



**RONKELLEHER**  
*Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders*

## Build Performance by Learning How to Use Leadership Styles Effectively

There are dozens of books about leadership and developing your leadership style. Authors have compared leadership styles to animals (lions, tigers, bear, beavers), and military generals (Napoleon, Attila, Sun Tzu, Alexander) all to help managers sort through the very difficult task of understanding what is a good leader.

As a society, we have done a miserably poor job of recognizing good leaders. Witness the selection of world leaders and national politicians that have taken countries and the world down the proverbial primrose path.

The purpose of this letter is to give you a bare-bones look at leadership as a managerial function, the basic styles of leaders, and how you can modify your leadership style to best fit a given situation.

### **Business View**

Most of us have been trained that the function of a manager is “Getting work done *through* others.” The more work the better, preferably at the lowest possible cost. Inherent in this school of thought is the idea to use power to “control” others.

An example of this “controlling” style of leadership is portrayed in Matthew, “*You know the rulers of the gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them*” (Mat 20:25).

Jesus is not condemning a leadership style that seeks to control. Rather, He is showing that it is inappropriate for the relationship between the disciples and Israelites.

### **Biblical View**

Over 40-years ago in his book *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* Peter Drucker noted,



*“to make the worker ‘achieve’ demands that managers look upon labor as a resource rather than as a problem, a cost, or an enemy to be cowed. It demands that managers accept responsibility for making human strengths effective.”*

Drucker’s point is that as managers we must change our focus from managing personnel to leading people.

One can summarize this philosophy as “Getting work done *with* others.” The idea is to use power to serve others; to enable them to do their work more effectively.

Jesus explains this requirement for leadership; *“Not so with you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mat 20:26-28).

To the disciples, the “Gentiles” that Jesus referred to, were quite likely Roman leaders or soldiers. Imagine how revolutionary this concept must have seemed to the disciples; give leadership responsibilities to servants and slaves! From this single passage, we see the definition for a participative leadership style that emphasized the importance of relationships.

## Styles Defined

There are four styles of leadership prominent in business today; Dictator, Authoritarian, Consultant, and Participative. Here are profiles of “pure” examples of each style:

**Dictator.** The dictator answers all the questions of who, what, when, where, and how work should be done himself. Opinions contrary to that of the dictator are not allowed. Poor performance is dealt with harshly. The dictator’s biggest weakness is that he could care less about the people around him or the consequences of his actions on others. The dictator’s biggest strength is his ability to quickly summarize a situation, determine a strategy, and to act.

**Authoritarian.** The authoritarian usually answers most of the who, what, when, where, and how questions himself because he holds his own opinions in high regard. The authoritarian is often very critical of opinions that differ from his own, is apt to use others’ ideas only if he agrees with them, and is seldom likely to give credit to others. An authoritarian is action oriented and very competitive. An authoritarian’s biggest weakness is his lack of regard for the skills of the people around him; either in using these people effectively or in recognizing the work they have done. The biggest strength of an authoritarian is their ability to gather information, decide, and act quickly.

**Consultant.** The consultative leader usually seeks input from others to answer the who, what, when, where, why, and how questions. But make no mistake, he usually makes the decision



himself. The consultative leader is often popular with workers because he seeks their input on major decisions, gives credit where credit is due, and will sometimes even delegate some decision-making power to subordinates. The biggest weakness of the consultative leader is that their decision-making process is slowed by searching out and evaluating opinions from others. The biggest strength of the consultant is that their people are very loyal and perform at or near peak levels.

**Participative.** The participative leader seeks input from the balance of the “team” before answering who, what, when, where, why and how questions. The participative leader leads from a position of democracy; everyone has a vote and all votes count the same. He will even accept the “team’s” counsel over his own opinion. The biggest weakness of a participative leader is that they are often incapable of deciding on their own. They are so reliant on group interaction that without a group they are ineffective. The greatest strength of a participative leader is that their workers are fiercely loyal, hardworking, and performing at peak capacity. This “team” can get more done in time than any group of individuals using the other leadership styles.

### Which Style Is “Right”?

Some writers would have you believe that only the participative team style is biblically correct. But filtering this notion through the record of scripture yields a different answer; there is no one style that is always correct, but there is probably one best style for any given situation. Consider how Moses demonstrated each of these leadership styles:

**Dictator.** Moses exhibited a dictator style in several situations. In Exodus 32 we have the account of the Israelites making the golden calf. Moses immediately has the calf burned, ground into powder and thrown into the water. He then made the Israelites drink the water. Moses showed no hesitation. He took immediate action to stop the blasphemous activity.

