

5 Leadership Styles: Which One Are You?

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Different leaders use different leadership styles. Much research has been conducted on these and they all vary to some degree. However, I've found that these five leadership styles encompass the traits of all different leaders. Which style describes you?

The Five Leadership Styles

Laissez-Faire Leadership

French for "let (people) do as they choose," laissez-faire describes a hands-off approach.[1] Laissez-faire leadership will typically yield the lowest results because the leader does not directly supervise the employee. Decision-making is left to the employees with little to no guidance from leadership. Leaders will provide resources, but employees are expected to diagnose and resolve issues on their own. This can be effective in situations where the employees are both motivated and capable to work on their own with minimal direction from management. However, this should not be used if your employees lack the knowledge or drive to accomplish tasks on their own. In this situation, it could lead to confusion, little work being accomplished, and a sense that you do not care about them. You might consider using this style of leadership in situations where a direct report knows considerably more than you do on a subject, but you should remain available for questions and give feedback.

Autocratic Leadership

Also known as authoritarian leadership, autocratic leadership is the opposite of laissez-faire. The autocratic leader exercises total control over all decisions and allows very little input from employees. While this sounds like a recipe for disaster, this leadership style lends itself to situations where quick, decisive action is warranted and there is little time for debate. In the military, there are definitely times where a quick decision coming from the leader can make the difference between life and death. That said, to adopt an autocratic style 100% of the time is not advisable. Total autocratic leaders are often disliked by their employees, which stifles creativity and can lead to high turnover rates. The key here is to understand when this type of leadership style is warranted and then avoid it at all other times.

Participative Leadership

Also known as democratic leadership, the participative approach blends laissez-faire and autocratic leadership to find a middle ground. The participative leader actively encourages participation from employees in decision-making, but then makes the final decision for the group. The benefits here are improved employee morale as they feel valued and respected. Here, all members of the team bring many more creative ideas to the table. This leadership style, however, does not work so well in those instances when decisions must be made rapidly as the participation process can take some time to sort through.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership incorporates rewards and punishments in exchange for employee performance. The leader and employee will agree on goals and pre-determined standards to meet those goals. In this style, the leader provides direction and oversight and then reviews the employee's performance in meeting their goals. Employees are rewarded for meeting or exceeding the goals (i.e. with bonuses) or punished if they fail to meet their goals. This style of leadership is typically more passive and does not encourage out-of-the-box thinking.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders create a vision for their employees and communicate it often. These leaders identify the need for change and then become that agent for change through inspiration and motivation. This leadership style will typically improve employee morale and promote inclusion within the group. The transformational leader is a role model for their employees and strives to understand their strengths and weaknesses in order to enable them to be their best. In contrast to transactional leadership that maintains the status quo, transformational leaders inspire their employees to change in order to meet the strategic goals of the organization.

Summary

The most effective leaders are not married to one particular leadership style and can switch between each style depending on which is most appropriate in a given situation. That said, if I had to choose one best style, transformational leadership lends itself best to empowered and engaged employees, strategic-thinking leaders with clear visions, and open communication at all levels within the organization.

What do you think? Can you blend different styles or do you prefer to stick to just one? I would love to hear your thoughts. As always, please feel free to leave comments or email me at dan@learningfm.com. Thanks so much for reading!

[1] "Laissez-faire." Dictionary.com. 2017. Accessed March 30, 2017. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/laissez-faire>.