FROM THE ARCHIVE

By Leonardo Vazquez, AICP/PP, July 2008

One of the keys to being an effective leader is to understand the difference between leading and managing. The differences can be subtle, but profound. Experts have used many ways to explain the difference. Warren Bennis says that managers do things right, while leaders do the right things. Edgar Schein says that leaders build and change cultures, while managers sustain them.

Planners manage groups, projects, and organizations. What’s the difference between a planner who leads and one who manages? I hope this listing helps shed some light.

**Planners who manage** follow agendas and scopes of work.
**Planners who lead** make strategic choices that most effectively further goals and missions.

**Planners who manage** are cautious and worried.
**Planners who lead** are careful and thoughtful.

**Planners who manage** are scared that “someone is going to say something.”
**Planners who lead** welcome the opportunity to hear different perspectives.

**Planners who manage** prepare plans and studies.
**Planners who lead** pursue positive growth and development using plans and studies.

**Planners who manage** avoid conflict and risk.
**Planners who lead** manage conflict and risk.

**Planners who manage** do things a certain way because “that’s how it’s done.”
**Planners who lead** do things that will best achieve lasting results.

**Planners who manage** are afraid of making mistakes.
**Planners who lead** see mistakes as learning opportunities.

**Planners who manage** seek validation.
**Planners who lead** seek understanding.

**Planners who manage** see diversity as a threat to the pursuit of the harmonious and orderly development of plans.
Planners who manage, planners who lead

Planners who lead see the zealous pursuit of the harmonious and orderly development of plans as a threat to building great communities.

Planners who manage tell and sell.
Planners who lead explore and influence.

Planners who manage think cultural competency is about “being nice to people different than you.”
Planners who lead know it’s much more complex than that.

Planners who manage think emotions get in the way of good planning.
Planners who lead know that how people feel about places, planners, and planning impact the quality and success of plans.

Planners who manage direct and command.
Planners who lead persuade and support.

Planners who manage need the power of their positions to persuade.
Planners who lead can persuade from anywhere in an organization or community.

Planners who manage are usually ignored after they leave the room.
Planners who lead have lasting impacts on others and the communities they serve.

For more on leadership:

Planners who manage, planners who lead

Leonardo Vazquez, AICP PP, is executive director of The National Consortium for Creative Placemaking (upcoming Pacific Conference in May), director of creative placemaking at the New Hampshire Institute of Art, and the author of Leading from the Middle: Strategic Thinking for Urban Planning and Community Development Professionals. He wrote this article when he was director of the Professional Development Institute at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University. Mr. Vazquez holds master’s degrees in public administration and in urban planning, both from USC, and a bachelor’s in journalism from Northwestern University. You can reach him at leo@cpcommunities.org