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LEADERSHIP ■ STYLE

Situational Leadership

Adapt your style to their development level.



by Ken Blanchard

I WISH I COULD TELL YOU there's a single solution to managing people—or one best leadership style. Regrettably, that's not the case. There is, however, a practical, easy-to-understand approach—*Situational Leadership*.

Effective leaders adapt their style according to the development level of the people they are managing.

In Situational Leadership, there are four leadership styles representing different combinations of directive and supportive behaviors.

- **Directive** behavior is defined as the extent to which you engage in one-way communication; spell out the person's role; tell the person what to do, where to do it, when to do it, and how to do it; and then oversee performance. Three words define directive behavior: *structure, control, and supervise.*

- **Supportive** behavior is the extent to which you engage in two-way communication, listen, provide support and encouragement, facilitate interaction, and involve people in decision-making. Three words define supportive behavior: *praise, listen and facilitate.*

Four Styles

The degree of direction or support you provide depends on the development level of the person for the task. There are four development levels:

Style 1. Directing. High-directive/low-supportive leader behavior is *Directing*. You define the roles of people and tell them what, how, when, and where to do various tasks. You initiate problem-solving and decision-making. You announce solutions and decisions and supervise implementation. You set goals, develop action plans, provide direction, set time-lines, and closely supervise people when they are inexperienced or incompetent with a task, even if committed.

Poor results tell you to focus on developing your team members' competence, confidence, and motivation.

To improve your use of this style, you may want to be more specific about what each team member's job is and what a "good job" looks like.

2. Coaching. High-directive/high-supportive behavior is *Coaching*. In this style, you still provide direction, but you also hear the person's feelings, ideas and suggestions. You increase two-way communications but maintain control over decision-making.

Coaching is for low-to-moderate development level. People who have some competence but lack commitment to take responsibility need both direction and support. Thus, a coaching style—one that provides directive behavior (because of their lack of competence) but also supportive behavior to build confidence and enthusiasm—is most effective. Coaches both direct and support their people. This style builds confidence and motivation in people, while keeping responsibility for decision-making with the leader.



To improve your use of this style, you may want to ask for input on goals and plans with competent team members and praise progress.

3. Supporting. High-supportive/low-directive behavior is *Supporting*. In this style, your role is to provide recognition and to actively listen and facilitate problem-solving and decision-making. As competence rises, most people question whether they can perform the task on their own. Here a Supporting style is appropriate. People need to be heard and encouraged.

Supporting is for moderate-to-high development level. These people are competent but have variable commitment toward the task. You need to practice two-way communication and active listening and to support people's efforts to use their skills. You listen, facilitate, and shift some control for day-to-day decision-making and problem-solving to team members. You provide support and encouragement when they lack confidence or

motivation on a given task.

To improve your use of this style, you may ask more questions, praise performance, or encourage your team members to solve their own problems.

4. Delegating. Low-supportive/low-directive behavior is *Delegating*. You allow people greater autonomy, since they have the competence, commitment and confidence to do the task. People at this level are competent and motivated to take responsibility. Thus, a low-profile delegating style—one that provides little direction and support—is likely to be effective. Even though you may still identify the problem, you delegate the responsibility for carrying out plans to experienced followers. They are permitted to "run the show" and decide on how, when, and where tasks are to be accomplished.

Empower competent and confident team members to manage their own performance. Collaboratively set goals and then delegate day-to-day decision-making to experienced team members.

To improve your use of this style, you may ask your team members to tell you what resources they need to excel and then secure those resources.

When to Use Each Style

The right style is primarily a function of the degree of difficulty of the task and the developmental level of the person doing the task.

Developmental level is the degree of *competence* and *commitment* a person has to perform a task without supervision. *Competence* is a function of knowledge and skills which can be gained from education, training, or experience. *Commitment* is a combination of confidence (self-assuredness) and motivation (interest and enthusiasm).

The factor that triggers a change in style is performance. Improvements in performance shift the leadership style. Effective managers adapt their style to match development levels and meet changing demands. Over time individuals and teams develop their own patterns of behavior and ways of operating; these constitute the norms, customs, traditions, and mores of the culture.

You may use one leadership style for the team, but a different style when dealing one-on-one, since individuals are at different levels of development. Shifting forward and backward in style makes Situational Leadership a dynamic developmental model. LE

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ACTION: Practice situational leadership.



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