

# **Becoming an Effective Leader Through Situational Leadership**

Bernard L. Erven

Department of Agricultural, Environmental and Development Economics  
Ohio State University Extension

Every business needs leadership. Leadership is one of the ways that managers affect the behavior of people in the business. Most successful managers are also successful leaders. They get people to work to accomplish the organization's goals.

Being autocratic or democratic is the usual way of thinking about leadership. Autocratic leaders depend on their authority and their power that comes from being an owner of the business or occupying a high position. Democratic leaders depend on personal power, participative problem solving and decision-making. Being only autocratic or democratic usually limits one's effectiveness as a leader.

An alternative to being an autocratic or democratic leader is to be a situational leader. Situational leaders are able to adapt their leadership style to fit their followers and situations in which they are working. This says, for example, that the same employer of three people may use very different actions in leading each of them.

Managers using situational leadership will make conscious choices between their use of directive behavior and supportive behavior. In directive behavior, they are relying on providing structure, control and close supervision for the people with whom they are working. In supportive behavior, they are relying on praise, two-way communication, and facilitating the work of their employees and co-workers.

Ken Blanchard<sup>1</sup> sees four leadership styles growing out of combinations of supportive and directive behavior: directing style, coaching style, supporting style and delegating style. In the leading style, the emphasis is on control and close supervision of the worker. In the coaching style, the leader provides more explanation of what the job entails and solicits suggestions while still staying in control of the situation. With the supporting style, there is a team approach between the leader and follower with the leader emphasizing support of the follower rather than control. Finally, in the delegating style, the leader turns over responsibility to the worker.

The key for the successful situational leader is to know which of the four styles to use in a particular situation with a particular person. The situational leader bases the choice of a leadership style on the competence and commitment of the person being led rather than on the leader's usual or preferred style.

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<sup>1</sup>Ken Blanchard, "The Color Model, A Situational Approach to Managing People," Blanchard Training and Development, Inc., 125 State Place, Escondido, California 92025.

Success in leadership comes when the leadership style is matched with the characteristics of the follower. Problems with leadership come when the leadership style does not fit the follower. To illustrate, an experienced and dedicated 40-year-old son or employee of a manager does not want to be closely supervised and controlled. On the other hand, a new employee with no experience does not want to be given a job to do without training and support from the manager. Delegation of responsibility to a person not prepared to handle the responsibility frustrates the worker and disappoints the employer. What appears superficially to be an employee attitude problem is in fact a leadership problem caused by the leader's inappropriate leadership style.

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