Leaders and Bureaucrats

The differences are all in the minds.

By William P. Fisher

People in leadership positions usually evidence a style, charisma, persona, or personality that causes others to follow their lead in achieving the leader's goals. Bureaucrats, those who are in responsible positions but don't seize leadership opportunities, have a style, demeanor, or manner that causes others to be unsure about their ability to lead. When this occurs, results are usually not all that they could have been.

On occasion, organizations, departments, and teams fail miserably due to the "bureaucratic mindset." Following are some contrasts between leaders and bureaucrats in terms of their styles and attitudes.

- **Leaders** say, "We can do it." Bureaucrats say, "We can try it."
- **Leaders** look for continued progress. Bureaucrats continue to maintain the status quo.
- **Leaders** possess and evoke an improvement attitude. Bureaucrats are self-satisfied.
- **Leaders** look for opportunities. Bureaucrats wait for something to happen.
- **Leaders** play a good game. Bureaucrats play a good game.
- **Leaders** judge themselves. Bureaucrats hope others will judge them favorably.
- **Leaders** know they must confront problems. Bureaucrats hope problems will go away.
- **Leaders** demand flawless administration. Bureaucrats get bugged down in administration.
- **Leaders** delegate duties and tasks. Bureaucrats absorb duties and tasks.
- **Leaders** are comfortable with their subordinates. Bureaucrats are comfortable in their office.
- **A leader** says, "I'm responsible." A bureaucrat says, "It's not my fault."
- **A leader** can laugh at himself/herself. A bureaucrat is offended by bureaucracy-directed humor.
- **A leader** shares credit but participates in it. A bureaucrat wants all the credit.
- **A leader** says, "I'll take the blame." A bureaucrat says, "Who's to blame?"
- **The leader** is a tireless worker. The bureaucrat is a tired worker.
- **The leader** gets hot, the leader is overwhelming. When things get hot, the bureaucrat is overwhelmed.
- **The leader** goes for the win. The bureaucrat goes for the tie.
- **The leader** rises above adversity. The bureaucrat runs away from adversity.
- **The leader** is outgoing. The bureaucrat likes going out.
- **Leaders** develop subordinates. Bureaucrats assign subordinates.

- **The leader** is often the team's most valuable player. The bureaucrat is often the team's most valuable player.
- **Leaders** say, "We can fix that." Bureaucrats say, "I told you it wouldn't work."
- **Leaders** are customer-oriented. Bureaucrats are process-oriented.
- **Leaders** provide direction. Bureaucrats give instructions.
- **Leaders** can manage many things at once. Bureaucrats prefer to manage one thing at a time.
- **Leaders** handle the media effectively. Bureaucrats allow the media to handle them.
- **Leaders** earn respect. Bureaucrats demand respect.
- **Leaders** seek organizational commitment and loyalty.
- Bureaucrats require personal commitment and loyalty.
- **Leaders** trust key subordinates. Bureaucrats rely on control systems.
- **Leaders** recruit the absolute best talent available. Bureaucrats don't want to be challenged by subordinates.
- **Leaders** teach. Bureaucrats pontificate.
- **Leaders** emphasize standards. Bureaucrats emphasize discipline.

Don't allow your organization to become a bureaucracy!

- **Leaders** focus. Bureaucrats view.
- **Leaders** inspire. Bureaucrats perp.ire.
- **Leaders** manage stress in their lives. Bureaucrats are managed by stress in their lives.
- **Leaders** communicate articulately. Bureaucrats communicate artfully.
- **Leaders** lead for the future. Bureaucrats allow the future to take care of itself.
- **Leaders** take action at the appropriate time. Bureaucrats want more advice.
- **Leaders** say, "We succeeded in spite of the obstacles." Bureaucrats say, "We could have succeeded if it weren't for the obstacles."
- **Leaders** take advantage of the rules. Bureaucrats go strictly by the rules.
- **Leaders** see the glass as "half full." Bureaucrats don't see the glass. Bureaucrats are protective of their time.
- **Leaders** are generous with their time. Bureaucrats are protective of their time.
- **Leaders** are gracious. Bureaucrats are ingratiating.
- **Leaders** are aggressive. Bureaucrats are intrusive.
- **Leaders** think strategically. Bureaucrats think about time off.
- **Leaders** attempt to be objective. Bureaucrats are selfishly motivated.
- **Leaders** enjoy their time. Bureaucrats put in their time.

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