



The Criminal Justice Institute's

Management Quarterly

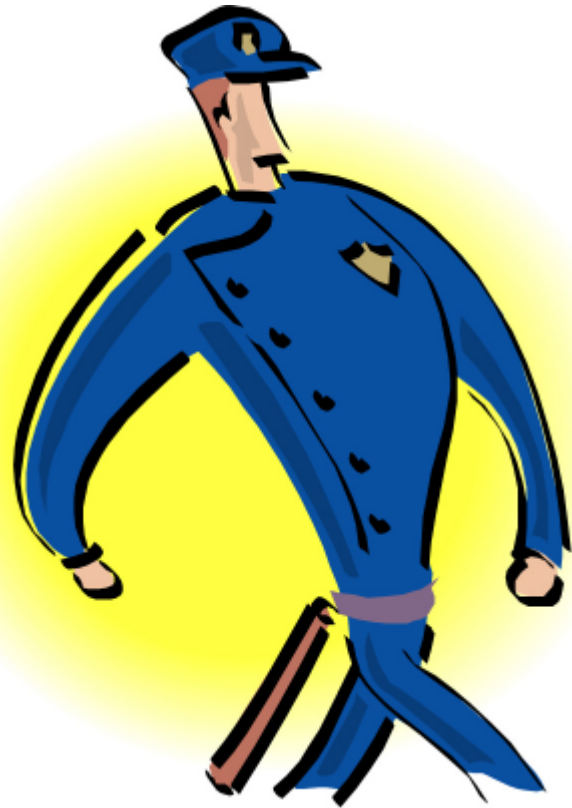
Spring 2006

A Supervisor? A Leader?

The differences are many.
And they matter.

"Am I a supervisor or a leader? Is there a difference?" All over this country, in corporations and government agencies, there are millions of supervisors who imagine that their place on the organization chart has given them a body of followers. Of course, it hasn't. It has given them subordinates. Whether the subordinates become followers depends on whether the supervisors act like leaders.

Thomas L. Brown, a web-based author who specializes in contemporary leadership issues, researched this question of "supervisor vs. leader" and discovered some key differences, many of which are featured in this issue of the CJI Management Quarterly. As you review this article, consider the differences he notes as they relate to the role you play within your agency and ask yourself again, "Am I a supervisor or a leader?" Your answer may surprise you.



Knowing the Difference

A **supervisor** is all wrapped up in "planning, organizing, and delegating." They seem to relish the integration of hundreds of details into a smooth-clicking, efficient harmony. A **leader** is more inclined to pay attention to the overall direction of an agency—giving the workplace canvass a very broad brush about "what we are, where we are going"—and then rely on trusted

subordinates to sketch in the details and keep the leader posted on the progress.

A **supervisor** is in the business of “clarifying” goals and tasks. Much as the freshman composition student wrangles with the third level of an outline for a thesis, supervisors labor hard to determine who is going to do what. **Leaders** believe that their time should be spent shaking up the status quo (in a healthy sense) and compelling people to take sound risks to make the agency razor-sharp in both an operational sense and a competitive sense.

A **supervisor** likes to solve problems and has a penchant for finding problems that need solving. **Leaders**, on the other hand, think of the critical messages that need to be communicated throughout the agency. They ask: *“What symbol, what message, can I emphasize today that will get everyone focused on why we are here and what we are trying to become?”*

Supervisors control; **Leaders** inspire.

Many men and women have said that the title “**supervisor**” connotes that someone is in charge—the same feeling that glows in the hospital room when the surgeon arrives and starts giving commands prior to an operation. A person called a “**leader**” also connotes someone in charge but in a *hands-off* way. The leader cultivates the desire in others to accept responsibility for tasks, deadlines, and milestones.

Supervisors have a reputation as people who list “things to be done” on one side of a page and “available people” on the other, and then draw lines connecting tasks to people. **Leaders** would rather build teams, much as a coach does. The leader may assign people to positions on the team, but the challenge is to build an environment of collaboration and synergy that spurs people toward “a greater horizon.”

