

What I Got Wrong When I First Grew Our Leadership Team – and How I Turned Things Around After Receiving This Advice

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When we first started hiring for more leadership positions at Lemonlight, I didn't understand the difference between a manager, a director and a VP. I thought leaders were leaders, and the right people would figure out how to make things work.

It's safe to say I was wrong! Because I didn't understand exactly what I needed, our team made some early hires that weren't quite right for what we needed. It turns out that different types of leaders have different types of strengths, and it's important to get clear on exactly what you need so you can hire accordingly.

Not quite sure how that applies to your hiring? Here's my favorite advice I was given about the difference between a manager and an executive.

Related: [What's the Real Difference Between Leadership and Management?](#)

Hiring leaders using the “evolution

vs. revolution” framework

When you're hiring for leadership, the first thing you'll need to determine is whether you're hiring for “evolution” or “revolution.” One leader will help you grow and expand on your current path, and the other will help you chart new territory altogether.

If you're looking for evolution, you likely have the foundation of a great team or process, but you need someone to make incremental changes and help take you to the next level.

If you're hiring for revolution, you likely need to overhaul an entire team or initiative or start a new one from scratch. You need someone who has the vision, leadership skills and experience to create something new or innovate.

Why the distinction matters

If you've been assuming that all leaders are created equally, it's worth giving some thought to why managers and executives have such distinct roles in your company. The two titles are different for a reason!

Managers tend to be newer to leadership roles, so they're often still learning what it takes to run a high-achieving team. They may encounter situations they don't quite know how to handle from experience yet, so they may need more guidance from senior leadership along the way.

Managers also tend to have more recent experience as individual contributors, so they're often more familiar with the work the team is doing.

Executives, on the other hand, have more experience under their belt – more wins *and* more failures. They know how to think about the big picture, project future outcomes and come up with the right plans to drive business forward.

Because they have more higher-level experience, they may be less aware of the details involved in the work, but they're also less likely to need hands-on support from you day-to-day.

There are tons of talented managers and executives out there, but the reality is that not all of them will help you take your company where it needs to go. It's worth thinking from this perspective to make sure you find the right background *and* the right leadership potential to meet your needs.

Here's what that looks like in practice.

Related: The Importance of Developing Effective Managers and How to Enhance Their Performance

How to hire for evolution

If you're hiring for evolution, you're looking for a manager. Managers are great for teams that need direction and some changes, but that are generally on the right track towards success. These teams need a leader who is prepared to offer guidance *and* a leader who can be in the weeds doing the work.

A great manager can evolve existing processes, make them better, hold the team accountable and enhance things over time. They often excel at optimizing workflows, improving team morale and ensuring that everyone is aligned with the company's goals.

Managers focus on the day-to-day operations and make sure the team is functioning smoothly, addressing minor issues before they become major problems.

How to hire for revolution

If you're hiring for revolution, you're looking for an executive. Executives are great for teams that need to do things differently or teams that don't have a precedent for

success. These teams need a leader who is comfortable with a blank slate and prepared to bring their ideas to life with little oversight.

A great executive can understand exactly what's not working, get to the heart of the real problem and understand how to fix it. They often bring a strategic vision and the ability to implement large-scale changes that can transform an organization.

Executives are adept at navigating complex challenges and can inspire a team to rally behind a new direction.

Importantly, not all great executives are also great managers – and vice versa. It may sound like executives are more capable than managers because their scope tends to be more complex, but that's not always the case. Some people's skills are just more suited to one path instead of the other, and both are incredibly powerful under the right circumstances.

Related: How to Spot the Perfect Executive for Your Company

Hiring leadership positions can be challenging, especially if you're expanding the organization for the first time. If you're caught up in the distinction here, remember that a growing organization will eventually need *both* types of leaders, so you'll benefit from both skill sets long-term.

For each hire, though, keep in mind the specific needs of your company and the type of change you want to foster. Learning to think in terms of evolution versus revolution will help you take the next best step toward growth and set your teams up for success with the right leader in place. Learn from my mistakes – the distinction matters!

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