

The Single Best Leadership Style?

Is there a single best leadership style? Organizations have succeeded and failed under every style imaginable, some spectacularly so. Think of the current adoration of Steve Jobs and his incredible (sometimes ruthless) control over product details. Few recall that these same traits got him fired and nearly took Apple under in the mid 1980's to '90's.

The Problem

In my opinion, there is no single best leadership style. The word "style" should be your clue. Style over substance implies the trendy world of business books and high-dollar leadership keynote speakers. I will even say that every experienced leader who now claims to know the right style has a significant failure in their past or future using that same style. "Style" is insufficiently adaptable as conditions change.



MY PREDICTION:

Few of us have all the style traits needed to single-handedly create a vision, develop a strategy, communicate it with passion and manage an excellent implementation. Plus, if the selected style is not authentic for you, it has no chance to succeed. Why not look at leadership as less about personal style and more about behaviors that will help you get the most from you and your team?



HOW TO PREPARE:

My favorite business author is Patrick Lencioni. His books are short, to the point and filled with real-life applications. He does not pretend there is a "single way" revealed by research or data. He uses practical experience and a thorough knowledge of human behavior to help us get on productive paths by making good choices. Lencioni's *The Five Temptations of a CEO* carves an interesting path through the hurdles that cause many top leaders to fail. He writes about the common traps and human distractions keeping good people with good intentions from being good leaders. "Style" should be the icing, not the cake.

Principle #1 is to have the desire to produce good results. That desire got you in the job you now hold, but it is easy to get side-tracked by personal needs, ego or the fear of losing status. A good senior executive must be willing to risk their status and reputation to make the organization successful. **Choose results over status.**

Principle #2 is to avoid the desire to be popular. If popularity is your main goal, you will not hold people accountable for results. The problems will build until terminations occur, rather than doing the hard work along the way to resolve problems. Long-term respect is more useful to you and the organization than short-term affection. **Choose accountability over popularity.**

Principle #3 is to make clarity more important than accuracy. Your team will benefit more from decisive action (even when it is wrong) than waiting for enough information (which rarely comes). When mistakes are made, explain why we are changing course, but make the deliverables clear at each step along the way. **Choose clarity over certainty.**

Principle #4 is to avoid the desire for harmony. A senior team that always gets along and does not disagree is probably unhealthy. The best decisions come from debate and passion. The lesson is to "tolerate discord." **Choose conflict over harmony.**

Principle #5 says a leader should actively encourage people to challenge his/her own ideas. It shows a level of trust in others that they will return to you and each other, creating a more productive and open business environment. **Choose trust over invulnerability.**

Lencioni is telling us to focus less on style and more on key behaviors that bring out the best in a senior team. These behaviors can work for any leader with any personality profile who is ready to understand what teams need from their leaders.

Contact me directly if I can help you or your team.

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This is your February/March 2012 **EXECUTIVE SCAN**

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