The **supervisor** administers systems to implement the agency vision into reality. **Leaders**, by contrast, are seen as disrupting current systems as they challenge the workplace to be better.

Supervisors wear invisible badges that confer upon them the power of management. Strangely, they seem almost naked without the agency blessing of a supervisor title—the “chevrons on the sleeves.” Without the authority that comes with a title, a supervisor seems as powerless as the frontier marshal who turns in his star. **Leaders** work from an elected base. They may or may not have an illustrious title, but their authority is unquestionable because it is based on the respect accorded them by those whom they lead. Leaders truly prefer to influence rather than command and, thus, leaders can exist at any and every level. And they do.

Supervisors are easy to spot in any agency because they have the job of putting out the fires. The supervisor is the person who is repeatedly called upon to crack through the bureaucracy (that he or she may have helped to construct) and to “make progress” whenever gridlock is choking the system. In contrast, **leaders** are in the vision business. They are trying to unify the agency around a clear sense of becoming, of getting as many wagons as possible headed toward the destination “just over those rugged hills.”

Knowing the Value

Brown notes that in all of the conversations he has had concerning the issue of “supervisor vs. leader,” no one has ever voiced displeasure with the position of supervisor. In contrast, everyone agrees that we need both leaders and supervisors in an organization. Their key attributes are as follows:

Supervisors make tomorrows. They crystallize the expectations of people into concrete agendas and action plans. In this sense, they truly master change. But **Leaders** have an even higher calling. They rally people to the agency vision, while also urging them to lock in place the values that keep that vision distinct and alive. Leaders know that repeated success, for any agency, is always an IF.

IF all of us are to make some sense of today’s whirling state of supervision throughout our agencies, perhaps we should make sure that we

emphasize *exactly* the right points in the “we need more leadership” speech. It is not that our profession needs fewer supervisors and more leaders. It’s that all of us could dramatically bolster the destiny of our agencies by committing to whatever it takes to become that rare being – *the supervisory leader*.

*Tom Brown is a champion of vanguard thinking about leadership. The author of hundreds of articles, he also wrote the first online book on leadership: **The Anatomy of Fire: Sparking a New Spirit of Enterprise**, which explores the look and feel of leadership in the 21st Century. To learn more about Tom, visit his website at www.tombrown.us.*



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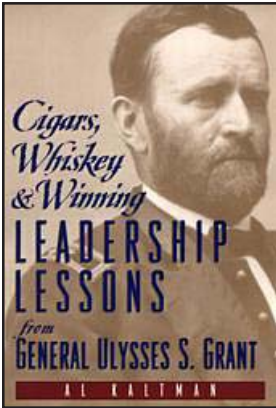
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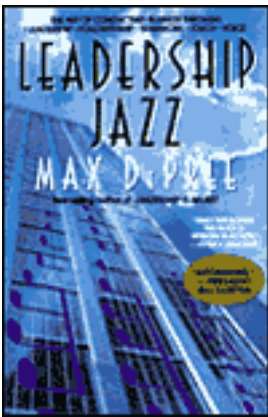
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Leadership Jazz by Max DePree

Leadership in the workplace, says Max DePree, is like playing jazz—it's more an art than a science. Today's successful managers are attuned to the needs and ideas of their followers and even step aside at times to be followers themselves. As a result, they spark vitality and productivity from their work force. They cultivate communication and spontaneity, diversity and creativity, and the unique potential of every person in the organization to contribute to the success of the team. In *Leadership Jazz* you'll learn how to hold people accountable but still give them space to make mistakes; how to balance the needs of your employees with those of the company; how to inspire change and innovation and maintain a sense of stability; how to practice the art of delegation; how to work constructively with creative people; how to assess candidates for senior positions; and much more.



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