

HEM AT THE HELM

There is a lot of discussion today about the similarities and differences between managers and leaders. The truth is, from my perspective, they are different but you need both. The key, however, is where leaders and managers are placed in the organization.

Leaders are visionaries. They help to envision the future of an organization. They are good at putting in place processes that create new organizations or new divisions or products for an existing organization. John Kotter ([Leading Change](#)) says, “Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles.”

Managers are geared to work with what already is. They are potentially good at controlling and overseeing a group that is already in place. Kotter says, “Management is a set of processes that can keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly.” They often do their best work in planning, organizing, budgeting, staffing, controlling, and problem solving.

If you blend this together with the teaching of “*Who Moved My Cheese?*,” you will see that some change characters are better at leading and some are better at managing. *Sniffs* smell change (nose) and have a good antenna to pull in information and trends that they need. Their head is up looking for possibilities. The danger with the Sniff is that he/she does not always do anything with the information. This means that the leader needs someone to help in implementation.

Scurrys (feet) are always ready for change. Their motto is “If it ain’t broken, break it.” They create change if it is not moving at a fast enough pace. This is a good characteristic for a leader. The downside is that *Scurrys* often run off without a budget or a plan, so a manager alongside might help with implementation.

Hems (folded arms) are the most resistant to change and are slow to move forward. They often have their head down because they are conscientious people who want to get their work done. They don’t take all their sick leave, and they put in a full eight hours. However, they are the most resistant to new ideas for product, sales, marketing, etc. This is why “Hems at the helm” is not a good idea. There is a place for Hems in every organization – they get the work done – but they are not built to dream, envision, or inspire.

A better choice for a leader would be a *Haw* with some Sniff or Scurry characteristics. Haws are initially startled by change but align quite quickly with the change. They are “people persons” who can relate to others who are like them or different from them.

When one works as a consultant, I have found, you have three choices. One, you can hover over a company in a helicopter, gather data, analyze and interview, and then present your findings. In skilled hands this is helpful, but it relies almost totally on

implementation by existing persons. Second, you can do all of the above, but at regular intervals for accountability and revisitation where the consultant stays involved to help create change. Third, you can actually play an active role for a period of time and get involved in the day-to-day implementation of change.

I am currently doing number three with a small organization that needs to grow to stay alive (although it doesn't always want to grow). This has really been a challenge for me because they have a "Hem at the helm." The idea of envisioning a new future sounds like additional work for this already busy person and empowering others to do some of the tasks creates for him the feeling of the situation being out of his control. Therefore, we have status quo leadership and a complacent workforce.

To allow this organization to let "leaders" emerge to work alongside of this "manager" (and his friends who don't threaten him) is a real challenge for me. Fortunately, he responds well to a straight kind of talk and is beginning to see that his strengths are needed but his limitations are holding the organization back.

The end of the story has not been written. A "complacent culture" is very strong in this organization but doing things as they have always been done will only bring slow death. Hopefully, the circle of decision and the circle of empowerment to implement will grow and the organization will again spring to life.

Finding ways to affirm the "Hem at the helm" and his non-threatening friends is a great need. One needs to help Hems (more than half of any organization) see that they can supervise and manage what is, but they are not really "wired" to create a new future for an organization. Each Sniff, Scurry, Hem, or Haw – or combination thereof – has his/her place in the organization. To help them find it is the challenge.

Thankfully, Spencer Johnson, author of *Who Moved My Cheese?* Has created a Change Profile so that people can take an inventory that reveals where they are strong and where they are weak. This is a great instrument for helping organizational change and is available through my office or in seminar form.

The bottom line is this — leaders are visionaries so they need to have some characteristics of Sniff, Scurry, and Haw. Managers work with what already exists; some Hems can be helpful in this role. However, "Hems at the Helm" tend to maintain the status quo and do not keep up with the current speed of change. □