



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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# Leadership Tip: Use Your Entire Toolbox

By David C. Miller



From these two characteristics we can define four categories of followers:

- The Enthusiastic Beginner—low competence, high commitment
- The Disillusioned Learner—some competence, low commitment
- The Capable but Cautious Performer—moderate competence, varied commitment
- The High Achiever—high competence, high commitment.

A person will go through these four developmental stages when they learn to master anything. The general rule to determine your leadership style is:

*When they are lacking competence, they need Direction. When they are lacking commitment, they need Support.*

## DIRECTION AND SUPPORT

*Direction* includes things like telling, training, showing, and monitoring and supervising.

*Support* includes things like asking, facilitating, praising and listening.

## FOUR LEADERSHIP APPROACHES

*A Directing style is ideal for Enthusiastic Beginners.* They have lots of willingness, being excited about a new venture, but have very low abilities since it is so new for them. They need lots of direction and instruction or else they will be spinning their wheels.

*A Coaching style is ideal for Disillusioned Learners.* This stage sets in when the person realizes that mastering this task is going to be harder than they initially thought. They have developed some competence, but their confidence has dropped. A Coaching style still provides direction, but also brings in the elements of listening and encouraging in order to support the person in their developmental journey.

**A**braham Maslow said, “*If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.*”

This saying is especially true when it comes to your leadership style. Many managers approach every employee and every situation using the same approach—typically, a directive style. Sometimes this is appropriate, but not always.

## DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Ken Blanchard developed a model, called Situational Leadership, where the appropriate leadership style is determined based on the person’s level of competence and commitment.

*Competence* is all about ability, skills, education and experience. How able are they to handle the task?

*Commitment* deals with motivation and confidence. How willing is the person to complete the task?



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*A Supporting style is ideal for Cautious but Capable Performers.* These people have developed quite a bit of skill, but they are sometimes unwilling or reluctant to take action. This could be because the rewards don't seem to be there or their confidence to be able to succeed is low. They do not need anyone to show them what to do, but they do need a leader to listen, process, praise and encourage.

*A Delegating style is ideal for High Achievers.* They have plenty of competence and commitment. They catch themselves doing the right things—very self-motivated. Try using a Directing style with a High Achiever and they will feel micromanaged. No—these folks need very little in the way of direction or support—they thrive on being empowered.

person. For example, Bob may be a High Achiever when it comes to programming code for the new system—he's been doing that for years. But he is a Disillusioned Learner when it comes to managing people, because he just got promoted as team lead three months ago—it's all new to him.

You will be using a Delegating style when dealing with Bob on technical issues and a Coaching style when working with Bob on people management issues.

So it's extremely important to employ a leadership approach that is appropriate to the situation at hand. Don't treat every situation like it's a nail—use your entire toolbox when leading. ●

## LOOK AT THE GOAL, NOT JUST THE PERSON

Remember that you will most likely be employing different leadership styles even with the same

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