

The Supervisor As Leader

Workshop 2

Until recently, Rajiv handled the children's programs at the Nature Center in the county's largest park. Two months ago, however, he was put in charge of all the Center's programming, for which he supervises a staff of five.

Rajiv tells his mentor, Tracy, "I'm having trouble with my staff—the people who are supposed to listen to me. It seems like each employee has his or her own little kingdom

rational plan to coordinate them. Then I laid out my plan and asked for comments. Nobody offered objections, so I thought that settled the matter. A week later, I realized nobody was paying attention to my plan."

"What did you do then?"

"I called another meeting and lectured them about being team players. That made people mad. Now I'm going around to each employee

personally, asking for ideas and comments, but they're holding back, as if they don't trust me. What did I do wrong?"

"It sounds like you've tried different

managerial styles," Tracy says, "and staff members are confused about who you really are."



and when I try to coordinate the programs—even to make sure, for instance, that birdwatchers aren't disrupted by 20 third graders tramping past—all I get is resentment."

"What kind of leadership are you giving your people?" Tracy asks. "Are you just telling them what to do? Are you having meetings, asking for suggestions?"

"I've tried everything," Rajiv insists. "First, I called a meeting. I pointed out that our programs have expanded so much that we need a

What's Inside

Here, you will learn to:

- ◆ understand varieties of leadership style
- ◆ follow three rules to improve your leadership
- ◆ identify and develop qualities of a good leader

Leadership Style

As Rajiv discovered, formal authority doesn't translate automatically into leadership. You can be named a supervisor, but the mantle of a true leader is one you have to earn. Unfortunately, there isn't one prescribed way for a leader to act. In fact, the many varieties of leadership style have long been a hot topic for researchers.

You may have heard of the Theory X and Theory Y approaches to leadership, originally defined by Douglas McGregor:

- ◆ **Theory X** leaders believe that workers are naturally lazy and undisciplined. To control workers, they use an autocratic (dictatorial) style of leadership, issuing direct orders and inviting no feedback.
- ◆ **Theory Y** leaders, in contrast, believe that workers are self-motivated and enjoy responsibility. As a result, Theory Y leaders are more open and democratic.

Often the democratic Theory Y approach is referred to as *participative* leadership, because it invites employees to become part of the decision-making process. Of course, there are many degrees of employee participation. (See the diagram below.) One supervisor may encourage input from employees but insist on retaining the right to make

the final decision. Another supervisor may go along with whatever the majority of the group decides. Whatever the degree of employee input, the participative manager usually takes care to explain decisions and build the workers' trust.

“Leadership has a harder job to do than just choose sides. It must bring sides together.”
— **JESSE JACKSON**
Politician and Activist

What the Supervisor Says

Amount of Employee Participation

“Let's discuss the options and then take a vote.”



“I'm open to suggestions. Feel free to speak up.”



“Does anyone have problems with our procedures?”



“Do it this way.”



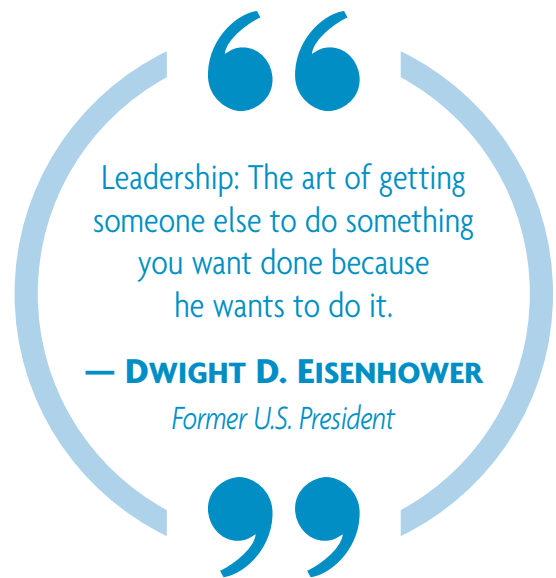
Other researchers have studied leadership in terms of the leader's primary focus. In this respect, also, two contrasting types have been identified:

- ◆ **Task-oriented leaders.** Some leaders are concerned mainly with the task to be accomplished. They concentrate on making sure that employees do the job in the best way possible.
- ◆ **Relationship-oriented leaders.** Other leaders are more concerned with keeping employees satisfied and harmonious, so that they function as a well-organized team. These leaders want to build good relationships throughout the work group.



