

Success

By Design

Building Strong Organizations... Strong Communities

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Effective Leadership

Effective leadership is one key element in the success of a group and virtually anyone can learn to be an effective leader. Leaders are made, not born.

“Being the leader doesn’t make you one, because leaders don’t automatically get the respect and acceptance of their group members; so in order to earn the leadership of their group and have a positive influence on the group members, leaders learn some specific skills and methods.”

Thomas Gordon

Situational Leadership

Throughout the years, there have been many leadership style theories identified. Basically, the autocratic leadership style has gone out of fashion in recent years, though certain situations, such as emergencies, still call for its use.

One popular theory is called “situational leadership.” No one style of leadership is appropriate for every occasion or situation. The most effective style to use depends upon the situation and whether the group members are willing and able to take on the responsibility. To be effective as a leader, it’s important to know your group in terms of knowledge, ability, desire and willingness, and be ready to adapt your style to suit the occasion.

The Telling Leader – This leader “tells” the members what to do and doesn’t worry too much about the feelings or relationships within the group. This is appropriate where members are new, inexperienced, lacking in confidence or need a lot of help and direction in order to get the job

done. The leader should give clear directions and provide follow-up and feedback.

The Selling Leader – This leader often needs to “sell” or persuade the group to “buy into” a job. The group is a little more responsible or experienced, but direction and guidance by the leader is still needed at this level. The leader should explain the decisions and give a lot of opportunity for clarification.

The Participating Leader – The leader and the group members participate in making the decisions and carrying them out together. The group has the ability to do the job, but might lack the confidence to carry it out on their own. The leader puts more emphasis on the group relationship than on the task to be done. They encourage and compliment the members.

Alberta
AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND
RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Delegating Leader – The leader trusts the group to decide and carry out the responsibility on it's own. The members have the desire and are experienced and capable of doing the job. The members are responsible for directing their own affairs.

Leadership Qualities

Effective leaders have many common qualities. Good group leaders make an effort to learn and practise skills so they can:

- listen openly to others
- offer and accept constructive suggestions
- give clear directions
- set and meet deadlines
- give formal and informal presentations
- help members identify and solve problems
- set an example of desired behavior
- show appreciation of others' contributions
- show understanding
- encourage members to exchange ideas
- handle conflict
- guide the group in goal setting and decision making
- delegate responsibilities
- ask questions of the group to prompt responses
- create a productive atmosphere

Effective Leaders

- They are honest. This gives them credibility, resulting in the trust and confidence of their people. Credible leaders foster greater pride in the organization, a stronger spirit of cooperation and teamwork, and more feelings of ownership and personal responsibility.
- They do what they say they will do. They keep their promises and follow through on their commitments.
- They make sure their actions are consistent with the wishes of the people they lead. They have a clear idea of what others value and what they can do.

- They believe in the inherent self worth of others.
- They admit to their mistakes. They realize that attempting to hide a mistake is damaging and erodes credibility.
- They create a trusting and open climate.
- They help others to be successful and to feel empowered.
- They don't push too much. They encourage members to do more, but know when it's too much.
- They roll up their sleeves. They show the members they aren't just the figurehead or decision maker. Members respect leaders more when they show the willingness to work alongside them.
- They avoid phrases that cause resentment, reluctance and resistance. For instance, instead of saying you have to do something, effective leaders request or recommend that members do something.

Giving Feedback

Whether you recognize it or not, as a leader you are constantly providing feedback to your members. How you provide that feedback will often spell the difference between member success and failure.

Silence – When you give no response to your member's work you aren't maintaining the status quo, but are actually encouraging a decrease in both their performance and confidence over the long-term. They don't know if their actions are appropriate. Silence can create paranoia.

Criticism – When trying to stop unwanted behavior or results you may criticize a member. This often hurts the relationship you have with them. Their confidence decreases, they may start to avoid you and other "good" behaviors of the member are affected. This can overpower all other feedback given.

Advice – When you tell a member what behaviors or results you want and how you would like them done, you improve the member’s confidence and your relationship with them. Increased performance will be the result.

Positive Reinforcement – This takes the advice feedback one step further by identifying how much you would appreciate the member’s assistance in reaching the desired behaviors or results. This kind of feedback will give you the best results by increasing the motivation, confidence and performance of your member.

Advice and positive reinforcement should be the only types of feedback you give to a member. Try relating your feedback to the action, behavior or result you want, not to the personality of the member. Consider your timing. Try to give feedback before the event in the form of advice, or afterwards in the form of positive reinforcement.

Accepting Feedback

Knowing how to accept feedback is another leadership skill that will teach you a lot about your leadership style. Resist the temptation to resist the feedback. Don’t explain, defend or deny. Listen silently to try to understand clearly what the other person is saying. You don’t have to agree with the feedback you get, but be receptive to getting the feedback.

