

VENTURING MAGAZINE

LeaderThoughts #4 by Michael Brown

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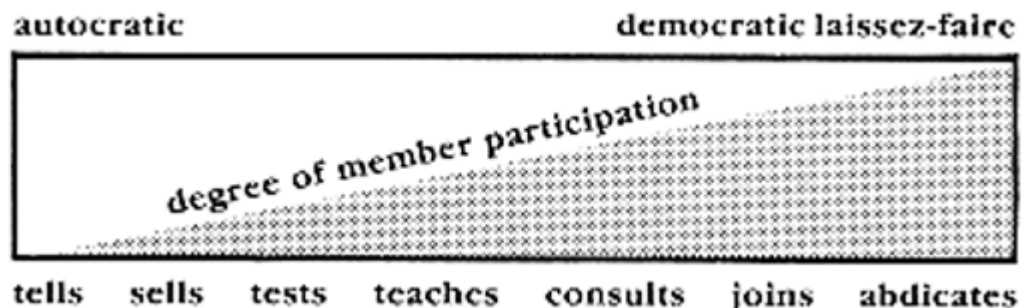
Situational Leadership

What may be a well known leadership concept is "Situational Leadership" (SL). Despite what some in the on-line scouting world claim, it's a widely used leadership idea, NOT a "corporate management tool" or the like. Many organizations include this in their LD program. I was fortunate to attend an "executive briefing" on Situational Leadership a few years back, given by the co-developer of SL, Dr. Paul Hersey. Hersey provides training in SL thru his Center for Leadership Studies <http://www.situational.com/> (Ken Blanchard, the other co-developer, does the same with his version of SL, called SLII, thru the Ken Blanchard Companies, www.kenblanchard.com).

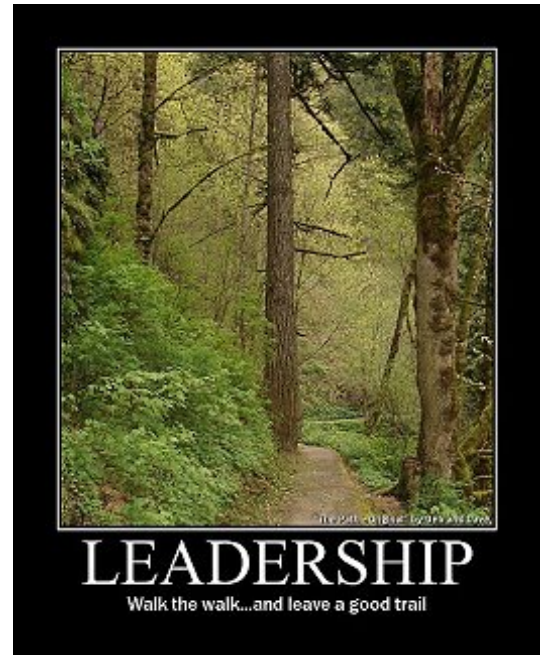
While I am familiar with SL, I felt that going to such a presentation, given by a co-creator, would give some good insights into it. I wasn't wrong. Below are my notes of his presentation, with some additional comments by myself in brackets.

Leadership is basically influence [as noted in LT #1]. Someone in the audience asked if that wasn't also manipulation. Hersey replied that manipulation is where you get someone to do something for YOUR benefit, whereas influence (leadership) is to get them to do something for THEIR benefit (and the group/companies). It's not the same.

The old view of leadership was of a graph with 2 extremes:



[I have also seen some works that extend this graph to left to the concept of "abdicratic", where the leader abdicates their position and allows the group to run itself, which may or may not work. In an earlier edition of the Scoutmaster Handbook, we had a scale of leadership from 'hardnose' to 'no nose' to illustrate the same concept.]



