



Foundation Stone #7: Leadership Skills February 2006

What's *Your* Leadership Style?

In his book *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Harvard Business Press, 2002), Daniel Goleman summarizes the leadership styles commonly found within organizations. While we would agree the Church and religious non-profits are very different from secular organizations in that they are to be in submission to our ultimate Leader, Jesus Christ, such leadership insights can be helpful in understanding the *human* element of how the religious leader interacts with and leads others within a particular organization. Goleman cites six common leadership styles:

Visionary: A visionary motivates people toward shared dreams. Such leaders are good at thinking “outside the box”, either by generating lots of potential ideas or by his or her ability to see a solution others are unable to dream or generate. Leaders who see the need for change within an organization are natural visionaries. Goleman says this style can be “particularly effective when a business is adrift – during a turnaround or when it is in dire need of a fresh vision.”

Coaching: A coach-style leader is adept at connecting the desires of individual members with the organization’s overall goals. He or she is highly people-focused in the attainment of goals, believing the best in those being led. Such a leader prioritizes people development, ensuring that rapport and trust are systematically established along the way.

Affiliative: An affiliative leader creates harmony by connecting people within the organization with one another. This style takes into consideration the emotional needs of those being led, prioritizing such needs at every step along the path toward the organization’s overall goals. The feelings, needs, and perspectives of members are sought after by such a leader. Goleman says that such empathy “allows the leader to keep people happy by caring for the whole person – not just the work task for which someone is responsible.”

Democratic: A democratic leader consistently seeks the input and commitment of those being led. This is most often accomplished by actively involving them in the process through participation in the various aspects of the organization, big or small. This could be through focus groups, committees, feedback, positions of leadership, or even service in a variety of “practical helps”. The *kind* of participation is less important to such a leader – as long as they are successful at engaging as many as possible in the process.

Pacesetter: A pacesetter is skilled at setting goals – short-term, long-range and intermediate. When goals are clearly communicated within the organization, those being led often respond with excitement and loyalty as they see such goals consistently met.

Commanding: A commander is most beneficial during times of crisis. Such a leader is able to think clearly, make quick decisions, and give clear instruction/direction to navigate the organization successfully through difficulty. While this style would come across dictatorial or “ruling with an iron fist” under normal circumstances, a commanding style may be the only successful style in the event of a *true emergency* – when focusing on people development and the feelings of others are luxuries that simply cannot be afforded.

Each style has its place within leadership at various stages of an organization’s lifespan. Leaders will have to operate in each of the six styles at times to effectively lead an organization throughout the life of the organization. Understanding these styles helps the leader better understand which style(s) he or she: (1) “defaults” to in everyday leadership, (2) shifts to under pressure, and (3) must purposefully develop (or defer to others) if they are outside a leader’s area of strength.

Thoughts to Ponder:

- Which leadership style(s) are your *personal* “defaults” as a leader? Which become stronger *under pressure*?
- Which style(s) are *most difficult*? Would you do better to *develop* such leadership or *defer* it to another on your team?

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