

Leadership Mode Cheat Sheet

LEADERSHIP MODES AT A GLANCE			
Leadership Mode	What it Looks Like	Best Used When	Red Flags
Directive (Clear Authority)	Leader sets direction clearly, makes decisions quickly, and expects immediate alignment.	Emergencies, safety-critical tasks, abnormal operations, time-compressed execution.	People stop speaking up, workarounds increase, engagement drops.
Consultative (Leader Decides)	Leader actively seeks input, then makes and communicates the final decision.	Planning work, known risks, improvement efforts, trade-off decisions.	Discussions drag on, teams feel consulted but ignored, decisions stall.
Participative (Shared Decisions)	Team helps shape the solution and has real influence over decisions.	Complex or novel problems, change initiatives, work requiring strong ownership.	Accountability becomes unclear, consensus replaces ownership, follow-through weakens.
Coaching (Capability Building)	Leader focuses on developing thinking and judgment rather than giving answers.	Skill gaps, developing supervisors, preparing people for higher responsibility.	Hard calls are avoided, performance or safety issues linger.
Delegative (Trust-Based)	Leader sets outcomes and boundaries, then steps back and lets the team execute.	Stable systems, experienced crews, low-variability work.	Standards drift, small issues go unchallenged, loss of situational awareness.

Field Check Before You Choose a Mode

Before acting, ask: Is there immediate risk? Do we need speed or learning? Is the task routine or novel? Where does the expertise sit right now? Let the situation, not habit, drive your leadership response. Use this cheat sheet before shift meetings, handovers, planning sessions, or difficult conversations.

