

EVERYTHING BEES TAUGHT ME ABOUT MANAGING A TEAM

By **Molly Sausaman**, Executive Director, American Beekeeping Federation (ABF)



Interpersonal dynamics are fascinating. I read more about human nature and the complexities of relationships than any other topic, and I have made a conscious decision to be a positive influence on those around me. So far, this decision has served me well.

Long before I became the executive director of the American Beekeeping Federation, I used the expression “you catch more bees with honey” to describe my interpersonal style. From my experience, people respond positively to kindness, and while I’ve built my management style around this principle, I often daydream about why no single management style reigns supreme.

Leadership experts agree that the best managers bring their talent, natural qualities and hard work together to find the best style for their specific situation, and they often employ different styles at different times depending on the circumstances. Are you one of these managers? Perhaps a

more pertinent question is: Do you put conscientious effort into managing?

Instinctively, my highest priority is the personal and professional well-being of my team. I’ve heard from employees, time and time again, that they feel greater quality of life when they enjoy and take pride in their work. Because the individual contributions of all the team members are what bring success to our organization, I see it as my duty as a manager to cultivate an environment that supports my team’s professional interests and aspirations and, in turn, their happiness.

My management style fits into the “servant leadership” bucket—a phrase coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in an essay titled

“The Servant as Leader.” This style is also called coaching, training or mentoring. The focus of servant leadership is to help employees improve their own performance. It’s effective for helping them develop and advance professionally and reach new levels of performance and productivity. The key to success with this management style is being trustworthy.

Nevertheless, a servant leader will have troubles with negative employees who are unmotivated. In my case, I do my best to hire positive and motivated people. For the most part, I’ve been very fortunate to have good people working beside me, but on occasion I have been known to cut my losses rather than waste time trying to support and coach someone who has no interest in flourishing.

While my management style works for me and has afforded me great professional gratification, I find it fascinating that another manager using a completely different style

may have these same feelings. I find it even more fascinating to hear other managers complain about poor staff performance while neglecting to identify themselves as a possible problem. Hopefully, you are already in the habit of reflecting upon, reevaluating and refining your management style. If not, I hope this article gives you the information you need to start.

Let's take a closer look at some common management styles and how to use them. There is no limit to how many styles can be employed by one manager, if they're done right.

AUTOCRATIC

Also known as: Coercive, Directive

The autocratic management style is all about having full control, and micromanaging is very common. The manager makes decisions and takes on a "do as I say" approach. If employees fail to fall in line, they face consequences. Employees are motivated mostly through fear of discipline. The main benefit is speed and efficiency, as the manager's orders are carried out.

This management style was common for the baby boomer generation, but it's becoming less common today. It promotes very little learning, and new and innovative ideas are unlikely to emerge. Employee dissatisfaction is likely to be very high. This will ultimately result in low productivity and poor performance. In the long term, this top-down approach isn't going to work. It should be used rarely.

AUTHORITATIVE

Also known as: Visionary, Transformational

The authoritative management style focuses on providing a long-term vision and keeping everyone on the team moving in the same direction. They entrust their employees to handle the details about how to get there. They don't involve themselves in the day-to-day details. This management style gives employees a sense of freedom. Authoritative managers must have a lot of credibility to command great respect and cooperation from employees in following their vision.

Authoritative management helps motivate employees to work toward common goals and solutions. They are free to perform in a way that is most comfortable to them. This

allows them to strategize and innovate. Nevertheless, lack of focus on details can lead to problems, particularly if team members are inexperienced or new. Authoritative management is typically better for experienced professionals who are knowledgeable and capable of working with little or no supervision.

AFFILIATIVE

Also known as: People Come First

People are more important than their functions in the affiliative management style. It emphasizes conflict management and promotes harmony in the workplace. Team chemistry is a high priority. Affiliative managers motivate by seeing to it that everyone is happy and satisfied. This style doesn't leave much room for a stern approach when poor performance needs to be corrected.

Affiliative management is great for keeping up morale, and feelings of self-worth and self-esteem will be high among team members. Since the emphasis is not on performance, employees are not subjected to a lot of pressure and may become complacent about their productivity. When a manager uses this style as a long-term management strategy, it is likely that performance of employees will be mediocre.

PARTICIPATIVE

Also known as: Democratic, Collaborative

The participative management style offers employees an opportunity to engage in decision-making. Employees are encouraged to voice ideas and take responsibility for results. Because there is a collaborative process involved, the participative management style encourages cooperation among employees, and they are willing to work hard to implement their collective vision. Employees will feel valued and morale will be high.

