



5 Leadership styles in a nutshell

WHICH STYLE OF LEADER DO YOU NEED TO BE FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE?

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Daniel Goleman's work on leadership styles is well-known, and I introduce them in my [High Performance Leadership Program for Senior Executives](#) and my online based program [Learning Leadership](#). Here is a handy explanation of what each style involves and when it can be appropriate to use:

Coercive leadership

What is it? Coercive leadership is a command and control style. It relies on forcing people to do what you tell them, whether they want to or not.

Does it work? Yes, however only in the short term. Threats work if you keep upping them; when coercive leaders run out of threats, they can't get things done.

Should I use it? In a crisis situation, this style can help kick start or turn around a problem. If you communicate your sense of trust and authenticity, you are unlikely to need to.

Authoritative leadership

What is it? The ability to inspire others to trust your vision and follow you willingly. It is a strong, positive, visionary style that requires leaders establish a strong bond based on trust.

Does it work? Yes. People will follow an authoritative leader because they trust the bond between them. It's one of the reasons that this leadership style, not the coercive style, is promoted within the military – counterintuitive as this may seem. It is a critical leadership style when a new vision is required or a clear direction is needed.

Should I use it? Yes. It is the best way for leaders to unleash high performance in others over the long term.

Affiliative leadership

What is it? Affiliative leaders focus on harmony and put people first. It is a leadership style that shies away from confrontation.

Does it work? It's effective in healing wounds in fractured teams and motivating others during stressful periods. Affiliative leaders can struggle to give tough feedback or make hard calls.

Should I use it? It has positive elements but you need to be able to adopt an authoritative style when a critical approach is needed.

Democratic leadership

What is it? Democratic leaders take everyone's opinion on board so that all decisions are backed by a consensus.

Does it work? It can – with some caveats. Giving everyone in a team a chance to participate in every decision simply takes too long; trying to do this can result in terrible bureaucratic slowdown. However, organizations that can streamline the process so that democracy does not impede progress can find it positive.

Should I use it? Consider combining elements of this approach with an authoritative style. Teams that trust one another, and their leaders, are willing to allow other people to make decisions on their behalf if and when necessary, but they are also willing to speak up if and when needed.

Pace-setting leadership

What is it? Pace-setting leaders push their people hard by setting stretch goals.

Does it work? It depends. It can work to get quick results from a highly motivated team. When combined with empathy and compassion it can be an effective way of developing people; without these characteristics it will have a fundamentally negative effect.

Should I use it? Yes, if used in the short term and you are compassionate and empathetic. Otherwise, no.

Want to find out which leadership style, or which mix of styles, best suits you and your organization?

Learn more about [High Performance Leadership](#) or [Learning Leadership](#), two programs run by IMD Professor George Kohlrieser.

[George Kohlrieser](#) is a Professor of Leadership and Organizational Behavior at IMD, where he directs the [High Performance Leadership \(HPL\)](#), [Advanced High Performance Leadership \(AHPL\)](#) and [Learning Leadership](#) programs.

Kohlrieser is author of the award-winning bestseller [Hostage at the Table: How Leaders Can Overcome Conflict, Influence Others and Raise Performance](#), which was released in [audio version by talking book](#) on 24 June 2016.

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