



Leadership Styles

Leadership style is something I've been pondering for a while now. I've been lucky to have met and worked with many great leaders over my career and I've also met and worked for some that, shall we say, could have done with some development and coaching. I don't like putting people into boxes, as everyone is different, but for the purpose of this series of blogs I'm going to paint a picture of the main leadership styles that I've come across and their merits and weaknesses.

Effective leaders match their style of leadership with the right situation. Ineffective leaders are inflexible and do not understand the relationship between leadership style and teamwork.

So, onto the first Leadership style:-

The Terminator

If you've seen the original Terminator film (1984), you may remember the quote by one of the main characters - Kyle Reese:-

'It can't be bargained with. It can't be reasoned with. It doesn't feel pity, or remorse, or fear. And it absolutely will not stop, ever...'

Meet the Terminator!

Whilst I'm a huge fan of the movie, I'm not a huge fan of this type of leadership style. There are times when it may be useful, but I would only consider using this style of leadership as a last resort or in an emergency situation.

This type of Leader retains as much power and decision-making authority as possible. They do not consult their team, nor is anyone allowed to give any input and the Terminator's team is expected to obey orders without receiving any explanation.

However, there are some benefits to this kind of leadership:

A more productive team 'while the leader is watching'. The power that the Terminator exerts over a team improves their working speed and makes them less likely to slack. This is ideal for poorly motivated employees who have little concern or interest in the quality or speed of work performed.

Improved logistics of operations. Having one leader with heavy involvement in many areas makes it more likely that problems are spotted in advance and deadlines met. This makes 'The Terminator' ideal for one-off projects with tight deadlines, or complicated work environments where efficient cooperation is key to success.

Faster decision-making. When only one person makes decisions with minimal consultation, decisions are made quicker, which will allow the management team to respond to changes in the business environment more quickly.



The downsides: -

Short-term approach to management. Whilst the Terminator will enable faster decisions to be made in the short-term, by not giving their people the opportunity to gain experience and start on their own leadership development, and learn from their mistakes, the Terminator is actually deskilling their workforce which will lead to poorer decisions and productivity in the long run.

Manager perceived as having poor leadership skills. While the Terminator style has merits when used in certain environments, this autocratic leadership style is easy, yet unpopular with employees.

Increased workload for the manager. By taking on as much responsibility and involvement as possible, the Terminator naturally works at their full capacity, which can lead to long-term stress and health problems and could damage working relationships with colleagues. This hyper-focus on results comes at the expense of good leadership development.

People dislike being ordered around. They also dislike being shown very little trust and faith. As a result, the Terminator style can result in demotivated teams. This results in the paradox that Terminator leadership styles are a good solution for demotivated workers, but in many cases, it is the leadership style alone that demotivates them in the first place. Younger people especially don't respond well to the Terminator.

Teams become dependent upon their leader. After becoming conditioned to receive orders and act upon them perfectly, workers lose initiative and the confidence to make decisions on their own.

This results in teams who become useless at running operations if they lose contact with their leader.

The Coach

Author, educator, and motivational speaker, Dr. William Arthur Ward wrote a phrase that I try to remember. It gives me personal strength to do the right thing, rather than the easy thing –

*'The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains.
The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher
inspires.'*

The effective Coach uses a combination of these, but at the right moment with the right individual.

There are key differences between the Terminator way of managing people and that of the Coach.

Whereas the Terminator tends to get things done by lecturing, directing and telling, the Coach asks thought-provoking questions, makes effective requests, listens well - especially for the unsaid, and offers constructive effective feedback to help someone learn and develop.

The Coach is excellent at helping others to advance their skills, building strength and providing career guidance. The best coaches are patient, perceptive, self-aware, reflective, open, supportive and keen observers. They are adept at giving valuable feedback that doesn't generate defensiveness and are great communicators. They help their employees by uncovering their blind spots and challenging self-limiting beliefs. Most effective coaching takes place through observation, assessment, dialogue, inquiry and conversations.



A coaching leader balances meeting short-term targets with long-term goals towards achieving the vision of an organisation. The Coach pro-actively links development to organisational goals, holding conversations that reach beyond work, helping people find strengths and weaknesses and linking these to career progression and personal development plans. They are good at delegating challenging projects, demonstrating trust and which often leads to high levels of loyalty and personal development.

