

How Adaptable Are You as a Leader?

As a leader, it's easy to believe that others need to respond to your needs. But the most successful leaders know that reality is just the opposite.

In the 1970s, Robert Greenleaf of the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership started the Servant Leadership movement. The concept was founded on the belief that an organization functioned better if leaders were servants first and leaders second, rather than the other way around. He encouraged servant-first leaders to focus on helping their teams grow in their jobs and fulfill their professional goals. Specifically, Greenleaf believed that when people are able to advance and learn at work, they're happier and more productive and naturally more loyal to their organizations.

One of the most important aspects of being this type of servant leader is the ability to quickly adapt your leadership style to individual circumstances.

Four Common Leadership Styles

What are the various styles of leadership? Although many exist, the following outlines the four most common styles I see as an executive coach when I shadow leaders in the workplace. Each of these four styles has both positive and negative aspects. As you read them, ask yourself these questions:

- Which style do I use most of the time?
- Have I used all four at some point?
- If not, what opportunities do I have for expanding my leadership style, so that I can move with agility from one style to another?

1. **Democratic/Participative Leadership.** In this style, a leader asks for inputs from others before making a decision. This style works effectively:

- When working with a group of team members who have good on-the-job experience and who can provide valuable input.
- With a team that needs to be heavily involved in the early planning stages of a project.
- When you find yourself promoted and suddenly working with former peers who have now become direct reports.

2. **Bureaucratic Leadership.** This style involves establishing and using procedures and laying out a step-by-step written plan to achieve desired outcomes. This style works effectively:

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- When precision is important, or a project is particularly complex.
- When working in a highly regulated environment (like banking or insurance) which requires rigorous compliance.
- When working on a project that's extremely technical in nature.

3. **Charismatic Leadership.** This style of leadership leverages personal charisma to keep employees motivated and moving toward a goal. This style works most effectively:

- If your team or organization has experienced a setback, such as the loss of a key client or recent layoffs, and you need to boost employee or team morale.
- When you have a big project to finish that requires creativity, and it must be done exceptionally well and/or quickly.
- When your team faces a major change, and you believe buy-in may be difficult.

4. **Autocratic Leadership.** When using this style, leaders tell others what to do without getting input from them. This style works most effectively:

- When urgent decisions need to be made, as in a crisis.
- When working with junior team members who may need more direction.
- When working in high stress or confusing situations where team members are looking for clarity and strong direction.

What Are Your Style Preferences?

Think about how you operate daily as a leader of others. Then, look at each leadership style, and estimate the percentage of time you spend using each. Write down the estimated percentage for each style so that all four add up to 100 percent.

Now, review your answers, and ask yourself these questions:

- What is your most frequently used leadership style? Your second most used leadership style?
- Are you relying too heavily on any one particular style?
- What percentage of each style do you think is *optimal* for your current position and given your current team?

With answers to these questions in mind, write down your goal percentages for each style, i.e., the percentage of each style you would like to have or that you feel is most appropriate for someone at your level and in your position. The use of which style needs to change the most, based on your analysis?

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After earning her MBA from Harvard, Brenda spent a large part of her career as an executive in *Fortune* 100 multinationals, building brands across dozens of countries spanning four continents. Now, as President of her own company, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through a unique, creative, and practical combination of leadership and branding. Visit www.BrendaBence.com.

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