

Leading for engagement

To maximise the productivity of their teams, leaders need team members to be fully engaged and emotionally committed to their organisation and its goals. They don't just work for a salary or for their next promotion. When they are engaged they use discretionary effort and go the extra mile.

Key concept

This post explains how emotional intelligence and leadership style are linked to leading for engagement.

In his pioneering work [Daniel Goleman](#) showed successful leaders...

- ✓ have strengths in the emotional intelligence competencies of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills,
- ✓ recognise their leadership styles rely on various combinations of these competencies, and
- ✓ are skilled in flexing between leadership styles depending on the demands of the situation.

In a nutshell, there are six leadership styles:



Coercive: The 'Do as I say' style typically dampens employees' motivation and inhibits organisational flexibility.

Authoritative: This style works best in situations where the leader sets the overall goal and team members are free to choose their own means of contributing to its delivery.

Affiliative: An affiliative leader builds team harmony and morale by a 'people come first' approach, but seldom sets direction or advises.

Democratic: Giving employees a voice builds organisational flexibility and responsibility and fosters fresh ideas, but the consequences can be endless meetings and confusion about priorities.

Pacesetting: A pacesetter leader 'walks the talk' of high standards, inspiring some employees but demoralising others who feel overwhelmed by the demands.

Coaching: A coaching style focuses on personal development, sometimes at the expense of task-orientation and results. This style doesn't work if employees are resistant to change.

Applying choice of leadership style to engagement

First, recognise these four leadership styles that enhance engagement, namely authoritative, affiliative, democratic and coaching and two inhibit engagement, the coercive and pacesetter.

Second, understand that leaders need many styles. Leaders who are able to flex from one enhancing style to another achieve the highest employee engagement scores and get the best business results. These leaders are sensitive to their impact on followers and have learned to adjust their style from, say, democratic to authoritative when greater clarity of direction is needed to align people.

Third, learn how to expand your repertoire. Few leaders are able to use all of the six styles – and even fewer know the circumstances and how to use the most appropriate style. The good news is that you can learn by understanding which emotional intelligence competencies underpin your leadership styles and build on your strengths in areas in which you need to develop. For example, the affiliative style relies on empathy and building relationships, whereas the democratic style requires collaboration and communication skills.

As [Daniel Goleman](#) says, leadership is like parenthood. It will never be an exact science, but neither should it be a 'black-box' mystery. How to lead for engagement can be unpacked and learned – for the benefit of your staff, yourself and the business' performance.

More this topic

My post [Controlling your emotions](#) explores how you control your emotions and their influence on your effectiveness as a leader, your personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of others.