

## Insights from NIA's Young Professional Advisory Committee (YPAC) Mentor Program

NIA's YPAC continues its unique mentoring program, pairing NIA Board of Directors member Jon Perry of Specialty Products & Insulation with YPAC member Thomas MacKinnon of Armacell. The two had virtual one-on-one sessions and then shared highlights of their conversations with the YPAC audience during NIA's Fall Summit in November 2022.

# The Key to Leading and Managing Teams

By Thomas MacKinnon

## Introduction

What is the difference between a leader and a manager? What does it take to become a manager and lead a team to success? If given the opportunity, should I become a manager? Many young professionals find themselves asking these questions as they advance in their career and are given the opportunity to move into a managerial position. As they consider making the jump into management, they must also consider that serving as a manager and leading a team require different sets of skills to be successful.

Through the NIA YPAC Mentor Program, I had the pleasure of discussing these questions and more over the course of five sessions with Jon Perry, Executive Chairman of Specialty Products & Insulation. We discussed his own transition into management, what led to his success, and the advice he gives to new managers.

## The Difference between the Leader and the Manager

Before diving into the career transition from individual contributor to a managerial role, Jon and I discussed the key differences between a manager and a leader. As we defined the roles throughout the sessions, the leader sets the key directives for the team to focus on to achieve success and inspires the team to complete these directives. Leaders live what they preach and are an example to the team, motivating them to get to the goal. The manager, on the other hand, sets the metrics to measure the success of the team and is regularly checking in with the team to assess progress. A good manager, therefore, sets clear goals and creates the framework and systems in which the team members can succeed.

It is important that the manager has both leadership and management attributes to get the team to reach the goal. Often during our conversations, the metaphor of traveling down a four-lane

highway arose while talking about leaders and managers. In this example, a leader sets the destination of where the team is traveling to, while the manager determines the progress and whether the team is ahead or behind where they need to be. When interesting new exits, or projects, arise that distract the team from its final destination, it is up to the leader to keep the team focused on the original destination and not chase these other options. Only after much consideration by the leader should the team vary its course and pursue the new opportunity.

## The Skills that Make You Successful in Management

After defining leader and manager, Jon and I discussed the transition between an individual contribution role—i.e., one with no reports—to a middle manager role and the skills necessary to be successful in each. As an individual contributor, having the right skills to perform the work and the right attitude for working well with the rest of the team leads to success. When moving to a managerial position, having the knowledge of how to accomplish the specifics of the jobs on your team is still needed, and knowledge of what your team is doing allows for the leader to motivate and manage them on the highway to success.

Where many new managers fail is that they stay in the weeds of the day-to-day work and do not delegate the work appropriately to augment the growth of their team, overloading themselves with both individual contributor and managerial work. By delegating appropriately, the leader allows the team members to grow, giving the leader the chance to create opportunities for successful people, whether within the team or in entirely new positions that fit their skill set.

## Becoming a Manager for the First Time

After defining the skills necessary to be successful, Jon and I concluded the sessions with a conversation about what those considering managerial positions should take into account. Before moving into management, people should take the time to understand how the management position is defined in their company, and what the work entails. New managers should ensure that they are aligned with their leader or boss after taking the position, especially in terms of the expectations and goals for themselves and their team, and talk about the long-term vision for the team and the company. Finally, having the right mentor to help you through the beginning of your time as a manager and to bounce ideas off will greatly assist in your transition into the position and accelerate your development as a new manager.



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