

The many hats of a leader

Producer, manager and leader were once three distinct roles. Today, as a Manager/Leader in an increasingly volatile and complex world, you wear all three hats simultaneously.

Which hat are you most comfortable wearing? What would help you shift more seamlessly between roles? How could you use this idea to communicate authentically and cultivate a more powerful leadership presence from within?

When you Produce, your emphasis is on *doing*. You put your time and energy toward activities that are uniquely yours to do, like closing a deal, analyzing a spreadsheet or building key relationships. Your effectiveness as an individual contributor drove your early career success.

When you Manage, you oversee operational complexities and help people create or navigate processes or systems. You emphasize *thinking*; fact before feeling. You set the expectations that enable goals to be met, implement and oversee systems that ensure the trains come and go on time, and hold people accountable to ensure that customers have predictably positive experiences.

When you Lead, you create a *feeling* for people that inspires them to change. Your cleareyed vision for the future, the behavior you model and the culture you foster enable people to grow and change. The feeling of empathy is at the heart of true leadership, according to new research from the Greater Good Science Center, University of California, Berkeley.

Three truths will help you think about how this framework applies to you.

Producer/Manager/Leader® is a mindset, not a career path. If you are accountable for achieving work through others, you will be most successful in thinking of yourself as a Manager/Leader because the job requires you to think and feel. What activities or situations require you to prioritize fact over feeling? Relationships before tasks? You will have a more powerful presence when you feel grounded in the perspective you bring, and in knowing that you have the power to switch hats.

Versatility and balance are crucial to your success as a Manager/Leader. There is no “right” allocation of your time and energy. Your hats are equally important, but you must learn to draw on them in the right amount and at the right time. If a time-sensitive situation requires the team to focus with a surgeon’s intensity, it may be necessary to drive goals, timelines and expectations to save the patient or deal. But too much task-focus and not enough love could cause people to look elsewhere. Think about the situation you face this week or month. What’s needed? What balance is required?

Honesty with yourself is the best policy. There’s no shame in having self-awareness that you prefer one hat over another. In fact, your authentic self-assessment will enable you to avoid the most frequent mistakes of Managers/Leaders: overusing your strengths. Perhaps you love being a technical expert or creative entrepreneur and are more energized by solving a wicked problem or closing an elusive deal. You spend too much time doing, squirreled away in your office, to focus on the task. If you are not Managing/Leading and minding the store, then who is? What do you enjoy most about your role as a Manager/Leader?

Lisa Prior is CEO and founder of Prior Consulting, an advanced leadership and culture firm for executive teams.
www.priorconsulting.com