The Coach does not 'wrap you in cotton wool'. They give insight from their own experience, they set high standards, they delegate, and they give tough projects to their team and they'll give you feedback....a great deal. The Coach is an individual that is genuinely interested in helping others succeed.

The coaching leadership style is most effective when the employees working under the coach are receptive to this help. People that do not want development, that are happy to be in the office at 1 minute to 9 in the morning and leave at 1 minute past 5 in the afternoon, whilst not always, but quite often, are threatened by this kind of management style.

The Coach often portrays the following characteristics:

- 🌱 Has high standards and continually raises the bar for their own learning and performance
- 🌱 Shares personal experience and learning, freely with others
- 🌱 Questions people around their thoughts and feelings to inspire personal growth
- 🌱 Uses 360 degree feedback to help them continually grow
- 🌱 Is approachable and intuitive
- 🌱 Has a large network to pool information from and seek advice
- 🌱 Sees unrealised potential in others and helps them to see it for themselves
- 🌱 Can challenge others without making them feel criticised
- 🌱 Is passionate about the success of others
- 🌱 Is able to coach for both today (results) and tomorrow (progression)

Who wouldn't want a Coach as their boss or even to be a coach themselves? Well, there are some downsides to this leadership style:

Coaching takes time

Not all businesses / teams have time for the Coach to do a great job. And it DOES take time to develop people. Every business / organisation has targets to meet of one sort or another. Even the best Coach has to weigh up the effort and time involved to develop someone into a role, versus the cost-benefit of recruiting the right person into the right role, at the right time, at the right cost. Not everyone can be coached quickly enough to the level required, if at all, and sometimes tough commercial decisions will have to be made as to whether the person needs to find a better role that better suits their skills.

A good Leader needs to make the choice at the right time, so as not to let the rest of the team down by carrying people who can't develop their potential quickly enough.

Coaching takes energy

The Coach uses personal energy developing their people - physical, mental, emotional and sometime spiritual energy. The Coach needs to keep in touch with their energy levels, to ensure they stay fit and keep themselves well whilst doing the best for their people.

To summarise, the Coach Leadership style can be a very powerful force in any organisation as long as they have a team of passionate people who are keen to progress their careers, the time to coach and the energy to make it happen!

The Oracle

The late, great and inspirational Steve Jobs (Founder of Apple) made a statement that neatly introduces The Oracle leadership style:

'Leaders are fascinated by the future, you are a leader if, and only if, you are restless for change, impatient for progress, and deeply dissatisfied with the status quo. As a leader you are never satisfied with the present, because in your head you can see a better future, and the friction between what is and what could be burns you, stirs you, propels you forward.'



Business leaders do not generally have a crystal ball to predict the future of their business and guide them in their leadership decisions. The Oracle creates his / her own future vision for their business, organisation or people. Whereas some people look at the future and ask 'why?', the Oracle sees things that do not exist and asks 'why not?'. They have the ability to see social and market trends and create a future. They literally can see things others cannot.

The Oracle is also capable of enlisting large numbers of followers through their passion and use of language. They are generally gifted speakers and have high levels of charisma.

If you haven't heard or read Martin Luther King's - '[I have a dream...](#)', or JFK's - '[We choose to go the moon...](#)', or Winston Churchill's - '[We shall fight on the beaches](#)', you really should! Three hugely visionary speeches that instil passion, emotion and desire to be part of something big. The power of The Oracle.

The Oracle leadership style is often most effective when an organisation needs to make a step change in direction.

They often portray the following characteristics:

- 🌀 Creates an inspiring vision of how the future will look.
- 🌀 Inspires people to understand the larger purpose of their work.
- 🌀 Creates an environment where people feel pride in belonging to the organisation.
- 🌀 Operates from an inspiring set of shared core values and beliefs
- 🌀 Engages people in working towards a shared vision
- 🌀 Encourages people to innovate, experiment and take calculated risks in pursuit of the vision.
- 🌀 Aligns performance and strategy with the vision.

