

Flexible Leadership Styles



**What's your leadership style?
Your success as a manager may depend on it.**

by Barbara Carnes

Traditionally, managers have achieved results through others via rules, procedures, policies, and the use of authority. They have planned and organized work, and controlled staff. But in today's fast-paced climate, it is difficult to plan because there is little history from which to project; it is difficult to organize because things change so quickly. Most managers have neither the time nor the inclination to oversee subordinates' work closely (on average, a manager supervises twenty or more individuals). By the time reports are initiated, the need for them has changed or they don't accurately reflect the work they were intended to measure. Today's managers can increase their ability to anticipate and manage emergent problems and create new initiatives by developing *leadership* abilities — rather than management skills — and by developing *flexibility* in their leadership style.

What is leadership? John Kotter, Harvard business school professor and author of *The Leadership Factor*, defines it as "the process of moving people in some direction through non-coercive means." James Georges, chairman and CEO of ParTraining Corporation, defines a leader as anyone who "engenders followers. If the person can get people to follow him, he is a leader."

The most effective means of exercising leadership is by using not one, but a variety of leadership styles. Most people have one leadership style they use in-

stinctively. A recent study found, however, that the most successful leaders don't use one style exclusively but instead combine several, choosing the most appropriate style for the specific situation and people involved. Leadership styles can generally be described in one of four ways: directing, influencing, stabilizing, or calculating. No one style is preferable; there are advantages and disadvantages to each, and circumstances under which each is appropriate.

Directing

The *directing* leadership style focuses on results. Leaders with this style use a lot of one-way communication, directing others to do things. They independently determine the action that should be taken, then delegate that action to others. Leaders who use this style are usually seen as take-charge, authoritative, and pioneering. Times of crisis, when there isn't time for discussion or collaboration, are appropriate times to use the directing style. This style does not produce effective results, however, if your goal is worker involvement, feedback, or collaboration.

Influencing

The *influencing* style involves persuading people to gain commitment. Users of this style "sell" ideas and plans of action to others. When leaders use this style, they are described as enthusiastic, verbal, and people-oriented. This style is appropriate

when you want to develop highly motivated, committed subordinates. When motivation and worker commitment already exist, or when those qualities are not necessary or desirable, this style is inappropriate.

Stabilizing

Managers who use the *stabilizing* style lead others by involving them in a team. Leaders who use this style are described by others as low-key, patient, and good listeners. This style is especially appropriate if you need to insulate workers from disruptive change elsewhere in the organization. It is also appropriate when teamwork and follower involvement is desirable. Other styles are more appropriate, however, when quick action is necessary.

Calculating

Calculating leaders carefully analyze data and situations, and develop clear strategies for implementing plans. Others consider such managers to be detail-oriented, diplomatic, and quality-minded. Use this style in situations where accuracy and details are important. But when accuracy is not critical or quick action is required, this style is not a good choice.

What's Your Leadership Style?

Most managers have a strong preference for one or two leadership styles. To find yours, work through the "What's Your Leadership Style?" exercise. The Leadership Style Exercise (Figure 1) contains sets of descriptive words. In each set, rank the words you would use to describe yourself in leadership situations, using a "4" for the words most characteristic of your leadership behavior, a "1" for the words least characteristic. First impressions are best.

When you are finished, total the numbers for all the first words of each group, then all the second words of each group, and so on. The ranking of the word in each group corresponds to a specific leadership style: the higher the score for each total group, the more you use that style.

To test your flexibility, re-take the assessment several times, each time thinking of a different situation in which you use leadership. If the totals each time are similar, your leadership flexibility is limited. If the totals are quite different, your flexibility is high.

To meet the demands of today's dynamic business environment, as MIS

Figure 1
Leadership Style Exercise

Example: 2 Assertive
 1 Emotional
 3 Sincere
 4 Curious

- | | | |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Directing | <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive | <input type="checkbox"/> Decisive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Influencing | <input type="checkbox"/> Persuading | <input type="checkbox"/> Verbal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steady | <input type="checkbox"/> Accommodating | <input type="checkbox"/> Patient |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cautious | <input type="checkbox"/> Curious | <input type="checkbox"/> Analytical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adventurous | <input type="checkbox"/> Pioneering | <input type="checkbox"/> Forceful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enthusiastic | <input type="checkbox"/> Charming | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimistic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loyal | <input type="checkbox"/> Easy-going | <input type="checkbox"/> Deliberate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Logical | <input type="checkbox"/> Methodical | <input type="checkbox"/> Restrained |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restless | <input type="checkbox"/> Bold | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talkative | <input type="checkbox"/> Impulsive | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Harmonious | <input type="checkbox"/> Stabilizing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Perfectionistic | <input type="checkbox"/> Precise | |

First Words = Directing Style
 Second Words = Influencing Style
 Third Words = Stabilizing Style
 Fourth Words = Calculating Style

Note: The grand total of all four subtotals should be 80.

manager you must understand leadership styles and use them flexibly. Your effectiveness and success depend on it. □

Barbara Carnes is an organizational consultant who also presents seminars and workshops on a variety of people-related topics.

She has written two books: **Increasing your DISCability** and **Making Training Stick**. Her third, about procrastination, is in process. Carnes and Associates, Inc., has offices in Fort Collins, Colorado and St. Louis, Missouri. Barbara can be reached at (314) 275-7468.

TECH EXEC Regional Sales Offices

Janice Healy
 Eastern Region Manager
 37 Putnam Park Road
 West Redding, CT 06896
 (203) 938-9818

Bart Taylor
 Western and Central Regions Manager
 221 East 29th Street
 Loveland, CO 80538
 (303) 663-4700

Corporate Offices
 221 East 29th Street
 Loveland, CO 80538
 (303) 663-4700
 FAX (303) 667-2321

Jim Richardson
 Sales and Marketing Manager

Donnell Curley
 Classified Account Manager



Book Review *Thriving on Chaos*

Continued from page 44

for a very rough ride indeed." But don't let the seeming absurdity make you discount the author or the message. The book's mission is to arouse nothing less ponderous than the American business establishment, and provocative statements are one of the author's tools.

Peters' most effective tool, however, is his passion. He is a visionary who pursues his visions with a missionary's conviction. His compelling sense of urgency pervades every page, and his fervor is infectious. "The objective is not to be excellent, because 'to be' implies stasis and there is no place to stand anymore; the only excellent firms are those that are rapidly evolving." □

Barb Gibbens is Senior Editor of the S/38 & AS/400 team of **NEWS 3X/400** magazine. Barb can be reached at (303) 663-4700.

ADVERTISER INDEX

Acom Computer	Cover 4
Andrew Net	29
ATS	Cover 3
Blue Ribbon	17
Business Model Systems	5
Ceres Capital	33
Decision Data	25
GBT	21
Metafile	35
National Productions	45
Perle Systems	3
Redmond Technologies	2, 31
Silverlake Systems	18, 19
Software Professionals	Cover 2