

Timely Tips

from Thinking Well Consulting

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This week: Situational Leadership Model

Dear Reader,

The Four Styles Of Situational Leadership

In simple terms, a situational leader is one who can adopt different leadership styles depending on the situation. Most of us do this anyway in our dealings with other people: we try not to get angry with a nervous colleague on their first day. We chase up tasks with some people more than others because we know they'll forget otherwise.



Ken Blanchard, the management guru best known for the "One Minute Manager" series, and Paul Hersey created a model for Situational Leadership in the late 1960's that allows you to analyze the needs of the situation you're dealing with, and then adopt the most appropriate leadership style. The model doesn't just apply to people in leadership or management positions: we all lead others at work and at home.

LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR

Blanchard and Hersey characterized leadership style in terms of the amount of direction and of support that the leader gives to his or her followers, and so created a simple grid:

Situational Levels

S Level 1

Directing Leaders define the roles and tasks of the 'follower', and supervise them closely. Decisions are made by the leader and announced, so communication is largely one-way.

S Level 2

Coaching Leaders still define roles and tasks, but seeks ideas and suggestions from the follower. Decisions remain the leader's prerogative, but communication is much more two-way.

S Level 3

Supporting Leaders pass day-to-day decisions, such as task allocation and processes, to the follower. The leader facilitates and takes part in decisions, but control is with the follower.

S Level 4

Delegating Leaders are still involved in decisions and problem-solving, but control is with the follower. The follower decides when and how the leader will be involved.

Effective leaders are versatile in being able to move around the grid according to the situation, so there is no one right style. However, we tend to have a preferred style, and in applying Situational Leadership you need to know which one that is for you.

DEVELOPMENT LEVEL

Clearly the right leadership style will depend very much on the person being led - the follower - and Blanchard and Hersey extended their model to include the Development Level of the follower. They said that the leader's style should be driven by the Competence and Commitment of the follower, and came up with four levels:

D Level 1

Low Competence
Low Commitment

Generally lacking the specific skills required for the job in hand, and lacks any confidence and / or motivation to tackle it. Typically match to S Level 1 - Directing.

D Level 2

Some Competence
Low Commitment

May have some relevant skills, but won't be able to do the job without help. The task or the situation may be new to them. Typically match to S Level 2 -Coaching.

D Level 3

High Competence
Variable Commitment

Experienced and capable, but may lack the confidence to go it alone, or the motivation to do it well / quickly. Typically match to S Level 3 - Supporting.

D Level 4

High Competence
High Commitment

Experienced at the job, and comfortable with their own ability to do it well. May even be more skilled than the leader. Typically match to S Level 4 - Delegating.

Development Levels are also situational. I might be generally skilled, confident and motivated in my job, but would still drop into Level D1 when faced, say, with a task requiring skills I don't possess. For example, lots of managers are D4 when dealing with the day-to-day running of their department, but move to D1 or D2 when dealing with a sensitive employee issue.

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

As you can see, Leadership Style corresponds to Development Level of the follower and it's up to the leader to adapt to each situation.

By adopting the right style to suit the follower's development level, work gets done, relationships are built up, and most importantly, the follower's development level will rise to D4, to everyone's benefit.

Short of a training program, you can learn the basics of how to operate effectively in all the Leadership Styles, and how to determine the Development Level of others from Ken Blanchard's "Leadership and the One Minute Manager."

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