



CENTER FOR
Heroic Leadership

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Beginnings matter – a lot

I'M A MIDDLE MANAGER

As a manager in the middle, is this another situation where I have to manage up, down and across my organization?

Oh, yes. Did you really expect a different answer? Most of us play both leadership and followership roles in our lives. For middle managers involved in a journey of change this is particularly true. As a middle manager you will probably follow senior execs in some cases and lead the effort in other settings that are within your sphere of control or influence. And you will need to do so collaboratively with peers in many of these situations.

You will need to take a “360” perspective for most of the journey. The CEO and senior executives may be heavily involved in the beginning of a journey as well as at key points throughout, but guess who picks up leadership roles early and carries them without wavering all the way to the end of the journey?

That’s really just the nature of most organizations and it highlights the significance of the managers in the middle as well as the need for a strong web of leaders that can share the load and support each other.

The Six Leadership Roles – A Middle Manager’s Perspective

Let’s look at each of the six leadership roles. These are the roles that you will be playing in partnership with senior leadership as part of the leadership web. When orchestrated well, these are the leadership roles that will always provide a solid foundation – they just need to be adapted for each journey.

Act I – Leadership in the Beginning – Start Strong

1. The Visionary Role

For changes that span the organization you will probably be following the lead of senior leadership in making the business case for the journey, communicating the “big Picture” vision and letting people know how the journey will be led. Reinforcing senior leadership and extending leadership into the organization is critical for these strategies. If you are leading a change that is more focused on your area of responsibility you will probably take the lead in developing these strategies – and will be relying on others to reinforce and support you.

2. The Architect Role

This is the role that determines the organization design necessary to achieve the vision. The elements of the design will vary from journey to journey and can include anything from structure to roles and from processes to competencies and management style. The Architect also develops the plan for the journey and the design of the web of leaders required to execute the plan. As with the Visionary role you may be following senior management and extending the leadership into the organization or you may be initiating the role in the area of your responsibility.



- *Maintaining Direction and Energy*
- *Communicating and Connecting*
- *Accountability*
- *Endings, Beginnings and “Inbetweenity”*
- *Building required individual, group and organizational capabilities*

“An organization will simply not have the power, reach, credibility, flexibility and resilience required over the course of a journey of change without the leadership of middle management”

Act II - Leadership on the Path – Hold the Course

3. The Catalyst Role

The strategies of the Catalyst are to engage many more people in productive roles in the web of leaders and followers, add operational detail to the vision and the organization design and prepare people for the journey. If you have not been engaged before, you will certainly be engaged here and will play a larger and larger role.

4. The Guide Role

Sometimes middle managers help create the communications systems required and sometimes they simply make them work. Middle managers are also major players in helping people let go of old ways and deal with the experience of “inbetweenity”, the stresses of having let go of those old ways but not yet having discovered and mastered the new ways. Middle managers are also key to healthy accountability, particularly the informal and frequent checkpoints that keep the change process on track and energy renewed.

5. The Builder Role

This is the partner of the Guide. Middle managers are also critical in this role as the Builder is responsible for maintaining the leadership web and building the individual, group and systemic capabilities required for success on the journey and in the desired state at the end of the journey. The Builder also is responsible for coaching people through the deceptively difficult process of mastery and challenging senior leaders to support that mastery with resources.

Act III - Leadership in Completion – Finish Strong

6. The Integrator Role

Here is a major challenge for middle managers. That challenge is to maintain leadership discipline, not get distracted by the next project or journey and “finish strong.” In particular it means ensuring that the various elements and people of the organization have been realigned after all the changes and “fit” or work together. That can mean presenting some difficult truths about lack of alignment and pushing for key decisions to complete the journey well.

Middle Management Leadership is Essential

An organization will simply not have the power, reach, credibility, flexibility and resilience required over the course of a journey of change without the leadership of middle management. That means that:

1. Senior management has to engage middle managers in effective leadership roles; and
2. Middle managers have to step up and take on those roles.

How to Get a Good Idea of Possible Benefits - Fast

There are several ways to quickly determine how the site can provide the foundation for partnering with senior management effectively. It is designed to provide very clear and intuitive common ground around which people at all levels of an organization can align their efforts.



1. Review the guiding questions in the QuickStart packet on the power of clear leadership roles and strategies (click the download tab). These questions are designed to walk people through the process of determining the highest leverage tactics for each of the core leadership strategies for leading a journey of change. There are also templates for organizing the work.

You can imagine aligning with senior management or those that you will be leading in your own sphere of influence. This QuickStart can be used to prepare for a journey or assess performance and next steps if in the midst of a journey.

2. Watch the first three minutes of the introductory video. This will give you a good overview of how the site is laid out around the four sources of leadership power, including the implementation guides for each (QuickStarts).
3. Skim the summaries for each of the four core chapters (leadership commitment, knowledge, strategies and webs). These are three to five pages long and designed for easy skimming (they are not heavy on text).
4. Just poke around in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section. The questions can be seen at a glance, so just see if any match the questions you have.

