

Boss, Manager, or Leader – Which One Are You?

By Michael Summers

Boss, Manager, or Leader – Which one would you call yourself? Which one would your employees call you? And how do you know which one you really are? Webster's Dictionary defines the three as follows:

Boss – “a person who exercises control or authority; one who directs or supervises workers.”

Manager – “a person whose work or profession is management.”

Leader – “a person who has commanding authority or influence.”

The title typically used in the workplace is manager and rightly so. By definition your work or profession is management. But within that title, a manager can be at either end of “boss” or “leader.” Although similar on the surface, there are major differences within these two definitions.

First, a boss **exercises** control or authority. This indicates an active controlling of employees. In leadership, there is no exercising; the leader simply **has** commanding authority or influence. Whether the leader chooses to use this actively or passively is up to him or her. There is latitude within leadership. And although the word authority is used in both definitions, a boss must exercise that authority in order to maintain it, while the leader's mere presence commands the authority, whether exercised or not.

Second, a boss is one who directs or supervises **workers**. Workers are never mentioned in the definition of leader. A leader is a leader regardless of whether they have 100 subordinates or no subordinates. And the leader with 100 workers will not necessarily need direct and supervise those workers anyway. True leaders will train, coach, and mentor their team so that the necessity for direction and supervision is minimal.

Third, the definition of leader includes the word **influence**, absent in the definition of boss. Leaders do not simply direct or supervise workers; they influence their workers, influence their peers, and influence their superiors. They influence the marketplace, influence demand, and influence the entire environment within which they work. While the boss's scope is on the micro, the direct oversight of the subordinates below, the leader's scope is macro, the shaping and structuring of the entire working environment.

If you hold the title of “manager,” it's important to ask yourself, what kind of manager are you? Are you the boss manager, or the leader manager? Do you simply direct and supervise your workers, actively exercising your control, or do you have a commanding authority and influence?

If you find that you're the boss, then I'll be blunt - you've taken the easy way out. Every person in a managerial position should seek to avoid the “boss” label and instead pursue “leadership.” The world has an abundance of bosses, but not nearly enough leaders. For a more detailed look at what leadership entails, I encourage you to read, [The 11 principles of leadership](#), also found on my website. Honing your leadership skills will not only be beneficial to your company, but will be beneficial to you as well, both personally and professionally.