

Recently, while browsing through the 2001 EAGE publication 'Reflections on the First 50 years', I was curiously drawn to an article entitled 'Snapshots from a lifetime in geophysics' by Nigel Anstey. In this very well written article based on his recollections, Nigel remarks '...it is still rare for a geophysicist to head an oil company, or even to become exploration manager. Perhaps, geophysicists just like doing geophysics.'

While this seemed true, I decided to check out around and used my electronic network of colleagues to find out what they had to say about it. Consequently, I framed the question below and solicited responses. The order of the responses is the order in which we received them.

– Satinder Chopra

Q1. Managers are usually rewarded (with good salaries) for the extra responsibility that they assume and the leadership and initiative that they display. Oil and Service companies need managers who are leaders. Apart from having high levels of energy and the drive to succeed in a leadership role, leaders are expected to have the requirements of vision, planning, communicating, monitoring, organizing and role modeling.

Very few people are born leaders, and most managers must develop leadership skills if they want to advance in management. Geoscientists aspiring to become good managers and executives prepare themselves for such positions, either by personal study and experience or by pursuing management degrees.

In your expert opinion, do you think geoscientists necessarily pursuing management programs make more effective managers and executives?

Answer 1

A situation persists in major oil companies where technical ladders do not carry the same compensation and recognition that management ladders do. Thus, most workers seek, and the oil companies in turn reward superior technical achievement with rank and management responsibility promotions. But it is evident that the skills delivering excellence in science and engineering rarely translate directly into excellence in the Boardroom. But it is also clear that a manager with little technical skill and experience cannot grasp the technical fundamentals of the business regardless of their proficiency in organization and execution. The greatest managers possess both top rank technical skills and engaging leadership and execution skills. Both are the fusion of innate and learned aptitude.

To transform technical superstars into management superstars, companies provide key employees exposure to a variety of experiential and formal training in the practice of business and management. Still, few people demonstrate the ability to carry and communicate an engaging vision as well as the talent to execute a strategic plan to realize it. In practice, there is a small population that possesses the inherent skills for all these tasks. Almost universally, they are hidden or very rough giving formal or on-the-job management training the raw materials to create a world class executive. But the simple task of taking a person, regardless of their technical excellence, processing them through charm and business school will not make a good manager. The challenge of management is to discern who the great managers in the rough are and who have little chance of being refined to master this very different and difficult skill. This too is a thorny process and one in which there are many mistakes both of inclusion and exclusion.

In my experience, the individual in most cases knows where their skills and preferences reside and would choose an appropriate path if compensation and recognition were equal in technical ladders as in management ladders. Oil and service companies need to work toward enriching the technical ladders both in compensation and recognition to provide a robust avenue to express excellence with equal stature to the management as well as polishing their ability to recognize the next generation of great managers and providing them with the training to realize their potential.

Bill Bartling
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Answer 2

My experience with Geoscientists suggests that they are often introverted by nature which brings an additional challenge to leadership. Introversion is not a bad thing, but rather a personality trait that steers their behavior to more of a listening/inward thinking mode verses outwardly engaging. Since management is about leading, and leading is about communicating, I believe that one of the most important skills for the ones that are introverted is becoming an adapted extrovert. Adapted meaning that they don't really change their personality, but rather learn to get out of their comfort zone and speak out and work on communicating including presentation skills. The other area of concentration that I would suggest is appropriate for most geoscientists is improving their skills in the bigger picture of how geoscience fits into business with an emphasis on risk management and economic models. Beyond better communicating and integrated business skills, the other areas of management can be honed via business school or self study combined with practice. This is a good step for those who want to move

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into management. It all depends on the ambitions of the geoscientist, i.e. does he/she want to become a manager, or a better geoscientist. In the latter case, better communications skills to sell your prospect and financial skills to better understand it's economics will always increase one's value.

*Bob Peebler
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Answer 3

Leadership is actually a gift and competency that you are born with or develop at an early age and can probably not be taught or learned, thus the saying of 'born leader'. Management on the other hand is not a born trait but a learned one. Geoscientists who combine a strong technical knowledge with management training and education are probably the best managers we can hope for.

In today's oil business world, managers and executives are constantly dealing with budgets, banks and spreadsheets, and must have a grasp and fluency of the language and indicators to acquire adequate funding for there business. It is a sad but true reality of our business. Most geoscientists have entered this business because of a first and foremost love of Geosciences/physics and the unique ability to apply science to real world problems, generate solutions and create value. Removing that emotional connection to the science and projects to become a manager can, in some cases, create a manager who is no longer doing either function effectively and can be harmful to an organization.

I have worked for several companies, in several different countries with different management types. In my opinion, the worst manager I worked for was a Ph.D. who refused to admit he did not know everything, micro-managed his team to death, made no real strategic or visionary decisions and eventually 'lead' the team into non-existence. The best executive I worked for was a lawyer with an MBA who left technical decisions and recommendations to the professionals and put most of her efforts into leading, guiding, making good strategic and financial decisions, and 'managing' our limited resources (money and people). So my answer would have to be an overwhelming YES. The investment and commitment to formal management training leads to more effective executives but being a natural leader is better! **R**

*John Logel
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