The participative manager is willing to listen to everyone and motivates by recognizing team effort and rewarding employees for it. This leads to better manager-employee relationships, meaning less turnover and greater employee loyalty. It also encourages employees to solve problems and develop innovative ideas. However, democratic decision-making takes time and

is best left to employees who are experienced and qualified to carry out their tasks.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Also known as: Coaching, Mentoring

Supporting employees is central to the servant leadership management style. Managers who embrace this style spend their time coaching and mentoring their team. It is effective for helping team members develop and advance professionally but requires strong interpersonal skills, high levels of credibility and expertise and a strong commitment to professional vision.

The learning experience that comes with this management style encourages a thirst for achievement among employees, improving their motivation and performance. It also promotes greater manager-employee trust, bonding and collaboration. Managers who oversee large groups of employees may not have the time to work this way, and a downside of the servant leadership style is the temptation for the manager to take on more work and mentoring than is practical.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE

Also known as: Delegation

The laissez-faire management style emphasizes employee freedom. A laissez-faire manager will only appear present at the beginning of the work process to provide guidelines and the end to review the outcome and provide recommendations for improvement. This management style is popular in organizations where employees need space to be creative, and can result in a high level of job satisfaction and productivity for teams who enjoy autonomy.

A team of highly skilled professionals will thrive under the laissez-faire approach, but the lack of oversight is not appropriate for teams who cannot self-manage or solve problems on their own. If not careful, laissez-faire management may result in missed deadlines and poor work quality.

WHAT'S YOUR STYLE?

Remember, there is no right or wrong management style. Do any of these management styles describe your approach, or do you think your team could benefit from switching things up?



The nature of the organization and the work, personalities, capabilities, experience and values involved all affect the effectiveness of any manager's style. Being aware of your management style and tailoring it based on these factors can improve your team's productivity and employee morale, and reduce turnover.

I find it gratifying to see my team consistently churning out great work not because they feel the need to live up to my expectations but because they've developed high expectations for themselves. In my world, a happy team is a productive team and a productive team is a happy team. In keeping with my natural instincts, I methodically cultivate an environment in which my team can thrive. In turn, my team members are proud of what we've built together and go home feeling positive and fulfilled.

INSPIRATION FROM OUR PEERS

Allison Gault, MBA, CAE, Executive Director, Colorado Nursery & Greenhouse Association (CNGA)

In a few words, how would you describe your management style? My management style is very flexible, transparent and collaborative.

How did you develop and refine your management style? After many years of managing people and having managers, I learned that not everyone likes to be

managed in the same way, so I need to be flexible to accommodate their style. Some employees want more direction and guidance, while others want to take a project and run with it. I also believe in transparency. Being transparent allows employees to understand the direction of the association and how their position fits into achieving our goals and serving our members. In addition, I've learned that a collaborative approach where employees are asked to provide input and feedback makes them feel like part of the bigger picture and purpose of the association. I also learn a lot from their ideas. It helps us to think outside of the box and provide great service to our members and industry.

How do you inspire your team to give 100 percent? I believe in leading by example and tying our work to the greater outcomes for the association and the industry. If my employees know that I'm giving 100 percent to my role and I'm clear about how our work benefits our members in tangible ways, it inspires them to want to do the same. In addition, understanding what motivates your employees on an individual basis is important. Providing recognition in a variety of ways (public, time off, bonuses, hand-written notes, etc.) is an excellent opportunity to show your employees that you care about them and recognize their hard work and achievements.

Has an employee ever told you something memorable that gave you reassurance about the effectiveness of your management style? I had an employee who suddenly had to take care of a family member due to a bad accident. This employee was a single mom who worked part-time and attended school part-time. We were able to provide her with a flexible work schedule so she could help her family member, be there for her kids, still go to school and get her work done. In her words, the flexibility was "invaluable and very much appreciated."

Tyrone Adams, CEO, Colorado Association of REALTORS

In a few words, how would you describe your management style?

My management style is based on collaboration, empowering and fun.

How did you develop and refine your management style? I developed my style through DELP and coaching for over 15 years.

How do you inspire your team to give 100 percent? By having them being involved in the process and decisions. Believing and trusting them to take calculated risks and decisions. If something doesn't work, it's not about punishment, it is more about learning from our mistakes.

Has an employee ever told you something memorable that gave you reassurance about the effectiveness of your management style? I hear it more from my peers and others who interact with my team. They like that I have their back and trust and empower them to be the professionals they are hired to be. 📧



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