

Management and Leadership: Not One and the Same

"Manager" and "leader" are two words often used interchangeably, and while management and leadership are both important to business success, they are not the same thing, emphasizes Rick LaPlante.

As a popular speaker on the topic of leadership, LaPlante has had firsthand experience — he had a successful 19-year career with Microsoft and guided development and differentiation between management and leadership roles. Today, LaPlante runs his own cattle company near Powell, Wyo., with his wife and family.

"People think they are the same, but they are fundamentally different," LaPlante says. He describes management as "dealing with current complexities." For example, he points out, beef producers "manage" grazing, herd health and breeding strategies for their operations.

Conversely, "Leadership is about change — creating the environment for change," LaPlante says.

LaPlante further explains that management is about predictability, reliability, control and efficiency in managing systems. He notes that managers want repeatable production outcomes — cows bred at roughly the same time each year and weaned calves to perform and weigh at minimum what they did the year before; managers don't like different. He identifies leadership as "creating a reality that wouldn't likely exist without intervention."

He says, "Leadership is a totally different set of skills than management." And he adds, "We don't teach it [leadership], in high school or college, and we should."

He also notes that ranchers often take the time to transfer or teach

management skills like riding, roping and other traditions. But he says, "We don't spend a lot of time passing on leadership — and we should."

Leadership is...

LaPlante says at the core of leadership is understanding that it is about people — as opposed to systems and processes.

He offers this analogy: Management relates to the way producers AI (artificial insemination) or graze, which LaPlante points out deals with policies and procedures. He says, "People are involved in the system; you give management plans to people to do, but it's not about the people."

Leadership, he explains, is about thinking of the future and creating the scaffolding or structure for people to use to make innovative choices and to do things differently. "Leadership is all about change, messiness, risk, movement and creating desire. It is always 100% about people."

He adds, "Leadership is about trying something even if you don't know the outcome, which is why leadership and management are often at odds."

In a nutshell, LaPlante says, "Leadership is about intentionality and figuring out where you are headed."

LaPlante notes that leadership is an acquired skill. He also believes leadership can, and should, be developed and can exist at all levels within an organization. LaPlante says, "Anyone can have a compelling vision of the future, not just one guy at the top. It's important to get everybody in the game."

Most important, LaPlante says is that leaders must motivate, inspire and influence thinking, creativity

and engagement. And he says the most important part of helping foster leadership among employees is that their employee can't push them down when they share an idea. Otherwise, he says, it becomes like a game of Whack-A-Mole, and pretty soon people won't pop their head up to share ideas.

Ready to change

LaPlante notes that in the farm and ranch business, owners often convince themselves that their businesses are not like other Fortune 500 companies, but he says the reality is farms and ranches do face the same issues as other businesses. And he shares this: If you sell 500 head of calves annually, you are in the top 30% of businesses in the U.S. by revenue. Thus, he poses the question: "Are you running your business like the top 30% in the U.S.?"

He adds, "We cannot have world class corporations without exceptional management. But, we cannot have even better or different world class businesses if we don't have [and implement] leadership."

To move forward, LaPlante advises individuals to inventory the challenges that face their business and then:

- 1) Decide if those challenges require management or leadership.
- 2) Determine who is the right person to provide the leadership.
- 3) Decide if that individual has the necessary leadership skills or how that person can get those skills.
- 4) Schedule time to provide the leadership to others on the team. **HW**