Although the correlation is not absolute, task-oriented leaders tend to be rather autocratic, and relationship-oriented leaders usually allow more democratic, participative decision making.

If you think about it, you can see that different styles of leadership have both advantages and disadvantages. Look at the following lists, and see if you can think of other items to add.



Advantages of an Autocratic, Task-Oriented Style

- ◆ Decisions can be made quickly.
- ◆ Responsibility for each decision is clear-cut.
- ◆ Workers know exactly what is expected of them.

Disadvantages of an Autocratic, Task-Oriented Style

- ◆ When a decision is imposed from above, workers may have little understanding of its importance.
- ◆ Staff members may lose interest and motivation.
- ◆ When not told exactly what to do, employees used to autocratic leadership are often at a loss.
- ◆ Little attention may be paid to individuals' needs.
- ◆ In the long run, workers may resent their bosses.

Advantages of a Participative, Relationship-Oriented Style

- ◆ People share their ideas, talents, and experiences, a process that often leads to wiser decisions.
- ◆ Employees become more creative when given freedom to do so.
- ◆ Smart, dedicated employees will tend to feel that their talents are being used and appreciated.
- ◆ Employees are often happier overall.
- ◆ People work harder to implement their own ideas than they would if just following orders.
- ◆ Given greater freedom and responsibility, employees tend to grow in their degree of competence, increasing the organization's human resources.
- ◆ Employees need less direct supervision, so the leader has more time for long-range planning.

Disadvantages of a Participative, Relationship-Oriented Style

- ◆ It often takes a lot of time and energy to involve everyone in a decision.
- ◆ Sometimes the group will never reach a clear conclusion.
- ◆ Some employees don't like to take responsibility for decisions.
- ◆ Employees may become confused about their responsibilities.
- ◆ Part-time and low-skilled employees may have little to contribute to decision making.
- ◆ If the participative style leads to less direct supervision, inexperienced workers may make too many mistakes.
- ◆ A supervisor can use participative decision making as an excuse for procrastinating or for avoiding strong action.



ACTIVITY 2.1

NAME _____

Your Own Leadership Style

For clues about your own natural leadership style, decide whether you agree or disagree with the statements below. For each item, select the most appropriate number.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree		
1. I feel overwhelmed by the amount of information I have to deal with.	1	2	3	4	5	
2. A leader should set clear, specific goals for subordinates.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. The leader's number-one task is to raise productivity as high as possible.	1	2	3	4	5	
4. Supervisors should keep close tabs on all important aspects of the team's work.	1	2	3	4	5	
5. A supervisor should aim for respect from employees, not friendship.	1	2	3	4	5	
6. An effective leader can delegate small tasks, but nobody else can make the major decisions.	1	2	3	4	5	
7. Quick decisions are essential in today's economy.	1	2	3	4	5	
8. People are happiest when they know exactly what is expected of them.	1	2	3	4	5	
9. The average person likes to avoid genuine responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5	
10. Personal fulfillment is nice, but most people shouldn't expect to find it at work.	1	2	3	4	5	
11. Meetings are often a waste of time.	1	2	3	4	5	

Now calculate your total score by adding up the numbers you circled. The maximum is 50. The closer you came to 50, the more you tend toward an autocratic, task-oriented style of leadership. The lower your score, the more you probably favor participative, relationship-oriented leadership.

_____ **SCORE**

Note that a "high" score on this activity is not necessarily good. Autocratic leaders can have a lot of trouble in today's business environment. Whatever your natural style, the next section will help you learn how to adapt it to the situation.



Three Rules of Thumb

In general, the trend today is toward participative leadership. Management is much less autocratic than it was several decades ago. Workers expect their opinions to be heard and respected. Few managers would contend that employees are naturally lazy or incapable of thinking for themselves.

In fact, many managerial experts advise supervisors to become “facilitators” and “coaches” rather than “bosses.” That is, instead of telling employees what to do, these advisers say, you should coach them to develop their own skills for analyzing a task and deciding how to approach it.

