

10 Common Leadership Styles (With Examples)

At some point in your career, you may take on a leadership role in some capacity. Whether you're leading a meeting, a project, a team or an entire department, you might consider identifying with or adopting a defined leadership style.

Most professionals develop their own style of leadership based on factors like experience and personality, as well as the unique needs of their company and its organizational culture. While every leader is different, there are ten leadership styles commonly used in the workplace.

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Why are leadership styles important?

As you develop [leadership skills](#), you'll likely use different processes and methods to achieve your employer's objectives and meet the needs of the employees who report to you. To be effective as a manager, you might use several different leadership styles at any given time.

By taking the time to familiarize yourself with each of these types of leadership, you might recognize certain areas to improve upon or expand your own leadership style. You can also identify

other ways to lead that might better serve your current goals and understand how to work with managers who follow a different style than your own.

Types of leadership styles

Here are the ten most common leadership styles:

1. Coaching Leadership

A coaching leader is someone who can quickly recognize their team members' strengths, weaknesses and motivations to help each individual improve. This type of leader often assists team members in setting **smart goals** and then provides regular feedback with challenging projects to promote growth. They're skilled in setting clear expectations and creating a positive, motivating environment.

The coach leadership style is one of the most advantageous for employers as well as the employees they manage.

Unfortunately, it's often also one of the most underutilized styles—largely because it can be more time-intensive than other types of leadership.

Example: *A sales manager gathers their team of account executives for a meeting to discuss learnings from the previous quarter. They start the meeting by completing an assessment together of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats regarding the team's performance. The manager then recognizes specific team members for exceptional performance and goes over the goals achieved by the team. Finally, the manager closes the meeting by announcing a contest to start the next quarter, motivating the sales people to reach their goals*

2. Visionary Leadership

Visionary leaders have a powerful ability to drive progress and usher in periods of change by inspiring employees and earning trust for new ideas. A visionary leader is also able to establish a strong organizational bond. They strive to foster confidence among direct reports and colleagues alike.

This type of leadership is especially helpful for small, fast-growing organizations, or larger organizations experiencing transformations or corporate restructuring.

Example: *A teacher starts a group at work for colleagues who want to help resolve anxieties and issues students have outside of school. The goal is to help students better focus on and succeed at school. He has developed testing methods so they can find meaningful ways to help students in a quick, efficient way.*

3. Servant Leadership

Servant leaders live by a people-first mindset and believe that when team members feel personally and professionally fulfilled, they're more effective and more likely to produce great work regularly. Because of their emphasis on employee satisfaction and collaboration, they tend to achieve higher levels of respect.

A servant leader is an excellent leadership style for organizations of any industry and size but is especially prevalent within nonprofits. These types of leaders are exceptionally skilled in building employee morale and helping people re-engage with their work.

Example: *A product manager hosts monthly one-on-one coffee meetings with everyone that has concerns, questions or thoughts about improving or using the product. This time is meant for her to address the needs of and help those who are using the product in any capacity.*

4. Autocratic Leadership

Also called the authoritarian style of leadership, this type of leader is someone who is focused almost entirely on results and efficiency. They often make decisions alone or with a small, trusted group and expect employees to do exactly what they're asked. It can be helpful to think of these types of leaders as military commanders.

This leadership style can be useful in organizations with strict guidelines or compliance-heavy industries. It can also be beneficial when used with employees who need a great deal of

supervision—such as those with little to no experience. However, this leadership style can stifle creativity and make employees feel confined.

Example: *Before an operation, the surgeon carefully recounts the rules and processes of the operation room with every team member who will be helping during the surgery. She wants to ensure everyone is clear on the expectations and follows each procedure carefully and exactly so the surgery goes as smoothly as possible.*

5. Laissez-faire or hands-off Leadership

This leadership style is the opposite of the autocratic leadership type, focusing mostly on delegating many tasks to team members and providing little to no supervision. Because a laissez-faire leader does not spend their time intensely managing employees, they often have more time to dedicate to other projects.

