

# LEADERSHIP : Developing People

Leadership is the ability to influence others and get the changes you desire. Anytime you interact with someone in order to influence them, you are attempting leadership. All of us have a predominant leadership style we prefer using. Problems arise when we expect others to adjust to that style. We may get what we want in the short run but alienate others over the long term. A better approach is to be flexible enough to attract the support and cooperation of others.

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## READINESS LEVELS

The key to this flexibility is correctly assessing other people's "readiness" to do a specific task. Readiness is based on task-specific ability and task-specific willingness.

**Ability** consists of experience, training, and understanding priorities. The only true test of ability is proven performance, not potential. Do others have the knowledge and skill necessary to perform the task successfully? Do they understand what is expected?

**Willingness** consists of desire, confidence, and incentive. The proof of willingness is "putting out the effort". Do they want to do this task? What about their confidence? Do they see an incentive for performing the task?

It is critical to remember that both these components of readiness are situation specific. They depend on the task to be done. Four distinct readiness levels, based on different combinations of task-specific ability and willingness, are possible.

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### Levels of Readiness

#### **R4 = High Readiness**

High Ability and High Willingness

#### **R3 = Moderate to High Readiness**

Moderate-to-High Ability and Moderate Willingness

#### **R2 = Low to Moderate Readiness**

Low-to-Moderate Ability and High Willingness

#### **R1 = Low Readiness**

Low Ability and Moderate Willingness

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## LEADERSHIP STYLES

Leadership style is the way we come across to others when we attempt to influence. A practical way to describe leadership styles is the extent to which directive and supportive behaviors are used. Directive behavior is the degree to which a leader explains, in specific terms, what to do, when and where to do it, how to do it (with as much detail as needed), and who is responsible. In directive behavior communication is primarily one-way and focuses on the other person's duties and responsibilities. Supportive behavior is the extent to which the leader sets positive expectations, encourages, listens to, praises, and helps facilitate the thinking of others. In supportive behavior the flow of communication is primarily two-way. Combining varying degrees of directive and supportive behavior produces four distinct leadership styles.

**Style 1** is characterized by explaining, demonstrating, and giving feedback on performance. It might sound like this, "Watch me, I'll explain this step by step. After that I'll give you a chance to try your hand at it. Don't worry about learning everything at once because I'll be here to provide any assistance you may need." Support consists of setting positive expectations and providing enough two-way communication to ensure that directions are clear and feedback is understood. Properly used, Style 1 is called "Directing".

**Style 2** is characterized by coaching and instruction. It looks and sounds very much like Style 1 in terms of structure. The distinction is in the higher amount of supportive behavior provided by the leader to develop in-depth understanding and skill through practice and positive feedback. In Style 2 the leader engages in more listening and discussion. It might sound like this, "I really appreciate your enthusiasm for this task. Let me explain why we do it this way and then I'll answer any questions you have. We'll make sure you have what you need to do an excellent job." Properly done Style 2 is called "Guiding or Coaching".

**Style 3** is characterized by encouragement and reinforcement. When using this style the leader does not "tell" or "direct" the other person. Instead, the leader shares responsibility for decision-making. It might sound like this, "Susan, we can all benefit from some of the approaches you have used in the past. How do you think we should proceed on this?" Properly used, Style 3 is called "Supporting" or "Participating".

**Style 4** is characterized by a more "hands-off" approach that gives the other person room to make and implement decisions. Of all the styles, Style 4 is the least structured. It might sound like this: "Jim, you know the results we are looking for. This project is right up your alley. Take responsibility, you know the parameters and the constraints. Call me if you need me." Supportive behavior is used to reinforce and reward the person for achieving intended results. Properly done Style 4 is called "Delegating".

Each of these four leadership styles naturally fits one of the four readiness levels. Ask yourself the following, "What specific task and result do I want this individual to accomplish? Given what I know, what does this person need from me to succeed?"

Direction? Support? How much of each?" Finally, "How can I provide these things in a way that is effective with this person?" Without taking the time to ask these questions first, leadership becomes a "hit-or-miss" proposition rather than a conscious influence strategy.