To be a successful supervisor, then, you’ll have to be sensitive to your employees’ needs and desires, and you’ll probably have to use a leadership style that is at least moderately participative. In later workshops you’ll work on specific skills for these purposes. First, though, there are three rules of thumb that can help you become an effective leader:

- ◆ Be yourself.
- ◆ Be flexible.
- ◆ Adapt to the situation.



Be Yourself

As a supervisor, it doesn’t help to pretend to be somebody you’re not. You can’t just learn how to play the role of a supervisor like an actor

memorizing a part. If you try spouting lines that you don’t really believe, your employees will recognize your pretense.

Therefore, you need to find a leadership approach that reflects your own basic nature. Try to find a combination of task-oriented and relationship-oriented elements that suits your personality and your beliefs about human nature. Draw ideas from everything you read and everyone you observe, then put them all together into your own synthesis. After all, you are unique as a person, so why shouldn’t you be unique as a supervisor?

A leader need not be either a task-type leader or a human relationships-type leader. A leader may well tend to engage in both activities, in one combined leadership pattern.

— **DAVID R. HAMPTON,
CHARLES E. SUMMER, AND
ROSS A. WEBBER**

*Organizational Behavior and the
Practice of Management*

Be Flexible

Just as you will be unique as a supervisor, every person working for you will be unique as an employee. No two subordinates will think or act exactly alike. Therefore, though you may have general rules that apply to all, you need to be flexible enough to respond to different needs and abilities. For example:

- ◆ Each employee will have a different type or level of expertise.
- ◆ Some employees will need more direct instruction than others.
- ◆ Some subordinates will accept criticism better than others.
- ◆ Some people need firm schedules, while others don't.
- ◆ Some people work best under pressure; others rebel when you pressure them.
- ◆ Some people function best in groups. Others need to work alone.

The more you can accommodate the idiosyncrasies of the people working for you, the better supervisor you will be.

Adapt to the Situation

The effectiveness of a particular leadership style often depends on the circumstances. Typically, for instance, a participative, relationship-oriented style is useful in situations like the following:

- ◆ A new problem calls for a creative approach.
- ◆ Employees are experienced, capable, and well motivated.
- ◆ Knowledgeable employees are available to act as leaders on certain aspects of a project.

In contrast, a more autocratic, task-oriented approach might be useful in situations like these:

- ◆ A crisis has occurred, and a decision is needed immediately.
- ◆ Team members are new at working together and unsure of their roles.
- ◆ Employees lack the experience and skills to accomplish their tasks without direct guidance.

Knowing Yourself

Classic advice for success in any endeavor is to “play to your strengths”—that is, to take advantage of what you do best. In leadership, though, you can sometimes even take advantage of your weaknesses.

Jeff M. is a young choir director from the Midwest who has led both student and adult vocal groups. Though he is a mild-mannered, soft-spoken person, the frustrations of choir directing build up in him over the course of a season, and sooner or later, he loses his temper and flies into a tirade at his choir members. Jeff's secret is that he knows he has this tendency, and he uses it to his—and the choir's—advantage. As much as he can, he times his explosion for the particular day or week when the choir members most need a chewing out.

This story is not a recommendation for losing one's temper. It does indicate, though, that self-understanding is a big plus for a leader. The better you understand yourself, the more you can use your personality traits to advance your goals.

You'll also find that many situations involve emotional issues. Imagine that you inherit the leadership of a work crew from a previous supervisor who was unpopular. Overall, the work is being done well, but the authority of the supervisor's position has been undermined. In this case, you may want to begin by building relationships with your team, showing that you're a fair, understanding person who can be trusted.

Now imagine a slightly different situation. Resentment of the previous supervisor has led to open rebellion, the team is doing terrible work, and the upper-level managers are impatient for quick improvement. In this instance, you may have to get tough before you can show your friendliness.



Some researchers believe that a work team typically goes through distinct phases, with a different leadership style appropriate for each. For instance, Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard have described four stages of leadership related to a team's level of "maturity":

- ◆ **Telling.** A new team needs a lot of direction, so the supervisor must be task-oriented and willing to give explicit instructions.
- ◆ **Selling.** As the team gains experience, the supervisor tries to "sell" ideas through persuasiveness rather than orders.
- ◆ **Participating.** When the team approaches maturity, the supervisor begins to behave more like a participant than like a "boss."
- ◆ **Delegating.** Finally, when the team is fully mature, the supervisor can delegate many leadership responsibilities to other team members.

