How to Find Your Leadership Style: Crash Course Business - Soft Skills #14

Crash Course: Business - Soft Skills
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Being a good leader seems tough.

And as we've seen throughout history with exiled kings and mutinied ship captains, it's no easy task to inspire others. It's easy to get down on yourself and doubt that you have what it takes.

But, like everything in this course, we're here to tell you that you can do it! The idea of a natural-born leader is a bit of a myth, and it's possible for anyone to become a leader... or at least more leader-like. So today, we'll show you how leadership styles can be different, which skills are most effective, and how to make sure your team stays in sync.

I'm Evelyn from the Internets. And this is Crash Course Business: Soft Skills [Intro Music Plays] Nowadays, the word manager has a bad rep and reminds people of a demanding, inflexible, or out-of-touch boss. On the other hand, a leader is seen as a supportive, visionary, or proactive boss.

But those are just stereotypes. A good manager has to have good leadership skills. Managers play a big part in shaping a company's culture.

They influence behavior and productivity, and set the vibe, which is why organizations are so different. It's like how Amazon has 14 codified leadership rules that lead to high productivity, but a lot of burnout and competition. Or how Walt Disney focused on creating a magical experience by calling park visitors "guests" and employees "cast members." People usually don't quit companies.

They quit managers. We all have at least one story of a boss we couldn't stand. So that's part of why leadership skills are so valuable.

Here's the thing, though: a leader isn't just a manager or a larger-than-life historical icon. Sure, there are standout activists like Marsha P. Johnson or supreme court justices like Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

A leader can be anyone who works well with others and inspires them to achieve their goals. Like a sports team where some players help out just as much as the captains or coaches, in business you can show leadership in small ways too. An effective leader creates a positive and productive environment.

An ineffective leader creates a negative environment with a lot of tension. Leaders have 7 core skills: forming strong relationships, making effective decisions, coordinating teamwork, communicating well, being ethical, motivating others, and providing direction. Basically, they help bring people together to accomplish things that nobody can do alone!

And there are lots of different leadership styles, so you can pick what works best for you and switch it up in different situations. Like, you wouldn't deal with a difficult customer the same way you'd pitch a new client. Commanding leaders live by a "do what I tell you" philosophy.

They're forceful, blunt, and straightforward, like a military commander shouting at their troops. This style is good for getting things done fast or when someone really isn't listening, but using commands too much can make people frustrated. When it's warranted, some commanding leaders are effective.

But it can be associated with bad leadership. Visionary leaders give general guidelines and set broad goals, but they basically let people find their own path. They're the "come with me" leader.

This style is great if your team thrives without much direction. But if you're less experienced than the rest of your team, you could be perceived as too idealistic and it could rub people the wrong way. Affiliative leaders focus more on relationships.

They're the "people come first" leaders, who try to solve conflicts by accommodating and making people happy. This style can help us feel supported and motivated… but it can also come at a price. If people are placed too highly above performance, some people may start slacking off.

Democratic leaders are most likely to ask, "what do you think?" They want to build an environment where people are involved in making decisions and most everyone agrees with each decision. This style can make sure decisions are fair, but it can also make them slow. If a meeting is already taking an hour, we do not need a sharing stick.

We need a fast decision! You know the phrase "do as I say not as I do?" Well, pacesetting leaders want you to "do as I do, now." They're more likely to set a highly ambitious goal and adhere to their own high standards. This style can work well for a team of highly motivated people or overachievers, but perfect is the enemy of good.

And it can be exhausting to keep up with a pacesetting leader. But coaching leaders, like every pee-wee football coach, are all about providing support, offering advice, and helping people change and grow. They're likely to say, "try this." This style of guidance is usually helpful, unless the team is super experienced and just wants to get work done without a lot of input.

To visualize all of these leaders, imagine telling a team to solve a puzzle in the office break room. A visionary leader would give an inspirational speech about how everyone has the power to put together a great puzzle, then show examples of teams who solved puzzles as a benchmark. An affiliative leader would use the puzzle as a tool to build a sense of community and get people excited to work on other projects with each other again.

