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Get out of the weeds and lead

Excelling at a particular activity does not necessarily prepare you to lead a team — just as playing the violin well doesn't prepare you to be the orchestra's conductor

BY ROXI BAHAR HEWERTSON

From the day we were born, all the applause has been about “what I have done well,” not “what *we* have done well.” Look at your life and your experiences and then fast-forward to where you are today. I think you'll agree that for most of your life, your personal performance generated the lion's share of your positive rewards or negative consequences. It wasn't a group of people; it was you, you and more you.

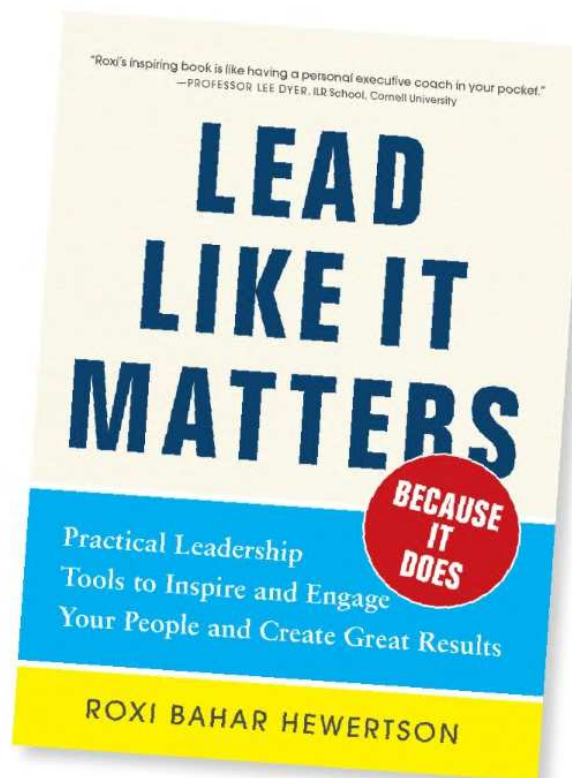
The exception is teamwork within or outside your family. If you have been a member of a real team of any kind, you may have picked up some insight into the way teams work and even into the way good leadership works. Whether you were on a great team or a lousy team, you learned something about

leading and teams. Unfortunately, few people integrate those lessons when they become leaders at work. The fallback position for most of us is what we know best and can count on the most — and that is *me*.

The skills and attributes required

to lead people successfully are entirely opposite from the skills and attributes required to be a successful individual contributor. The work, rewards and impact are 180 degrees from each other. Consider this: If the roles and skills weren't so opposite, it would be a walk in the park for someone to move seamlessly from being a great violin player to being a great conductor. Knowing how to play one instrument flawlessly requires one skill set. Knowing how to create harmony from a symphony of people playing

Leading others is an emotional and intellectual seismic shift that will quickly separate effective leaders from ineffective ones.



This article is excerpted with permission from “Lead Like It Matters...Because It Does.”

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many varied instruments requires additional, different and opposite skill sets.

In the first case, the violin player is responsible for his performance. The conductor is responsible for knowing what the violin player is capable of and is meant to do, and understanding the job of every other performer in the orchestra. It is also the conductor's job to get the most out of each person and his or her instrument so that everyone will blend well together to produce magnificent music. While the soloists may be appreciated, the audience will remember the performance as a whole. The leader is responsible for the quality of the results. She and they succeed only when the entire orchestra succeeds.

For some people, this transition in roles may come more easily; for most of us, however, it's not a seamless shift because we have not learned how we can most effectively lead others to do their best work. We tend to come at leadership as though it were no big deal: "Hey, I'll get the hang of it — it's just like falling off a log." Or we may consider leading as just another line on our job description, equal or even subordinate to all the other duties and responsibilities listed there. The supervisor role is slapped on, and suddenly you find you still have most, if not all, of your old job and now you are expected to help others create good results.

There might be time cards to approve, vacation schedules, health issues, and messy interpersonal conflicts to deal with, all without getting much, if any, information about how to manage any of those new responsibilities gracefully. Talk about setting up people to fail! This is rarely intentional, and nevertheless, it happens far too often.

Leading others is an emotional and intellectual seismic shift that will quickly separate effective

leaders from ineffective ones. Making the transition from being an individual contributor to being a leader can seem as difficult as swimming from New York to London alone, without a life jacket.

How can you make the leadership leap gracefully, you might ask. Of course I'm going to tell you to read my book and do every exercise in it at least once, if not multiple times! Here are some other suggestions: Take a really good leadership development

course, find a willing and seasoned mentor who is a good leader, observe other good leaders around you to see how they behave and what they do, observe bad or mediocre leaders around you, [and] finally, regularly ask for and listen carefully to constructive feedback from your direct reports, your stakeholders, your peers and your boss.

Get out of the weeds and *lead*. When you have your entire team fired up and producing great results, you can be far more strategic, including ensuring a sustainable future for your "pond." At long last, there will be time and space for you to be proactive rather than reactive. When you get it right, you will be amazed at how much more time you have to think, to create and to have fun at work. This is not a wild theory, an empty promise, or even wishful thinking. It's real — and it's a beautiful thing. ■

Exercise 1: Three leaders who mattered to you

Think of three leaders who have had a big impact on your life, for good or for ill. Remember their faces, remember their voices, and consider how you feel about each leader's impact on you and why. They could be parents, teachers, mentors, coaches, bosses, someone you read or heard about, someone in a movie that you saw, or someone else. You know who they are.

Write down your answers. I'd like you to get quite specific about each leader's direct or even indirect impact on you and your life.

Who are they?

Name 1: _____

Name 2: _____

Name 3: _____

In how many ways did each of these leaders affect your life? How do you feel about each of them and why?
