**Are You a Leader or a Champion?**

As I was thinking about how to wind down this series, I started thumbing through the previous posts to process what we have looked at so far. We’ve covered [what leadership is](http://online.ben.edu/blog/leadership/what-is-leadership-anyway?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.yahoo.com%2F), [how leadership applies to different generations](http://online.ben.edu/blog/leadership/do-old-paradigms-still-apply?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.yahoo.com%2F), and [what it takes to be a leader](http://online.ben.edu/blog/leadership/what-does-it-take-to-be-a-leader?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.yahoo.com%2F). We have also introduced servant leadership and what that means in different contexts. This is certainly a lot of ground to cover in such a small space.

When discussing leadership, one of the more amusing opinions that gets tossed around is the false belief that there are no new ideas. There seems to be this whole fallacy that everything has either already been done, or anything new is simply a rehash of what has gone before. I once heard a very well known industrial psychologist called this the ‘old wine in new bottles’ dilemma. I won’t name this person as that statement was part of a larger and very colorful late night rant in the bar at a Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology annual conference, but I will say that they were fairly emphatic that they were correct. I will also say that they were not as correct as they firmly believed.

While there is a lot of idea recycling around the subject of leadership, there are also quite a few new ideas that are helping drive new knowledge around what it is to lead and who to lead better. One of the more interesting ideas I’ve found is the notion of an organizational champion. This is a fairly new construct that is been floating around the last few years and seems to be gaining some steam in the popular press, even though the academic researchers have not caught up. It is tied to the idea of someone who leads not just internally but externally as well. This notion has been supported by a number of leadership thinkers as of late including Mike Thompson in his book called, Organizational Champions: How to Develop Passionate Change Agents at Every Level (2009).

So what is the difference between a leader and a champion? In a nutshell, a champion is someone who commits themselves and their organization, to winning in the global market place through agility, creativity, and honesty. They are not afraid to make bold moves that not only benefit their organizations, but also serve the greater good. In other words, they are not just focused on motivating top performance now, but also to helping their organization evolve to meet future needs. Moreover, they are not just looking at the organization, but the broader world. Quite an intriguing concept.

Whenever I talk about this concept I often get asked for examples. One of the more visible examples of someone who exhibited this model would be the late Steve Jobs. Interestingly he was probably a better champion than he was a leader, or even a manager.

Many people consider Steve Jobs to be one of the great technology and business leaders of the modern age. What is often forgotten, however, is that he was well known to be very challenging to work for. Read the stories of people who worked for him, particularly early in his career, and you’ll see a picture of someone who was impatient, arrogant and really didn’t play well with others unless they wanted to play his game. This not playing well with others eventually led to him being fired in 1985 from the company he founded.

By the time he rejoined the company in 1997 he had learned a thing or two. He had learned how to lead with more than just a technical vision. He sought involvement of others in the pursuit of his vision to change the way we work, play and interact. He then took an active role in championing how those products could make the world a better place. The result of course is the whole Apple ecosystem that includes iPods, iPads and i-everything that pervades everything we do. The devices have even made their way into the hands of confirmed windows users like myself.

So what does this example teach us? It teaches that leading is not just about being in charge. Just like we learned with our review of servant leadership, the best leaders focus on their motivation and their drivers, not just on driving others towards some defined outcomes. When they understand those motivations and lead from an honest place of wanting to help and serve others, great things happen. This is why we should strive to be not just leaders, but champions.

**References**

Tompson, M. (2009). *Organizational champions: How to develop passionate change agents at every level. New York, NY*: McGraw-Hill

**Related Benedictine Programs**

You can learn more about being a leader and a champion through Benedictine University’s [Master of Science in Management and Organizational Behavior](http://online.ben.edu/programs/msmob?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.yahoo.com%2F) program degree program. To learn how an online degree from Benedictine can help you hone your leadership skills talk to a [Program Manager](http://online.ben.edu/request-more-information?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.yahoo.com%2F) today.

**About the Author**

Jimmy Brown, Ph.D. is a senior level management consultant with seventeen years of experience leading efforts to develop and implement practical strategies for business performance improvement. Dr. Brown has held senior level consulting positions at leading firms such as Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Accenture and Hewlett-Packard. He is currently a Practice Area Lead with Beacon Associates.

* [Request Info](http://online.ben.edu/request-more-information?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.yahoo.com%2F)
* [Apply Now](http://online.ben.edu/admissions/apply-now?cmgfrm=https%3A%2F%2Fsearch.yahoo.com%2F)