A democratic leader would survey everyone to figure out the best way to put the puzzle together, and then divvy up the pieces each person needs to handle. A pacesetting leader would set a timer and then dive straight in, while expecting everyone to put together as many pieces as they are. And a coaching leader would show people how to fix the pieces they tried to jam together in a frenzy, and provide a good book on puzzle-solving for everyone to read.

Now, this is super simplified. People are complicated and can't be separated into neat little boxes, so we blend leadership styles together. Someone like Michelle Obama is usually described as a charismatic leader.

She may blend visionary and affiliative styles together and use diplomacy and charisma to smooth things along. And the leadership style that works best for your company or team may not work in everyone's. Oprah may be great at leading those book clubs, but she probably wouldn't be a great hockey team coach.

So while leadership seminars and retreats may seem flashy or help you network a little, they're not going to magically change you into a great leader overnight. That's not how anything works. To see how to judge who you should take leadership advice from, let's go to the Thought Bubble.

You've been working at a popular ethical clothing brand for about five years, and you've just been promoted to lead the communications team. Together, you'll write press releases and develop multimedia campaigns for all your new products. You're understandably nervous.

You've never led a team before, and you really want to do well. So before you start, you book a ticket to a 2-day leadership conference in Brooklyn. There are hundreds of attendees, a charismatic keynote speaker, and panels of entrepreneurs.

You hear about people's successes and failures, and by the end of the weekend you're feeling inspired. But when you get home and review your notes, they're mostly a list of meaningless buzzwords. You realize you felt super empowered because of the environment, not because of the information.

Most of the advice was pretty superficial, like "be the mentor you wish you'd had" and "be free to be yourself." And those hyper-specific leadership tips from that venture capital tech firm CEO don't really apply to your job. Every organization is different, so seek out advice from people with leadership styles you admire. That's way better than listening to blanket statements from people that just seem like influential leaders.

Instead of going to generic conferences, read articles from academic sources like The Harvard Business Review. Or find advice from experts who study and teach business and organizational management. You'll still need to think critically about anything you read or hear, since everyone has their own biases.

And even the best articles won't lead to instant success, even though they can give you new ideas to try. The absolute best way to become a better leader is to practice. Try different styles and learn from mistakes to find the approaches that work best for you.

Thanks, Thought Bubble! Just in case you're wondering, Crash Course Business isn't a leadership seminar. We've got some pretty awesome academics putting together research-based advice.

Good leadership essentially boils down to the golden rule, with a twist. Treat others as you want to be treated -- and listen to how they want to be treated, because you're different people! One of the best ways to build people up is to provide positive feedback and genuine praise.

We all like to know that we're appreciated. We tend to underestimate how much recognition can really mean to people. So, awards like employee of the month or a handwritten thank you note can go a long way to show we're invested.

Just don't go handing people plastic keychains as a thank you for 40 years of service. We celebrate achievements all the time with retirement parties, birthday parties, graduation parties, and baby showers. So we can do it for business achievements, too.

Plan an event like a nice dinner to celebrate the end of a big project and reflect on good things that happened. And if your budget is tight or your team is small, you could put together something informal, like going out for drinks to welcome a new coworker. Nothing brings people together in an office like free cake.

Also, it feels good to see positive feedback empower others, but we don't need to celebrate everything. If your coworker's best friend's dog just had puppies, put cute pics on the fridge and leave it at that. No matter what your company's celebration style is, your achievements always matter.

And you can definitely develop the skills to lead and help other people feel appreciated. So if you take away nothing else from today, remember: Anyone can focus on building leadership skills. Life and work can change a lot.

Pick a leadership style that works for you, but you may need to switch it up. Follow the golden rule, and celebrate achievements to boost team spirit and productivity. No matter how good a leader is, office politics can get complex.

So next time, we'll talk about fairness -- one of the most important things in keeping a workplace productive. Without it, leadership falls flat. Thanks for watching Crash Course Business, which is sponsored by Google.

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