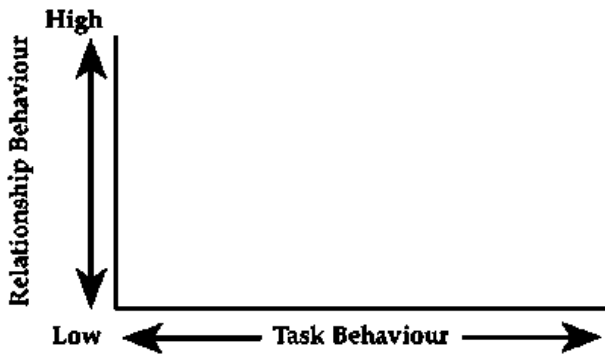
Tanenbaum & Smith added to this the idea of behavior: task or relationship.

Leadership styles are just different mixes of these 2 behaviors.

1. leadership style: pattern of behavior as perceived by others.
2. self perception of leadership style: intention, how we see it.

[Note: there may be a great difference between the two!]

This leads us to the x-y chart below:



[note that its 'low behavior', never zero as in a mathematical x-y graph]

Task behavior - what to do, how, when, where, by who, etc.

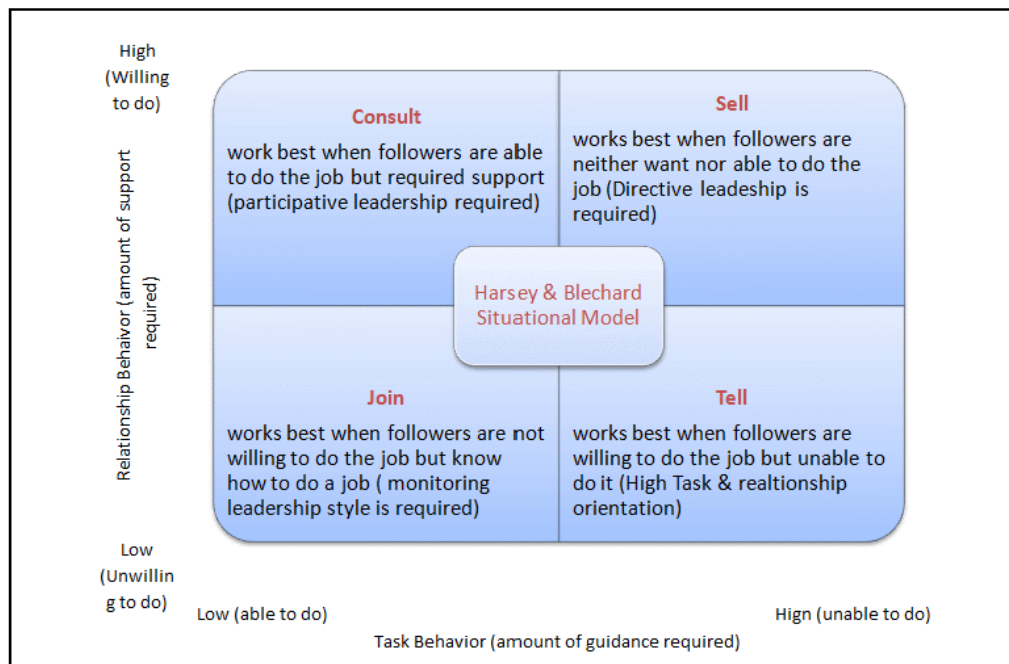
Task - Directive (guidance, guiding)

Relationship behavior - 2 or more way communication between leader & follower

Relationship - Supportive provides "socio emotional" support

[I typically teach that task is about getting the job done, and relationship is about keeping the group together, and sometimes we have to balance between the two or lean more toward one or the other as the situation requires.]

This then leads to this:



[This builds up the scheme for SL.]

Leader effectiveness depends upon the situation its being used, as shown in this formula.

$$Le f(S) L \leftrightarrow F \leftrightarrow A \leftrightarrow B \leftrightarrow J \leftrightarrow O \leftrightarrow T$$

Basically, leader effectiveness (Le) is a function of the situation (f(S)), which depends on the interaction of the following:

- L- the leader, their style, attitude,
- F- the follower
- A- key associates of the leader
- B- boss (of the leader) and their proximity
- J- job and its demands
- O- organization (organization culture)
- T- time (time to deal with the situation, crisis or not, etc)

The crucial variable? The leader and the follower!!