Listening

The ability to listen well is a cornerstone of good leadership. To listen well:

- Stop talking. Before you speak, remember people are more receptive to your input if they feel you have a clear understanding of their situation.
- Watch for nonverbal clues. Most of the meaning of our messages is in the vocal and visual components. Sighs and slumped shoulders may mean depression. Animated

expressions and gestures usually mean excitement. Ask yourself. “Do the non-verbal clues match the words?”

- Give visual feedback with non-verbal expressions and gestures (e.g., nodding). These let your speaker know that you are listening and understanding what they have to say.
- Be patient. Our desire to provide quick fix solutions to the problems of others puts up roadblocks. “You don’t have to finish, I know what you are going to say,” is a sure way of letting the speaker know that you have little time or confidence in their ability to solve their problem.
- Don’t mentally argue. If you are developing arguments in your mind as the speaker talks you are probably missing much of the message.
- Use reflective listening skills. Use paraphrasing to let the speaker know what you have heard.
- Acknowledge their ideas. This doesn’t mean you agree with the speaker, but it does mean that you feel their ideas are worth listening to.
- Keep alert. Effective listening requires energy and concentration. Avoid distractions.

“I not only use all the brains I have, but all I can borrow.” Woodrow Wilson

Delegating Leadership

To decide whether you can delegate tasks to others, ask yourself:

- What am I doing now that I’d like to see someone else do?
- Which skills among the members can be used more effectively, by giving them more responsibility?
- What could I do if I had more free time?

Once you’ve decided to delegate, you need to:

- know your members, what they have done and what can they do
- listen to the membership so you pick up information about what they want to do

- let them know that you are willing to share authority
- give them a purpose so members know why the task is important
- give credit where credit is due and show appreciation for their efforts

Handling Group Discussions

The majority of work accomplished at meetings is done through group discussion. This is significant as discussions are a time where everyone has the opportunity to contribute to a group. Group discussion is actually more beneficial to your organization than when one individual is working on a project. The ideas generated within a group often don't come alive when one person is working alone. Yet, discussion time within a meeting is also the time when frustrations build.

How can you avoid being frustrated yet still have a productive meeting? Identify why the group is having the discussion. There are three reasons for having a discussion: to gather information, to exchange ideas and to solve problems. If you know why you are discussing the issue, it's easier to participate, keep the discussion on track and get results.

Be aware of how the discussion is progressing. Two things can be happening during a discussion: the development of information, ideas or issues, or the evaluation of information, ideas or issues.

Usually, developing and evaluating gets mixed together. This is where you can run into problems like discussions that go around in circles and frustrated participants. It can look like this: one person makes a suggestion, the second person says it's good, the third person says it's not good and a debate follows. The suggestion is tossed out and the leader asks for another suggestion. It's good, it's not good, it gets tossed out. After this happens a few times the group is tired, everyone stays quiet, time is used up and there are no results.

To avoid this scenario, you need to get the ideas out first or develop the information, ideas or issue. Don't let people evaluate at this stage or it will discourage participation. After the ideas are out, then evaluate. This progression keeps the group moving forward and avoids having a similar debate for each idea or comment.

Keeping development and evaluation separate also helps in avoiding the trap of the first idea or the last idea (the survivor of a half hour of frustrating debates) being the best idea. If you only have one idea, of course it looks like the best idea.

Handling Difficult Conversations

The best intentions of a leader for keeping a meeting within a reasonable time frame can be destroyed if members put obstacles in the way.

An **orator** is an able speaker who likes to practise his speaking skills and may tend to talk for a long time. The leader must judge how much time is enough for this person and then get his attention by saying something like, "Excuse me, Jack, but we're running short of time and several other members have some points they would like to make. We'd all appreciate it if you could wind up your comments in the next minute or two. Thank you very much."

A **wanderer** tends to bring up an entirely unrelated topic. A leader can get the meeting back on track by saying something like, "Linda, I'm sorry to break in like this, but I think that you're getting away from the subject. Remember we'd like to settle the issue of ____ and we would appreciate it if you could confine your remarks to that subject. Thanks."

The **repeater** talks numerous times on the same subject while other members haven't had a chance to talk. You can give the person a rest and the others a chance to talk by saying something similar to, "Dave, before we hear from you again I would like to know how Debbie and Rick feel about this subject. Thank you." An alternative could be to go around the table in turn and ask for others' comments on the subject.

An **interrupter** tends to interrupt others as they are speaking on a subject. The leader may have to interrupt the interrupter by saying, "Before you say anything more, Jason, please wait until Shirley has finished and you then will have an opportunity to make your point. Thank you."

Summary

Effective leaders have many common qualities. Making the effort to practise and learn the skills it takes to be an effective leader will enable you to use the style of leadership necessary in any situation you come across.

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