

for effective leadership, understand your style

Glenn Gutek

At the risk of placing substance over style, all leaders must understand this simple truth: style does matter. It is not about matching your belt to your shoes, or accessorizing appropriately for the occasion, but rather understanding the way you go about leading.

Allen rose through the ranks of the military with great ease and retired young with a high rank. Properly prepared for his transition into civilian life, Allen was able to land a great opportunity with an upstart tech firm in the mid-west. Everyone was confident his previous leadership performance would translate to the battlefield of competitive software development. Within months it became obvious that the members of Allen's team were not responsive to the command and control leadership style that Allen was comfortable exercising.

Allen's story is not uncommon. Effective leadership in one field or with one team does not always translate to effective leadership with another team or another field. The complexity of the marketplace has prompted the importance of knowing your leadership style and discerning the style that a team will easily respond to. The distinctions of leadership styles could be endless; however, the following six styles are the most prominent in the workforce today.

Charismatic: This is leadership by infusion of energy often embodied in the personality of the leader. This leadership style may encompass a wide swath of personalities, but the common ingredient is that the energy ushered in by the leader is closely connected to the leader herself or himself. Once Elvis leaves the building, so does some of that infectious energy!

Over the years, this style has been both praised and panned, but any study of leadership must recognize that there is value to those who bring energy to an organization by their sheer presence. The downside of this leadership is the reality that some teams don't need to speed things up, but rather slow things down. The charismatic leader is an excellent vision-caster and can elicit a loyal and passionate following. Where this style will often fall short is in the attention to details.

Technician: This is leadership by displaying both knowledge and skill. This style is highly valued in cultures where competence is high in economic value. It is leading by simply being the best producer of what your organization produces. This leadership style can influence their arena with an impeccable

reputation, and sets the bar for the standard of work quality.

There are limits this style has in being replicated throughout an organization. Some leaders who strongly employ this style can in time be a little like the “Wizard of Oz,” hiding behind the curtain, pulling strings, leaving everyone to wonder “how does he/she do it?” Nobody can argue with the value quality plays in any arena. Keep in mind there is a distinction between leading the best, and being the best.

Strategic: This is leadership by connecting the dots. This style is embodied in people who tend to be global and conceptual thinkers. They not only are able to see the end destination, but they know the path to get there must be identified and paved. Tragically, this style can be marred by the blues, because not only do strategic leaders see what could be, they see what is not.

Team Builder: Here, leadership is by roles and unity. This style recognizes that you can’t just assemble any group of people and claim you have a team. This leadership style is employed by people who look at people individually and find individual roles for them to fill. At the same time, they align these individuals into a cohesive whole.

Managerial: This is leadership by systems. This style focuses on doing things right. Processes and systems are designed and

understood so that current operations function consistently. Though some would argue that managers are not leaders, you have to acknowledge that effective managers have a profound influence on those that surround them. In fact, they have the capacity to lead a culture that prizes management, even at the expense of effectiveness.

Directive: Here we have leadership by control. This style was once enamored with the industrial revolution. In recent years, it has been stated that command and control are no longer cherished. However, any organization in crisis would love to have a directive leader step forward and bring order out of chaos. There is still a need for directive leaders.

How to employ your understanding of leadership styles

The most important thing to be understood when examining the concept of leadership styles is to recognize that there are circumstances where certain styles flourish and others where they flounder. In days of old, the common philosophy was to master all of these styles. “A man for all seasons” was the fantasy of owners, entrepreneurs, and executives.

Today, the world is way too diverse and complex; and truthfully, nobody was ever excellent at all styles. Most writers on the subject these days encourage you to know your style and function in an environment

where your style will flourish. As a leader, not only should you know your natural style, but you should also know the “shadow side” of that style: How does your winning formula undermine your effectiveness?

Typically, a leader’s ineffectiveness will not be exposed, even if one of their weaknesses is revealed. Ineffectiveness will shine when your strength runs amuck. There is an old saying that if the only tool you have is a hammer, than the whole world looks like a nail. Some of the biggest mistakes in leadership are when you are using a hammer when sand paper is required.

Effective leadership in today’s diverse culture will require a team approach, and teams require diverse leadership styles. By not only employing the best leadership style for you, but also knowing when to adapt to other styles, you can effectively lead your team to success. 

Glenn Gutek is a speaker and CEO of Awake Consulting & Coaching, a firm that helps small businesses and organizations improve their leadership and business development through training, development and coaching, he is also the author of “Wide-Awake Leadership.” For more information on speaking and consulting, please visit www.AwakeConsulting.com or contact Glenn at glenn@awakeconsulting.com or 407-901-4357.

Copyright of Supervision is the property of National Research Bureau and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.