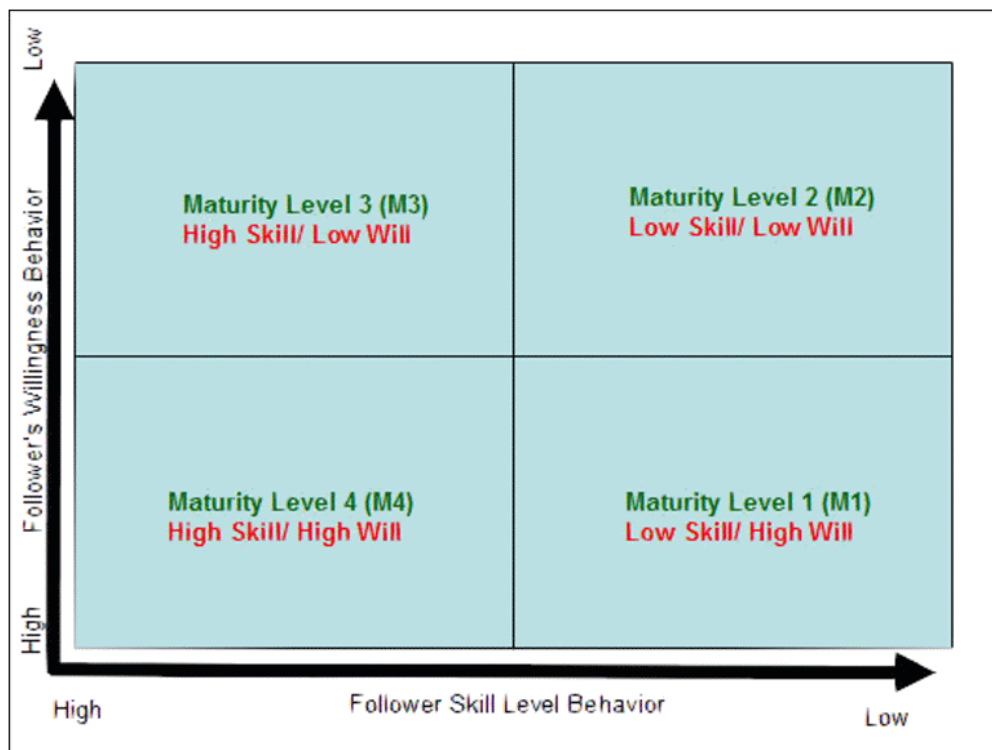
Being effective as a leader.

1. Identify the task (break it down to its smallest component)
2. Assess the performance readiness. Can the follower do the task?

