## **LEADERSHIP STYLES**

*Approaches an individual can use to lead others*

In golf, a person has several clubs that can be used depending on their position on the course. The leadership styles presented here resemble metaphorical golf clubs (Goleman, 2000). An individual can utilize seven basic styles or approaches when leading others. Each style has its benefits and drawbacks depending on the context. Skilled leaders will *intentionally select* the appropriate style for the situation.

As a leader, it is critical that you a) know these styles, b) understand when they are helpful and when they are not, and c) educate your team on how they can best contribute.

**Visionary**—Leaders using this style know where they believe the group should go. They have a strategy in mind and are comfortable asserting their viewpoints and thoughts. While this can feel comforting for the followers (“Phew, someone has the answer!”), caution is advised. As soon as someone says, “I know the path,” or “I have *the* answer,” ensure that the group stays alert and closely monitors progress. At times, this individual can lead the group in the wrong direction.

**Coaching**—Leaders who use a coaching style share their expertise with others. They pause, slow down, and take the time to guide others to the correct path. For instance, a leader who is a negotiation expert will actively coach others to improve their skills as well. The coaching style is highly personalized but can take too much time. The leader needs to pay close attention to time and resources.

**Directive**—This is the most high-risk leadership style because it can alienate others, cause hard feelings, and disengage individuals who do not feel a part of the process. Conversely, it can be expedient in an emergency or appropriate under time stress. However, overusing this style will likely damage relationships in the long run.

**Participative**—This style is practical when the leader needs a high level of buy-in from the group. When exploring this leadership style, the adage “People support what they help create” comes to mind. While there are many positives, the style can take too much time and stall progress if the leader tries to please everyone. A skilled leader using this style must watch the time and know when it’s appropriate to vote, table the discussion, or make a decision.

**Pacesetting**—A pacesetting leader defaults to ‘raising the heat’ – perhaps too often. Like the other styles, this approach has a time and place – especially when time stressors are involved. However, consistently pushing individuals can marginalize them or come off as too much. On the positive side, sometimes groups settle into a slow-moving pace or a low energy level. A leader using this style will raise the heat and re-energize the group to meet the mission.

**Delegating**—Young leaders often take on too much themselves. If you pay close attention, you will notice your team members taking on multiple roles (trying to lead, keep time, and facilitate the meeting) – especially early in their development. This is a recipe for disaster – especially for inexperienced leaders. This style challenges you to practice delegation. As the leader, you merely assign the roles/tasks, monitor the process, adjust as needed, and pay attention to the group's energy.

**Affiliative**—In a nutshell, a leader using this style focuses on people and leads through relationships. Through these relationships, the leader gets their work done. People using this style like harmony amongst the team and often have a committed band of followers. A potential downside is when there is a clear and distinct “in-group” and “out-group.” At an extreme, a leader who defaults to this style may avoid conflict, play favorites, or get “too close” and struggle to make tough decisions.

## **FOLLOWERSHIP STYLES**

## *Approaches followers can use when engaging*

Each of us is a follower sometimes, yet followership is often left out of conversations about leadership. Like leadership styles, you can employ several followership styles depending on the context. The key is intentionally choosing the follower style appropriate for the situation—each has a time and a place. Developing skills around respectful dissent, effective partnering, and effective followership are vital to building a healthy culture.

As a leader, it is critical that you **a**) know these styles, **b**) understand when they are (and are not) helpful, and **c**) educate your team on how they can best contribute.

**Partner**—This followership style is the most active and engaged. Fully engaged followers view themselves as partners in the process. They are not trying to take over; they see themselves as "all in" and will do what it takes to achieve the mission. The fully engaged follower will likely have difficult conversations with the leader – they feel a duty to do so. This is a positive form of followership, but you must pay close attention – some leaders may not want partners in their space.

**Independent**—You will often notice this followership style in public service. In the U.S., Republicans will openly disagree with Democrats and vice versa. In one sense, this can be good because at least there is transparency, and (frequently) everyone knows where the other individuals and factions stand. This style usually occurs in systems where people cannot be fired (or killed) for voicing their concerns and criticism. This is less common in organizational life, where the system has higher levels of fear and your job could be on the line.

**Apathetic**—These followers rarely activate unless tapped. Moreover, even then, they may not contribute much to meet the group’s objective. This style is a passive form of followership and, for many groups, expendable. Their presence does not add much value.

**Individualist**—Few people truly understand the motives and alliances of the lone wolf. They often talk a good game and nod in agreement, but they prioritize their agenda – whatever that is... Moreover, while it seems they are on board, they are more focused on their agenda. Walter White, Jason Bourne, Batman, House, and Michael Scott are examples of TV and film characters who display the tendencies of a lone wolf.

**Subversive**—This style is prevalent in organizational life. Because of fear, people rarely externalize their true feelings about leaders, leaders’ ideas, and the limitations of the current strategy. An indicator of this style is a “meeting after the meeting” to gossip and discuss why the plan will not work. Of course, none of those reasons were shared in the actual meeting. Another indicator is when an authority figure offers a bad idea to the group, but no one openly challenges that thinking. Perhaps the paradox is that due to fear and an inability to intervene, the followers enable a path prone to failure – which lowers morale and engagement.

**Implementer**—The implementer is a dutiful follower who rarely questions an authority figure. While this style has its place, it can also be used for great destruction. Toxic leaders like Hitler, Stalin, and Jim Jones needed implementers to enact their terrible visions. Implementers know their roles and move when activated. This is positive when they work for a morally sound leader. However, if the leader is ethically corrupt, these individuals may find themselves doing the dirty work of a toxic leader.

**Five Reflection Questions**

1. What are the downsides of defaulting to both the participative and coaching styles?
2. What would it look like if you encountered a leader who defaults to both directive and participative styles?
3. Which of the styles do you most often default to? Which do you shy away from? What are the ramifications of this for you as a leader?
4. Followers are often a part of the problem when things are not going well. How so?
5. What does it look like when you work with a follower who defaults to both partner and subversive styles?