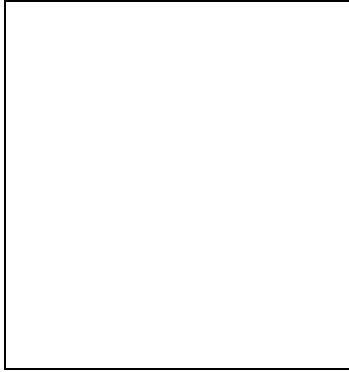
## **MATCHING STYLE TO READINESS**

**R1/S1 - Directing low readiness.** Everyone, no matter how competent, has areas where they have not been successful and lack confidence or desire. If ability and willingness are low, what can you do to help? What they need is a great deal of structure (what, where, when, and how). An effective leader provides this, stays close, and keeps them on the right course. It is important for you as a leader to realize that you may not always have the ability to provide direction in situations where you lack expertise. In these cases, be prepared to help others locate a source of expertise to deliver the structure they need. With sufficient direction people will succeed and their potential will be transformed into ability.

**R2/S2 - Guiding low-to-moderate readiness.** Everyone has areas where they are willing and confident but lack the ability to do the task. Often at the R2 level enthusiasm is mistaken for know-how, by both the leader and the other person. If left alone the risk is failure. This can result in a loss of confidence, self-doubt, and unwillingness to try again. The best help you can give in such situations is high direction combined with high support. Structure is still needed because of their limited experience. High amounts of two-way communication builds on their desire and confidence to learn new things. The effective leader develops people, at this readiness level, with "hands-on" guidance and coaching.

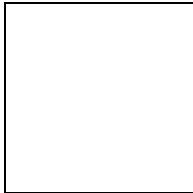
**R3/S3 - Supporting moderate-to-high readiness.** Everyone has been in situations where their ability is newly developed. At the R# level, individuals have the ability but haven't yet developed the confidence to put that ability to work. What you can provide is reassurance and reinforcement for their ideas and actions. By being available and a good listener you are encouraging the person to take the lead. Anytime you shift responsibility for decisions to others, it is natural for their confidence to drop. With appropriate support and participation confidence grows to complement ability.

**R4/S4 - Delegating to high readiness.** High ability and high willingness combine at Readiness Level 4. On these tasks, people have sufficiently internalized the knowledge, skill, confidence, and desire needed to perform within established guidelines. What they need from you is sufficient information and enough latitude to carry out their responsibilities. Feedback and recognition are still important; people at this level want independence but do not want to be left entirely alone. The payoff for developing others' readiness comes when you, as the leader, get more freedom to coordinate your group's activities, compete for resources, and do strategic thinking.



In summary, these concepts are no more than organized common sense. If you want to be a more effective leader and influencer you will assume responsibility for giving others what they need. You will provide the direction and support that fits their needs, rather than the styles with which you are most comfortable. Matching your style to the readiness of others is the challenge. Leadership requires thought, planning, perseverance, and commitment.

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# ASSESSING READINESS

## WHY ASSESS READINESS?

The key to effective leadership is matching your style to the needs of others. How do you determine these needs? Instinct and intuition can help, but there is no substitute for doing your homework. In order to choose the right leadership style, you must know the specific ability and willingness of the people you are trying to influence.

Remember, in its simplest form, readiness can be described by four distinct levels, R1 through R4.

Many leaders fail to take the time to assess readiness. They act without first determining the specific needs of those they are attempting to influence. For instance, they delegate tasks for which people are not ready, or they continue to direct those who know what to do.

Assessing readiness has a number of benefits. First, it clarifies the strengths and weaknesses of the people you work with. Second, it will give you the information you need to develop others. Third, it helps you define potential people problems before they occur. Fourth, it will save you time. With so many benefits, why don't more of us do it?

The primary reason for not diagnosing readiness can be found within ourselves. Our own readiness to assess others may not be fully developed. Some of us feel we have not had adequate experience in assessing others. Others may feel unable or even unwilling to take the time to carefully evaluate each person's readiness for each situation. In other words, we are not all R4's. Accurate assessment, however, demands that you stay close to your people.