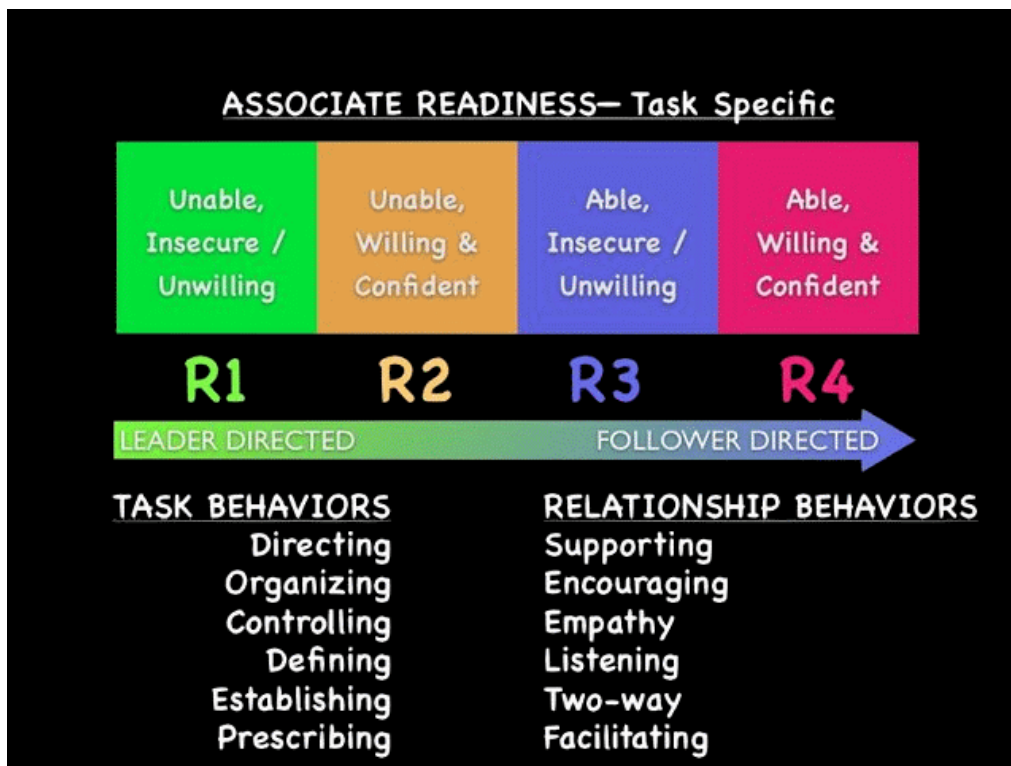
$$\text{Performance readiness} = f(\text{ability/willingness})$$

Readiness

levels:



(NOTE on image- Maturity level is same as Readiness Level)



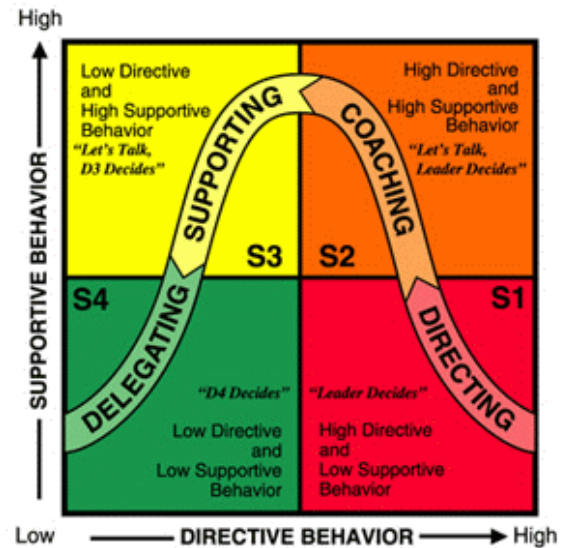
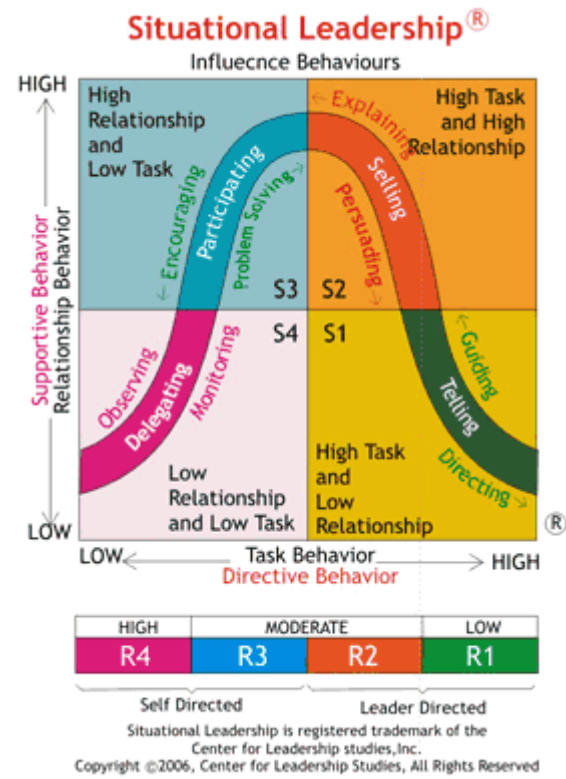
Match the leader behavior to the readiness level.