Managers may adopt this leadership style when all team members are highly experienced, well-trained and require little oversight. However, it can also cause a dip in productivity if employees are confused about their leader's expectations, or if some team members need consistent motivation and boundaries to work well.

Example: *When welcoming new employees, Keisha explains that her engineers can set and maintain their own work schedules as long as they are tracking towards and hitting goals that they set together as a team. They are also free to learn about and participate in projects outside of their team they might be interested in.*

6. Democratic Leadership

The democratic leadership style (also called the participative style) is a combination of the autocratic and laissez-faire types of leaders. A democratic leader is someone who asks for input and considers feedback from their team before making a decision. Because team members feel their voice is heard and their

contributions matter, a democratic leadership style is often credited with fostering higher levels of employee engagement and workplace satisfaction.

Because this type of leadership drives discussion and participation, it's an excellent style for organizations focused on creativity and innovation—such as the technology industry.

Example: *As a store manager, Jack has hired many brilliant and focused team members he trusts. When deciding on storefronts and floor design, Jack acts only as the final moderator for his team to move forward with their ideas. He is there to answer questions and present possible improvements for his team to consider.*

7. Pacesetter Leadership

The pacesetter leadership style is one of the most effective for driving fast results. These leaders are primarily focused on performance. They often set high standards and hold their team members accountable for hitting their goals.

While the pacesetter leadership style is motivational and helpful in fast-paced environments where team members need to be energized, it's not always the best option for team members who need mentorship and feedback.

Example: *The leader of a weekly meeting recognized that an hour out of everyone's schedule once a week did not justify the purpose of the meeting. To increase efficiency, she changed the meeting to a 15-minute standup with only those she had updates for.*

8. Transformational Leadership

The transformational leadership style is similar to the coach style in that it focuses on clear communication, goal-setting and employee motivation. However, instead of placing the majority of the energy into each employee's individual goals, the transformational leader is driven by a commitment to organization objectives.

Because these types of leaders spend much of their time on the big picture, this style of leading is best for teams that can handle many delegated tasks without constant supervision.

Example: *Reyna is hired to lead a marketing department. The CEO asks her to set new goals and organize teams to reach those objectives. She spends the first months in her new role getting to know the company and the marketing employees. She gains a strong understanding of current trends and organizational strengths. After three months, she has set clear targets for each of the teams that report to her and asked individuals to set goals for themselves that align with those.*

9. Transactional Leadership

A transactional leader is someone who is laser-focused on performance, similar to a pacesetter. Under this leadership style, the manager establishes predetermined incentives—usually in the form of monetary reward for success and disciplinary action for failure. Unlike the pacesetter leadership style, though, transactional leaders are also focused on mentorship, instruction and training to achieve goals and enjoy the rewards.

While this type of leader is great for organizations or teams tasked with hitting specific goals, such as sales and revenue, it's not the best leadership style for driving creativity.

Example: *A bank branch manager meets with each member of the team bi-weekly to discuss ways they can meet and exceed monthly company goals to get their bonus. Each of the top 10 performers in the district receives a monetary reward.*

10. Bureaucratic Leadership

Bureaucratic leaders are similar to autocratic leaders in that they expect their team members to follow the rules and procedures precisely as written.

The bureaucratic leadership style focuses on fixed duties within a hierarchy where each employee has a set list of responsibilities, and there is little need for collaboration and

creativity. This leadership style is most effective in highly regulated industries or departments, such as finance, healthcare or government.

Example: *Managers at a Department of Motor Vehicles office instruct their employees to work within a specific, defined framework. They must take many steps to complete a task with strict order and rules.*

Remember, most leaders borrow from a variety of styles to achieve various goals at different times in their career. While you may have excelled in a role using one type of leadership, another position may require a different set of habits to ensure your team is operating most effectively.

By understanding each of these leadership types, and the outcomes they're designed to achieve, you can select the right leadership style for your current situation.

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