Your own work teams may not correspond exactly to these stages. The general point, however, is that you should use all your experience, your reasoning power, and your knowledge of human nature to analyze the situation in which you and your employees find yourselves. Then you can decide which leadership approach best suits your goals.

“
There is no one best style of leadership that consistently leads to high levels of performance. There are too many complex relationships in leadership to make this possible.

— **ANDREW D. SZILAGYI, JR.**
Management and Performance

ACTIVITY 2.2

NAME _____

Taking Charge

Imagine that the leader of this class or seminar becomes ill. You are suddenly promoted to lead the group through the rest of this workshop and the remaining ones. How are you going to handle it? Answer the following questions:

1. How will you show the group that you were the right choice as leader? That is, what will you do to earn the group's respect and trust?

2. How will your style of leadership differ from that of the current leader? Give specific examples of things you would do or not do.

3. What would be your most difficult problems as leader of the group?

4. Overall, would your leadership style be more autocratic or more participative than the current leader's? How and why?

Qualities of a Good Leader

In addition to studying leadership styles, researchers have examined the personalities of effective leaders. The studies show that successful leaders tend to share a number of personality traits or qualities.

It's important to realize that these qualities don't add up to a single "personality type." Leaders are too varied to fit a single type. However, it's useful to know that the following traits are common among people who gain success as leaders:

- ◆ Self-confidence and positive thinking
- ◆ Willingness to accept responsibility
- ◆ Initiative
- ◆ Assertiveness
- ◆ Strong desire for achievement
- ◆ Decisiveness
- ◆ Energy
- ◆ Persistence
- ◆ Honesty
- ◆ Courage
- ◆ Reliability and trustworthiness
- ◆ High degree of organization
- ◆ Creativity



- ◆ Tact and sensitivity to the needs of others
- ◆ Fairness
- ◆ Tolerance of frustration and pressure
- ◆ Versatility and willingness to adapt to new situations
- ◆ Skillfulness in communication

Of course, none of us is perfect in these qualities.

Everybody has room to improve. And that, in fact, is a principal reason for providing this list—to emphasize that many leadership qualities can be developed by deliberate effort. For instance, there are specific ways to develop your decisiveness, communication skills, and tact. Later workshops in this book will assist you, and you can help yourself by constantly assessing your performance and analyzing how to improve in the future.

? Did you know?

Actions speak louder than words, the proverb says. Similarly, many management theorists believe that the best thing a leader can do is to set a good example.

If you are conscientious, dedicated to the job, and enthusiastic, those qualities will tend to rub off on subordinates. If you're open and responsive to reasonable criticism, you'll encourage your employees to follow suit. If you are fair, you'll create an environment of fairness. If you take pleasure in your work, you'll help to spread enjoyment around you.

ACTIVITY 2.3

NAME _____

Leadership Qualities

Think of a successful leader you have known or read about. It could be someone in business, sports, politics, or any other field. Answer the following questions about this person.

1. Of the leadership qualities listed in the preceding section, name two or three that you believe were most important for the success of the leader you have chosen. Why and how were they important? (If there are qualities *not* on the list that you think were even more important for this leader, feel free to comment on those.)

2. What were the leader's most notable weaknesses? For instance, are there any qualities in the list that your leader did not exhibit? Or did he or she have any other personality traits that created difficulties?

3. From your analysis of this leader, what conclusions can you draw for your own success as a supervisor?



GETTING CONNECTED

For help in assessing your own leadership qualities, check out the following Website:

The Leadership Motivation Assessment

<https://myqss.link/Leadership-Motivation>

To learn about your leadership style, take this style assessment and learn how your leadership style may be different from what you think:

<https://myqss.link/Leadership-Style>

If you identify potential defects in your qualities as a leader, don't be discouraged. Instead, take those areas as challenges that you can work on. Draw up a plan for self-improvement.

WORKSHOP WRAP-UP

- Leadership styles vary from autocratic, task-oriented approaches to participative, relationship-oriented techniques. The trend today is toward participative styles.
- Three rules of thumb for effective leadership are: be yourself, be flexible, and adapt to the situation.
- Some of the typical qualities of successful leaders are self-confidence, decisiveness, creativity, tact, and skillfulness in communication. Characteristics like these can be developed with conscious effort.