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Officer Development Series – *Leadership Skills*

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## **Managers *versus* Leaders** By Deputy Chief Frank Viscuso

Excerpt from *Step Up and Lead*

There is a distinct difference between management and leadership. Managers manage a process they've seen before. Leaders create change. Although your thesaurus may say the best synonym for leadership is management, these are two very different things.

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*Managers manage a process they've seen before.*

*Leaders create change.*

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I can vividly remember sitting in my chief's office as a young officer as he added to my already heavy workload. I could not comprehend how he could possibly think I had enough time, energy, and talent to get so many projects completed in what felt like an unrealistic time frame. The most common phrase I used during that time of my life was, "My brain is going to explode." Perhaps you can relate. Think back to an experience you have had in your life with an ineffective leader. Have you ever felt that you were expected to do more than others around you? Have you ever worked to improve yourself and your organization while others seemed disengaged without consequence? Have you ever felt overworked, underappreciated, and uninspired? If so, you may have worked under an ineffective leader. Learn from the experience. Sometimes, we need to experience what

doesn't work so we can better understand what does. In unstable times, growth comes from leaders who create change and engage their organizations, instead of from managers who push their employees to do more for less.

Great leaders don't focus on trying to get people to *do* something. They focus on trying to get people to *be* something. Imagine how much more productive you would be if your superior was constantly helping you become more than you thought you could be. This is a stark contrast to the way most “bosses” operate. This explains why so many people think that boss spelled backwards is Double-S.O.B.

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*“Great leaders don't focus on trying to get people to do something. They focus on trying to get people to BE something.”*

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You can be the one to change the “management” mindset within your organization, but you must first decide to lead.

No one anoints a leader. You may be an officer, but that doesn't mean you are a leader. The first thing a true leader does is take responsibility. My favorite leadership quote of all time is this:

*“A Leader of one can become a leader of many, but if you can't lead one, you'll never lead any.”*

The bottom line is, if you can't lead YOU, you can't lead others. No one enjoys working under a manager for obvious reasons. Managers are cynical pessimists because they've seen it before and believe they've already done it as well as it can be done. Leaders, on the other hand, are enthusiastic about positive change – without positive change there is no future to work towards. Management involves power by position. Leadership involves power by influence. Firefighters *have* to follow managers, but they *want* to follow leaders

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*Firefighters have to follow managers,  
but they want to follow leaders*

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## Step Up

Most people are good followers, but many of them never learn to lead. They follow instructions, follow directions, and follow the pack. Although they may be consistently honing their skills, they're hiding. When people hide, it's because they are afraid. These people are everywhere, in every profession. Even in the fire service. Some people may ask the question, "What could a person who runs into burning buildings possibly be afraid of?" A firefighter will silently laugh at that question. Firefighters have fears, just like everyone else. Courage isn't the absence of fear. It's the management of fear.

Many people are afraid of failure. You may be one of them, but for most of us in the fire service, it's not failure that we fear – its blame. No one likes to be criticized. I'll admit it. I don't like to be criticized. My first reaction is to defend myself. Most people are like me, but some allow their fear of criticism to prevent them from stepping up into a leadership role. They don't even like the thought that their actions may cause some form of criticism. So what do they do? Nothing!



**Step up and take responsibility!**

Becoming a leader requires that a person goes through discomfort, which is exactly why we don't have more leaders. If the pain of change is greater than the pain of staying the same, it's easy to fall back into a safe, obscure position. Leaders, on the other hand, are willing to get uncomfortable.

- Leaders are willing to take a stand and challenge the status quo.
- Leaders are willing to stand up in front of strangers.
- Leaders are willing to give direction.
- Leaders are willing to be tough when they need to be.
- Leaders are willing to tell someone when they're wrong.
- Leaders are willing to praise someone when they do something right.
- Leaders are willing to propose an idea that might fail.
- Leaders are willing to take on the opposition when they know it's the right thing to do.
- Leaders are willing to stop a destructive practice and start a new trend for the betterment of their organization.

If you're not uncomfortable in your work as a leader, it's almost certain you're not reaching your potential as a leader. Too many people have been led to believe it's safe to do nothing—to get by. They think it is okay to just participate. While that may be the path that the masses choose, it's not the path for you. If it were, you wouldn't be reading this.



Frank Viscuso is a fire chief, speaker, and fire service instructor who specializes in leadership and officer development. He is the author of four books including the best-selling textbook *Fireground Operational Guides*, and his leadership book titled *Step Up and Lead*. He can be reached at [frank@commonvalor.com](mailto:frank@commonvalor.com), or via cell: 973-981-1505