

# absolutely business



## Practical People Management Basic tools for extraordinary results

By Denise Walker FREC

### Part three: Management styles - being all things to all people?

*In this series of articles, Denise Walker shares her management experience, ideas and methods that actually work from a practitioner's perspective rather than HR theory.*

The way in which managers approach differing situations and people can have a profound affect on business and the people in it. This is not the same as having one rule for one and a different rule for another – and it is definitely not about compromising established standards, and quality or “people pleasing”. It is about adapting your approach according to individuals’ development needs.

Known as “leadership styles”, these could just as easily be known as “management styles”, although the labelling is ultimately irrelevant; the important thing is to give the appropriate amount and type of support to the people in your teams.

Many new managers (myself included 20 years ago) make the mistake of approaching each individual in the same way and this can have quite negative consequences. Imagine if you were highly competent in your job and your new manager started to coach you in what you already know. Wouldn't you be annoyed? Or if you were a junior trainee, straight out of college and, after a couple of days' instruction, were told that you can now get on with it – with no support evermore. Frightening!

Managers do not intentionally make errors like this and these situations can be avoided through recognising that everyone will be at different stages in their development and adapting your approach, to ensure that everyone gets what they need - when they need it.

There are 4 key leadership styles and effective managers can flit between them all, adapting to different people in different situations. These are:

1. **DIRECTING:** Giving step by step instruction, for example, when working with brand new trainees. This is the most time-intensive style and it is good to move on from this, as soon as the trainee meets the criteria for doing so (otherwise, you could start to feel that you may as well be doing the job for them).
2. **COACHING:** Giving initial instruction and then letting the individual practise it, under your guidance – alternating between hand-holding and letting them go but still watching closely. In this scenario, the individual is likely to be relatively new to the role or task and still be learning.

From a manager's perspective, coaching allows both parties to gain confidence in the trainee's new skills and abilities, because they get the chance to try things for themselves – and are allowed to “fail” in a safe environment. This stage is also the start of you reclaiming some of your time and the coachee finding their feet.

3. **SUPPORTING:** This is appropriate when the individual is competent in their role but needs some support, often in terms of direction or focus. For some managers, this could mean having set times for meetings or “catch ups” to check activity and results KPIs, keeping a watchful eye or simply being there to answer questions.
4. **DELEGATING:** At this stage, the individual is highly competent and capable of taking on more responsibility. You can delegate additional responsibilities, such as coaching new employees, taking on more senior level tasks. They may also be ready for promotion or an expanded role. As a manager, your input in this case is less quantity but still quality-focused. For example, the individual may not need help with the nuts and bolts of their job but may like your input when putting together their budgets and sales plans.

As people progress, they naturally benefit from different types of support and it is a sign of a good manager to recognise this and also to remember that this process is applicable whenever the individual is learning something new, even if they are capable of getting to the delegation stage very quickly.

As a business consultant, I have worked with scores of recruitment companies to help to maximise their potential. In cases where I have had the opportunity to work with their recruitment teams, I invariably find that those that use a solid, effective induction and training programme, as part of their people development strategy, have the most successful, high-billing consultants.

Most managers will have a preferred style but effective managers understand the need to regularly adapt their style. Clearly, there can be a large investment of time and effort in using directing and coaching styles during induction but time spent here clearly reaps rewards later, with staff becoming confident and competent in their abilities. And, of course, once they are at the stage where you are supporting and delegating, the further their progression, the less input from you and the more successful the team and the business. Win-win all round.

#### About Denise Walker FREC

Denise Walker owns and runs Absolutely Business, a specialist management consultancy, designed exclusively for the recruitment industry, delivering **business consultancy, training and training services**.

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