

Decentralized Management and Leadership

By John Tooley

For Management and Leadership (M&L) to function at their full potential it is essential that their management approach become decentralized. It is critical to the success of the company that we push the decision making to our Project Managers (PMs) and Crew Leaders (CLs) within each project and team. This is not easy but essential. Project Managers and Crew Leaders must be developed to stop asking “What do I do?” Instead, they must mature to state: “This is what I intend to do.”¹ They must know the purpose and intent of the Management and Leadership and carry it out within the boundary of company processes, specifications, standards, policies and procedures. This is true autonomy. We must help our Project Managers and Crew Leaders master their job and have a clear understanding of the companies’ purpose. They cease being followers and become leaders. It is the responsibility of Management and Leadership to help each master implementation of their intent. Then we can push decision making to Project Managers and Crew Leaders accomplishing true decentralized Management and Leadership for our company. Giving purpose, helping all employees achieve mastery of their job and then giving them autonomy to get their job done. These are the three pillars of a superior company or agency.²

MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP

Management is the practice of compliance

- Getting someone to do what you want by paying them, inspiring them or threatening them

Leadership is a choice

- It’s when someone steps up and causes a change, good or bad by getting others to help make the change
- A change that would not have occurred if you were not leading

Project Managers and Crew Leaders must have complete trust that the Management and Leadership will back their decisions. Management and leadership must accept extreme ownership of the development of their Project Managers and Crew Leaders (See table 1³). If they are not functioning up to par it’s either, they have clarity of purpose and intent of the Management and Leadership and refuse to implement it, or they desire to do right but there is a breakdown. (See Table 2⁴) This is where Management and Leadership must take extreme ownership of the deficiency if it’s the ladder of the two and get to the root cause of their not being able to implement their intent. The same is true for Project Managers and Crew Leaders when anything goes wrong at the project level. They too must accept extreme ownership of the problem and pursue the root cause and improvement of the process that allowed the problem. True leadership will completely accept ownership of the issue and confess, “This is fully my problem, I failed to explain that fully, I failed to get you competent in that task, our process for that is insufficient, etc. and I intend to help this issue improve.” When employees experience this level of trust, it becomes real across the company.

Table 1
Management and Leadership Must Own
-Vision, mission and goals, “ Purpose ”
-Training, “ Mastery ”
-Processes, specification, standards, policies and procedures
-Support and resources
-Development of all we can be
-Success, “ Autonomy ”

Decentralized management and leadership requires simple, clear, concise instructions that can be understood easily

by everyone. This is critical because the Project Managers and Crew Leaders must pass on the intent and instructions of both management and leadership.

Table 2	
Wrong Doing with Intention	Wrong Doing Without Intention
Wrong by commission or omission with intent is blame worthy and demands disciplinary action	Wrong by commission or omission without intent is not blame worthy and L and M, PM and CL must accept complete ownership

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¹ *Turn the Ship Around* – A true story of how to turn followers into leaders, L. David Marquet

² *Drive* – The surprising truth about what motivates us, Daniel H. Pink

³ *Extreme Ownership* – How the U.S. Navy Seals lead and win, Jocko Willink and Leif Babin

⁴ *Human Error* – James Reason