The Oracle is most effective when:

- 🌀 A new vision or clear direction is needed, e.g. when in a period of change – at an individual or organisational level.
- 🌀 The leader believes in the vision; and sees it as being in tune with his / her own values and those of the organisation.
- 🌀 The leader is self-confident, self-aware and empathic to others.

The Oracle is least effective when:

- 🌀 The leader is not regarded as credible, i.e. others feel they know more about the organisation than the leader.
- 🌀 When overplayed, i.e. if trying to steal power from a team-based approach.

Summary

When effective, the Oracle motivates individuals by focussing their attention on the long-term goals of the organisation; and how each individual contributes to its delivery. When not used effectively this style fails to take into account the natural talents and experience of the knowledgeable team members.

The Oracle is the most charismatic of Leaders and comes in many forms and contexts. According to the many books and blogs on the topic of leadership, The Oracle is the person who, to a large extent, single-handedly formulates a winning vision of where and how the organisation is to be in the future and who takes prime responsibility for ensuring that the organisation's people 'live' the vision.

The Collaborator

In the world of social media and 'crowd-sourcing', surely The Collaborator is the best leadership style for our times?

The Collaborator is a very open and collective leader in running a team. Ideas move freely amongst the group and are discussed openly. Everyone is given a seat at the table, and discussion is relatively free flowing.

The Collaborator creates and facilitates dialogue, encourages people to share their ideas, and then synthesises all the available information into the best possible decision.

They communicate that decision back to the group to bring unity once the plan is chosen.



When is it Used?

The Collaborator is needed in dynamic and rapidly changing environments where very little can be taken as a constant. In these fast-moving organisations, every option for improvement has to be considered to keep the group from falling out of date.

When situations change frequently, the Collaborator offers a great deal of flexibility to adapt to better ways of working. Unfortunately, they are also somewhat slow to make a decision, so while they may embrace newer and better methods; they may not do so very quickly.

This kind of leadership style can bring the best out of an experienced and professional team. It capitalises on their skills and talents by letting them share their views, rather than simply expecting them to conform.

If a decision is very complex and broad, it is important to have the different areas of expertise represented and contributing input – this is where the Collaborator shines.

Good environments for the Collaborator:

Creative teams or organisations: Ideas need to flow in creative environments to find create new concepts and designs.

Consulting: When paid to explore problems and find solutions, their role will be to explore the possibilities in depth, and that means there has to be a great deal of exploration and open discussion.

Service industries: New ideas allow for more flexibility to changing customer demands.

Education: Few places need to be more open to different ideas than education, both by educators and their students.

The effective Collaborator:

- 🌱 Keeps communication open - Everyone needs to feel comfortable enough to put their ideas on the table.
- 🌱 Keeps focus in discussions - It's hard to keep unstructured discussion productive. It's the Collaborator's job to balance being open to ideas and keeping everything on track.
- 🌱 Must be ready to commit - Through collective discussion there may be so many possibilities and suggestions that it can be overwhelming and difficult to commit. But as the Collaborator, when the time comes, they must choose and do so with conviction. The team depends on the clear and unambiguous mandates to be committed.
- 🌱 Respects all the ideas - The Collaborator might not agree with every idea the team has, and that's ok. It is important, however, that there is a healthy environment where all ideas are listened to and considered, not dismissed out of hand, or the flow of ideas will falter or stop altogether.
- 🌱 Explains, but doesn't apologise - It is important that the initiators of ideas not selected, understand that their thoughts were considered and had merit, but that ultimately you had strong reasons to go a different direction.

Benefits of the Collaborator Leadership Style

Because group members are encouraged to share their thoughts, The Collaborator style can lead to better ideas and more creative solutions to problems. Teams feel more involved and committed to projects, making them more likely to care about the end results and in turn this often leads to higher productivity.

Downsides of the Collaborator Leadership Style

Whilst the Collaborator can be the most effective leadership style, it does have some potential downsides. In situations where roles are unclear or timing is critical, this style can lead to communication failures and uncompleted projects or at best, late delivery. In some cases, team members may not have the necessary knowledge or expertise to make quality contributions to the decision-making process, which may lead to dead-ends and re-work.

The Collaborator works best in situations where the team is skilled and energised. It is also important to have plenty of time to allow people to contribute, develop a plan and then vote on the best course of action.