**Authoritarian.** Moses exhibited an authoritarian style in Exodus 18. Here Moses listens to his father in law, Jethro, who explains to Moses that Moses should set up a hierarchy of judges to settle disputes among the people. Moses listened to Jethro and immediately set up a hierarchy of judges within each family so that only the most difficult cases would be brought before him for a decision.

**Consultant.** Moses exhibited a consultative style in Exodus 35-39. In these chapters, Moses related to the Israelites the preparations needed for the building of the tabernacle. Moses gave specific instructions for the construction of the tabernacle and its implements. He allowed each skilled worker to complete their work. But ultimately Moses inspected their work to see that they had done it correctly (Ex 39:43).



**Participative.** Moses used the participative style in Numbers 13. Here Moses prepares a group of 12 leaders (one from each tribe) to explore the country of Canaan. He gave the men specific instructions about where they were to go, and a list of eight questions he wanted to be answered. When the men returned from their scouting expedition Moses debriefed them. Ultimately, Moses even let the decision of the scouting party override his own opinion.

## When to Use Each Style

Each of the four styles has a purpose and is needed in specific types of situations:

**Dictator.** The dictator style is needed in times of extreme emergency. For example, when the Salomon Brothers bond-trading scandal erupted, Warren Buffet took over as CEO. Warren was the largest Salomon shareholder and knew that immediate action was needed to save the firm. In a matter of days, Buffet cleaned house by firing bad apples and restructuring the management of the company. He made full disclosures to the Federal Treasury and to clients, and he restored a sense of integrity in their business operations. Looking back, most analysts agree that without Buffet's dictatorial actions the entire firm would likely have been lost.

**Authoritarian.** The authoritarian style is particularly effective with new employees and in cases where employees are constantly violating company operating policies. The new COO at Salomon, Deryck Maugham, exhibited the authoritarian style as he began shaping up the company's values and employee commitment to workplace integrity.

**Consultant.** The consultative style is best used when experienced people are available to solve complex problems. This style is an excellent one to develop creative solutions to problems and is a good training tool for younger managers.

**Participative.** The participative style is very effective when you have a group of highly trained, competent people who need to solve complex problems. This style is a very good motivator for people who have reached their peak career levels and who might become frustrated with routine assignments.

The dictator and authoritarian leadership styles are very action-oriented and are best used in situations where immediate action is required. In the short run, these are very productive styles but must be used sparingly. The consultative and participative styles are very effective in the long run, especially when complex problems are at hand and creative solutions are needed.

## Style Versus Group Size

There are no hard and fast rules for which style works best in large groups versus small groups or one-on-one situations.



A dictator or authoritarian approach is most appropriate when addressing a large group where you wish to be very firm about the course you are setting for the organization. The exception might be the annual corporate management meeting when you are recognizing the efforts of top managers or when you want people to feel like part of a team. In this case, a consultant or participative style is more appropriate.

When you are in small groups or especially in one-on-one situations the consultant or participative style is usually the best approach to long-term problem solving. The exception to this is when the small group or individual has violated company operating principles and emergency action must be taken.

## **The Servant's Heart**

A servant's heart is key to a biblical approach to leadership styles and it can be demonstrated in all four styles. Leadership involves power. Power itself is not good or bad. In the biblical leadership model, each style must be used when appropriate and the leader's power must be used to serve the workforce.

The more power you have as a leader the more you are obligated to be a servant. As a servant, you have internal and external customers. The internal customers are your bosses, your peers, and your subordinates. Unless you are the CEO, you have internal customers in other departments of the company; those people with whom your department has frequent interaction or those whom you depend on. For example, if you are a sales department manager, you have internal customers in credit, advertising, transportation, etc.

Your external customers are your clients; the people who purchase your goods or service. If you are the CEO of a corporation, shareholders are also an external customer. Other external customers include raw materials suppliers, transportation companies, banks and other financial institutions, etc.

At each of these points of interpersonal contact, you should be a leader with a servant's heart. To be a servant you must understand the customer's needs. For your bosses, you must ask yourself, "How can I serve you better?" For employees, you must ask yourself, "How can I help you realize your dreams?" For your peers, you must ask yourself, "How can I help you do your work?" For customers, you must ask yourself, "How can my product or services meet your needs better?" For external suppliers, you must ask yourself, "How can I help you meet my needs while building your business?"

## **One Last Thought**

An effective leader is one who can adeptly change his management style to suit a given situation: a dictator when fast decisive action is required, an authoritarian when fast action is necessary but



there is some latitude in how to accomplish the task at hand, a consultant when working with experienced people on complex problems, or participative when working with highly trained people on issues that require creative problem-solving.

Regardless of the leadership style, you find yourself using, remember, you are a servant to the people you are responsible for leading. It is your responsibility to find out what their workplace needs are and to help fill them. If you do, you will build the performance levels of bosses, subordinates, and peers!