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The 7 Most Common Leadership Styles (and How to Find Your Own)

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SUMMARY

Are you using an effective leadership style that works best for you and your team? Get an overview of seven common leadership styles and explore how to develop your signature style.

At first glance, we may think that some leadership styles are better than others. The truth is that each leadership style has its place in a leader's toolkit. The wise leader knows to flex from one style to another as the situation demands.

Leadership styles are on a continuum, ranging from autocratic at one end, to laissez-faire at the other, with a variety of styles in between.

The seven primary leadership styles are:

1. Autocratic Style

The phrase most illustrative of an autocratic leadership style is "Do as I say." Generally, an autocratic leader believes that he or she is the smartest person at the table and knows more than others. They make all the decisions with little input from team members.

This command-and-control approach is typical of leadership styles of the past, but it doesn't hold much water with [today's talent](#).

That's not to say that the style may not be appropriate in certain situations. For example, you can dip into an autocratic leadership style when crucial decisions need to be made on the spot, and you have the most knowledge about the situation, or when you're dealing with [inexperienced and new team members](#) and there's no time to wait for team members to gain familiarity with their role.

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2. Authoritative Style

The phrase most indicative of this style of leadership (also known as "[visionary](#)") is "Follow me." The authoritative leadership style is the mark of [confident leaders](#) who map the way and set expectations, while engaging and energizing followers along the way.

In a climate of uncertainty, these leaders lift the fog for people. They help them see where the company is going and what's going to happen when they get there.

Unlike autocratic leaders, authoritative leaders take the time to explain their thinking: They don't just issue orders. Most of all, they allow people choice and latitude on how to achieve common goals.

3. Pacesetting Style

"Do as I do!" is the phrase most indicative of leaders who utilize the pacesetting style. This style describes a very driven leader who sets the pace as in racing. Pacesetters set the bar high and push their team members to run hard and fast to the finish line.

While the [pacesetter style of leadership](#) is effective in getting things done and driving for results, it's a style that can hurt team members. For one thing, even the most driven employees may become stressed working under this style of leadership in the long run.

An agile leadership style may be the ultimate leadership style required for leading today's talent.

Should you avoid the pacesetting style altogether? Not so fast. If you're an energetic entrepreneur working with a like-minded team on developing and announcing a new product or service, this style may serve you well. However, this is not a style that can be kept up for the long term. A pacesetting leader needs to let the air out of the tires once in a while to avoid causing team burnout.

4. Democratic Style

Democratic leaders are more likely to ask "What do you think?" They share information with employees about anything that affects their work responsibilities. They also seek [employees' opinions](#) before approving a final decision.

There are numerous benefits to this participative leadership style. It can engender trust and promote team spirit and cooperation from employees. It allows for creativity and helps employees grow and develop. A democratic leadership style gets people to do what you want to be done but in a way that they *want* to do it.

5. Coaching Style

When you having a coaching leadership style, you tend to have a "Consider this" approach. A leader who coaches views people as a [reservoir of talent to be developed](#). The leader who uses a coach approach seeks to unlock people's potential. Stay informed through COVID-19

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Leaders who use a coaching style open their hearts and doors for people. They believe that everyone has power within themselves. A coaching leader gives people a little direction to help them tap into their ability to achieve all that they're capable of.

6. Affiliative Style

A phrase often used to describe this type of leadership is "People come first." Of all the leadership styles, the affiliative leadership approach is one where the leader gets up close and personal with people. A leader practicing this style pays attention to and supports the [emotional needs of team members](#). The leader strives to open up a pipeline that connects him or her to the team.

Ultimately, this style is all about encouraging harmony and [forming collaborative relationships within teams](#). It's particularly useful, for example, in smoothing conflicts among team members or reassuring people during times of stress.

7. Laissez-Faire Style

The laissez-faire leadership style is at the opposite end of the autocratic style. Of all the leadership styles, this one involves the least amount of oversight. You could say that the autocratic style leader stands as firm as a rock on issues, while the laissez-faire leader lets people swim with the current.

On the surface, a laissez-faire leader may appear to trust people to know what to do, but taken to the extreme, an uninvolved leader may end up appearing aloof. While it's beneficial to give people opportunities to spread their wings, with a total lack of direction, people may unwittingly drift in the wrong direction—away from the critical goals of the organization.

This style can work if you're leading highly skilled, experienced employees who are self-starters and motivated. To be most effective with this style, monitor team performance and [provide regular feedback](#).

Choosing Leadership Styles

Knowing which of the leadership styles works best for you is part of being a good leader. Developing a signature style with the ability to stretch into other styles as the situation warrants may help enhance your leadership effectiveness.

1. Know yourself.

Start by raising your awareness of your dominant leadership style. You can do this by asking trusted colleagues to describe the strengths of your leadership style. You can also take a leadership style assessment.

2. Understand the different styles.

Get familiar with the repertoire of leadership styles that can work best for a given situation. What new skills do you need to develop?

3. Practice makes a leader.

Be genuine with any approach you use. Moving from a dominant leadership style to a different one may be challenging at first. Practice the new behaviors until they

become natural. In other words, don't use a different leadership style as a "point-and-click" approach. People can smell a fake leadership style a mile away—authenticity rules.

4. Develop your leadership agility.

Traditional leadership styles are still relevant in today's workplace, but they may need to be combined with new approaches in line with how leadership is defined for the 21st century.

Today's business environments are fraught with challenges due to the changing demographics and the employee expectations of a diverse workforce. This may call for a new breed of leader who is an amalgam of most of the leadership styles discussed here.

As the Chinese proverb goes, the wise adapt themselves to circumstances, as water molds itself to the pitcher. An agile leadership style may be the ultimate leadership style required for leading today's talent.

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