

Develop Your Own Management Style

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You are a unique individual—one of a kind. Not only are you unique, everyone working for you is also unique. Therefore, you have to develop your own management style to be successful in managing all of that uniqueness. Your style will be shaped by your personality, values, personal and professional life experiences, mentors, role models, the people you supervise, and your training (or lack of it). You have to find out what works for you—and that may change over time, especially as your employee mix changes. It may also change depending on the current situation, time, pressure, and all of the other factors that impact a manager.

Here is some different advice. You don't necessarily want to apply the Golden Rule to your employees all of the time. Don't treat your employees as you would want to be treated. Instead,

**Being a manager
is a tough job;
being a good one
is even tougher.**

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treat them as they want to be treated, and that may differ from your expectations. Get to know them, determine how they each should be treated, and apply a tailored management style in the way you treat each one. Of course, the general rules on treatment apply to how you manage everyone. That is an aspect of the Golden Rule that you do want to apply. Treat everyone with respect, listen to them, be considerate, be fair, and cultivate all of those habits and characteristics that good managers have—but apply them in your own way as it works best for your office.

Management Styles of the Rich and Famous

There are many high-profile examples of how to develop a successful management style. Managers like Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, and Ricardo Semler have developed their own management style, as outlined in a *Thinking Managers* article by Edward de Bono and Richard Heller (<www.thinkingmanagers.com/business-management/management-styles.php>).

Actually, I wouldn't recommend styling yourself exactly after any of those men. What worked for them may or may not work for you, but it is worth looking at them as examples. The fact that each man has been highly successful shows that there are many different routes to success. The following descriptions are based on information from de Bono's and Heller's article.

Bill Gates' management at Microsoft® was based on control and managing the details—to the point of micromanagement. The Gates management style goes to the level of closely monitoring all details and getting to the nitty gritty level. This is demonstrated by the fact that he even used to review and sign the expense reports for Steve Ballmer, his number two man.

Warren Buffett, on the other hand, has always stated that he wanted the managers of Berkshire Hathaway to think like owners, de Bono and Heller write. He urged them to “look at the business you run as if it were the only asset of your family, one that must be operated for the next 50 years and can never be sold.” He wanted them to function on their own, but he did maintain some oversight.

According to de Bono and Heller, Ricardo Semler (head of the Brazilian engineering company Semco) has taken a more unorthodox management style that turned out to be very effective for him and his company. Semler's management policies included unusual practices such as shutting down the company for an afternoon twice a year so all employees could clean out their work areas; limiting all memos and reports to one sheet of paper topped by an eye-catching tabloid-style headline to sum up the key message; and allowing employees to assess their own managers, with a low rating putting the manager's job at risk.



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Management Styles for the Rest of Us

Remember all of your management theories from college or your training courses? Those are directly related to styles of management. You may want to go back and look at them. They include Theory X; Theory Y; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; Herzberg's Hygiene Theory; the theories of Chris Argyris, Rensis Likert, and Fred Luthans; and others. I won't repeat them, as I don't want to bore you. It is up to you to glean out nuggets from them to fit yourself and your situation.

If you research what the current experts say, you will find that there are anywhere from two to eight major management styles—some of which overlap. Naturally, each expert has his/her own take, since they want to sell books or services. Let's take a look at some of them. Almost all of the experts agree on the first two in the below list as the broadest categories for management styles (under slightly different names, of course). After those two, we get in to smaller categories. We will get into the details of each and even some subcategories.

- Autocratic, authoritarian, or coercive
- Democratic, permissive, or participative
- Laissez-faire or hands off
- Authoritative or expert
- Affinitive or empathetic
- A coach.

Autocratic, Authoritarian, or Coercive

This is the manager who makes the decisions on his own. He doesn't take much, or any, input from subordinates. He is the boss and the decision maker. This management style typically is used in situations or businesses that require quick responses to a time crunch or a crisis situation. Most people tend to visualize this style as a dictatorial approach to management. This may be true for some managers, but it can be a necessary management style. Good examples include the military, a fast-paced trading environment, or an emergency in which there is no time for deliberation and group consideration. When used in other fields or other situations, it is not as successful, creating low morale and disharmony.

Democratic, Permissive, or Participative

In general, this style permits subordinates to take at least some part in decision making and provides them a considerable degree of autonomy in completing routine work activities. Most consider this to be more a motivating and more enjoyable work environment, but it does have some disadvantages such as possible inefficiencies in the decision-making process, being more time intensive, and opening the door to conflict in some cases. There are some subcategories to this management style that provide varying degrees of employee participation and job autonomy:

- Directive democrat—makes decisions participatively by taking input from subordinates most of the time, but closely supervises subordinates in their duties.
- Directive autocrat—makes most decisions unilaterally, but takes some input from subordinates. He, too, closely supervises subordinates.
- Permissive democrat—makes most decisions participatively by taking input from subordinates and gives subordinates more latitude in carrying out their work.
- Permissive autocrat—makes most decisions unilaterally, although usually with at least some input from subordinates, and gives subordinates latitude in carrying out their work.