## WHAT TO DO

To develop sound management practices you have to make a commitment. You have to consciously set aside the time to assess readiness. If you don't, it won't get done. Is it worth the effort? Is there something in it for you? The benefits would certainly suggest it.

Having established the objective of assessing readiness of those with whom you work, the next step is to develop a strategy and a plan of action. It is not necessary to diagnose every person on every single task. Pareto's 80/20 rule applies well here. Roughly 20% of all tasks account for 80% of results. Where will you get the most mileage from diagnosing readiness? There are always key tasks and situations where it is more

important to assess others to ensure the best possible match of your style with their needs. This means deciding when to assess readiness, with whom, and on what tasks.

Here is where making a list for analyzing your people on their key tasks is helpful. On a sheet of paper construct three columns and place one person's name on the top of the sheet. Title the first column - **Key Tasks**. In this column list the most critical technical tasks and management tasks which the person is responsible.

Care in defining the tasks on your list is essential. These definitions will affect the quality of your assessments. The most common mistake in defining tasks is being too general. Often what we define are the broader goals and objectives people have rather than the specific tasks needed to achieve them. These goals should be broken down into their component tasks. Otherwise, we find ourselves assessing part of a person's responsibilities where more than one level of readiness is possible.

If a person can be diagnosed as having more than one readiness level, you have defined more than one task. Always ask yourself, *Is there any part of this task where ability may be higher or lower than with other parts?* and, *Is there any part of this task where willingness may be higher or lower?* If the answer is yes to even one of these questions, your task definition is too broad for the person on this specific task. When the answer is no to both questions you have arrived at a useful definition of the task.

Title the second column on your list - **Ability**, and the third - **Willingness**. Construct a similar sheet for each person with whom you work. In completing your assessment of readiness for each key task, consider the following components of task-specific ability and task specific willingness.

Without considering the individual components of ability and willingness it is easy to overestimate readiness.

## **HOW TO DO IT**

There are two basic ways to gather information about a person's readiness. The first is through observation. Watching people provides a wealth of information about their ability and willingness. Your best gauge of someone's readiness is their behavior. What people do is more important than what they say they do. Get out and see what's going on firsthand. Look for specific evidence of knowledge, skill, desire, and confidence.

In addition to relying on what you see, a second way to assess readiness is through conversations with the person. Such discussions provide valuable insights about readiness.

Start with questions relating to the key components of ability. Talk specifically about a person's experience, training, and understanding of current priorities. A simple question like, *How would you do this?* can be a gold mine of information. Other questions that are

useful to ask are, *How often have you done this?...What training have you received?...What priority do you give?... and, What results do you feel are expected?* When people respond to these questions they invariably provide useful information concerning ability.

In listening to others talk about their experiences, people usually also communicate information about their desire, confidence, and what incentives they see in performing a task. How a person responds often tells us as much as the content of their response. After questioning for ability, you can check on willingness more directly by asking such questions as, *Do you want to do this?...How confident are you in doing this?...and, What do you see are the incentives for you by doing this?* Having a sound questioning routine is a good way to increase your understanding for other people's readiness.

Before applying these tools with others, the place to start is with yourself. Ask yourself the following questions: *Do I possess the necessary knowledge and skill needed to assess others?...Am I willing to do it?...What's in it for me?* Be honest with yourself. What will it take to incorporate the assessment of readiness in your own day-to-day leadership?

Remember, your ultimate goal is to arrive at a mutual understanding of task-specific readiness. Reaching this understanding is really a give-and-take proposition. People may assess their own ability and willingness as higher than they actually are. Just as likely, they can underestimate their readiness on certain tasks. You also are not immune for over- and under-assessing readiness.

The important thing is to make readiness assessments an acceptable topic for discussion. Your assessments are a starting point for developing others. Their current readiness provides a baseline on which to build. As a leader, your efforts should be directed toward helping others achieve their full potential.

Using the components of readiness as a framework for observing and listening to others will increase your ability and power to influence them.

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