- R1- unable, unwilling (insecure, really. No confidence)
- R2- unable, willing (motivated)
- R3- able, unwilling (some insecurity)
- R4- able, willing (confident)

Effective leader- matches their leader behavior to the performance needs of the individual or group!!

- behavior style
- R1 -> Telling/Guiding/Directing
 - R2 -> Selling/Persuading, explaining WHAT is the difference between 'telling' and 'selling'? In selling you tell WHY we are doing the task.
 - R3 -> Participating/encouraging, problem solving
 - R4 -> Delegating
- R1 + R2 leader directed
 - R3 + R4 self/follower directed

Keep in mind also that its LOW support behavior, NEVER "NONE". [as I noted before] You always give some support("you're doing a great job"). It's less than a R1, but it's still important!



This is the model of situation leadership.

This is Ken Blanchard's version of it.

Coaching process is getting from R1 to R4, and to deal with slippage [follower falling back to a prior readiness level. Yup, it happens.]

1. cut back guidance and instruction \ growth
2. increase support behavior /

The need of support behavior is less than the need of autonomy--- moving from R2 to R3

Slippage- a follower can slide back a level. You need to change your leadership style and address. Important note, because I think we too often assume that there is always progress forward, no falling back.

My Comments

Again, SL seems pretty simple, but has a lot to it. It's an art, not a science, in how one applies it. How good are you at accessing the readiness level of the follower, and how well are you at doing the 4 leadership styles? I bet many of us prefer to use one style, despite the fact that it should be only used in certain cases, and how good are we at judging it the right case?

There are some further points I should point out.

- Readiness of the task is what we speak of. Can the follower do a certain task? Task can be something like making a sandwich, taking notes at a meeting, or perhaps more complex, like being a treasurer for an organization, or running a website.

- Big mistake some make is assuming the levels deal with the followers' development as an individual. Not so! It's their readiness to do a certain task.
- We all can do different tasks. This should mean that we are at different readiness levels for different tasks. And so this means that leaders will need to use different styles with the same follower, depending on the task. This can be difficult for some leaders to grasp. We sometimes have a problem that with the same follower we may be delegating, telling or coach, depending on the task.
- Tied to the previous item, we as leaders need to keep in mind that a high readiness level in one task does not translate to a high readiness level in another. A very competent treasurer does not mean that becoming a secretary means they will be very competent at that task. Leaders and followers need to be mindful of this, as followers will move from position to position.
- As noted, followers can 'back slide' in their readiness level with some tasks, and we as leaders need to help them out.
- While getting to the 4th readiness level may be seen as a goal, some will NEVER reach it for some tasks. Getting to the 3rd or even the 2nd may be as high as they go.

Situational Leader is an important concept. It has been applied to teams (Team Leadership Model, High Performing Teams, Situational Team Leadership- to be covered in a future note) and to self leadership (again, topic of a future note). Sadly, I am not aware of any BSA courses that cover SL other than the OA's National Leadership Seminar (unless they revised that course and removed it). It seems with Wood Badge/NYLT that they decided to skip SL to go straight to team leadership, which I think is a mistake. I can't speak of NAYLE/PLC.

For those wanting to learn more about Situational Leadership, there are a few resources. Hersey and Blanchard first enunciated the concept in their college textbook, "Management of Organizational Behavior", but I don't recommend it. It's a big, expensive college text. Hersey's company does have a book on Situational Leadership, but it is pricey and a little hard to find. Most people use Blanchard's "Leadership and the One Minute Manager" (1985), which is readily available and is a good introduction to the concept. Blanchard's recent "Leading at a Higher Level" (2006, 2009) also touches on the topic.