Laissez-Faire or Hands Off

This style puts the complete trust of running the business or doing their job in the hands of employees, and allows a greater degree of autonomy (think Warren Buffet). This can be a great style in creative or entrepreneurial industries, but can lead to a fragmented or less-organized approach to doing business if implemented across an organization, especially a large one. It can also lead employees to wonder if the manager really cares about them and their work.

Authoritative or Expert

This is the style that can be used by managers who are the experts in their field. They lead by example and inspire confidence in those under them. They frequently have a vision of what needs to be done and how, but are charismatic enough to make people want to follow them. The problem is that you have to be the true expert for this to work. And if you make a mistake, you lose your credibility.

Affinitive or Empathetic

This is the manager who tries to build emotional bonds through empathetic communication. The people who are part of this manager's team always come first, sometimes even before the job (good for the employees, bad for the organization). This may be used successfully during times of stress, both in employees' work and personal environments. However, it is not always successful for the everyday work or for a long-term work environment.

A Coach

This is a manager who sets developmental steps so as to mature his or her staff for the future. He helps improve staff performance by developing long-term strengths. This can only be implemented over time, but can be (and I think should be) used in conjunction with other styles.

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As you can see, there are many styles of management. All have their good and bad points. You will probably have to mix and match parts of each in different situations and at different times. I am not going to tell you which style is best for you, remembering that you and your people are unique. There is some general advice that I can provide, though. Most experts (and employees) agree that some level of participatory approach is the best. It creates the best work situation, the highest morale, and the best productivity. As I have said in past *Defense AT&L* articles, remember that you are the manager and have the final say in the decisions and actions. But it certainly doesn't hurt to listen to what your people have to say. Their input can be very helpful.

Don't forget guidance and suggestions from other writers and your own experience when you are developing your own unique style.

Elements to Balance

To be a successful manager with your own style, you have to balance certain elements and actions. What follows are some that Sam Boyer, a management consultant from

Colorado, pointed out in a speech and summarized in an article, "Developing an Effective Management Style" (<www.samboyer.com/articles/developing_an_effective_manager.htm>). I have taken the liberty of editing them somewhat and adding to them, so they are reflective of my thoughts, too.

- Good managers are assertive. They are not arrogant, nor are they aggressive in their dealings with others. They are decisive, focused on the problem and its solution. Effective managers show neither malice nor pity towards their subordinates.
- They have a positive attitude. The attitude of employees is a reflection of the attitude displayed by the manager. They display nothing less than a self-confident, "we are going to move forward, and we are going to do it now" positive attitude.
- They provide direction. They have annual and long-term goals. Those with an effective style do not wait until the end of the period to assess performance. Rather they assess ongoing performance and address situations that limit their success.
- They have written policies and procedures. Effective managers have personnel policies, operational procedures, job descriptions, and performance evaluations in writing. Not only are policies and procedures written down, but they are followed and enforced.
- They hold themselves and employees accountable. Managers with effective styles are fair managers. They do not show favoritism among their employees. They work to equalize the workload between employees and hold each accountable for completion of his or her assigned tasks. Effective managers show respect for their employees and work to obtain the same from the employees through holding themselves accountable.
- They celebrate small victories. Enough small victories and they become a large victory and a success for the organization.
- They are communicators. They actively communicate with their employees, other stakeholders, and the public. They make themselves available to those who have to communicate to them. They touch all bases by asking questions, coaching, and observing results. Individuals with effective management styles never stop learning. They ensure that not only are employees initially well trained, but also they insist upon ongoing training.
- They limit the number of supervisors between themselves and the bottom employees. Managers that have an effective style rely on their internal systems, written policies and procedures, and training to get things done—not on extra supervisors.

- They are ethical. They do not compromise personal standards or acceptable ethics to accomplish organizational goals. They dismiss employees who violate ethical standards.
- They use technology and state-of-the-art systems when and where appropriate. They realize the value of using new technology and systems.
- They do not say, "This is how we have done things for 20 years and we're successful; why should we change?" Effective managers continually make changes to ensure ongoing success.
- They have fair compensation for their employees. Managers with effective styles have compensation systems that pay for results. They live by the theory that having fewer well-paid employees is a better situation than a larger number of poorly paid individuals.
- If they are in the commercial field, they let their employees know the business is profitable and thriving. Employees feel better about themselves and their jobs when they know they are working for a profitable company. If they are in the public sector, they let their employees know what impact that they are making, which serves the same purpose.
- They treat their people as individuals, motivating and empowering them. They give them the chance to perform and learn.
- They allow people to try things. They want their people to learn from their mistakes; they don't necessarily punish employees for those mistakes.

Find What Works For You

Being a manager is a tough job; being a good one is even tougher. To be a successful and effective manager, you have to develop your own management style. It will vary over time and according to the situation and the specific employees involved. Just think about the things mentioned here and in other articles, factor in your experience, consider your observations of other managers (good and bad), and you can do it. Sure, you will make mistakes. Learn from them and forge ahead. If you don't make mistakes, you are not trying new things, different approaches, or making firm decisions. Read, learn, seek, and take advice, but shape your own style based on what works for you. And don't be afraid to change it if the situation calls for something different.

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