for both the leaders and the team members. The leader's guidance may be tested. If the team leader remembers the team also shares responsibility for the overall success of the unit, the transition period may be easier. In his book, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up To and For Our Leaders*, Ira Chaleff states that everyone on the team is expected to help an organization achieve its mission and vision, which means the followers don't just blindly follow. Both followers and leaders need to be proactive and courageous in offering positive solutions and listening to others' ideas.

There are four basic strategies both leaders and followers can use to promote teamwork:

- Understand personality types and how they impact the team.
- Identify the connection between personal assumptions in regard to others and how these assumptions affect personal behavior.
- Identify sources of unproductive thinking patterns and reduce their effects.
- Manage difficult conversations and ways to cope with receiving negative feedback.

As the team lead, you can use these strategies yourself and encourage your team members to apply them in order to create and maintain a positive and productive work environment.

The difference between a "group of people" and a team is the ability to accomplish much more through the sharing of knowledge and skills. Team members are more vested in collaboration toward the goal than the need to win as the individual star. Leaders who apply the same strategies that made them successful as a team member will find that success continues in their new role.

"I think the Army would make a serious mistake if we made a distinction and said, 'You are a manager, and you are a leader.' So my philosophy is that we are all leaders! We also must be responsible managers or stewards of resources entrusted to us. We would make a serious mistake to think that we could be one and not the other."—General John Wickham