

Situational Leadership: What is it and How Does it Make Better Managers?

As a manager, the team you lead likely has employees who have diverse learning styles and skills. The situational leadership theory proposes that no one leadership style is appropriate for these different individuals. Effective leaders adjust their style to match how an employee approaches their work.

The theory first developed by Dr. Paul Hersey, was later revised by Kenneth Blanchard. The slight difference between their approaches is that effective leaders base their leadership style on the development of employees (Blanchard), instead of their maturity level (Hersey).

A manager who employs situational leadership must evaluate the needs and developmental level of the individual before choosing their approach. This can be determined based on their commitment, competence, and past performance.

There are four different development levels that each have a corresponding leading style.

Directing

Directing is suitable for enthusiastic learners. This is an individual who is excited to learn but lacks the necessary skills. Through this style, leaders decide what the employee does by providing specific instruction and goals, as well as giving frequent feedback without discussion.

Coaching

Like directing, the leader decides what the employee does in the coaching style. This time instead of giving feedback without discussion, the leader provides feedback with encouragement and explanation. This style is desirable for the disillusioned learner, the individual who gets discouraged by tasks that are harder than expected.

Supporting

While the individual still receives identical feedback in the coaching style, the supporting style allows for employees to make their own decisions. This leading style works great for the capable but cautious individual. They understand the task at hand, and its process, but are unsure of their ability to tackle it.

Delegating

Finally, the most independent of the 4 leading styles - delegating. This style works best for the individual who is a self-reliant achiever. They are able, confident, and experienced to take on tasks independently. Leaders, in this case, allow employees to make their own decisions but provide less feedback and encouragement.

So, why does this matter?

One size does not fit all. What works phenomenally for one employee, might crush the ability of another. Not only this, but providing support for employees based on their needs can create a motivating environment.

By receiving the coaching and support essential to execute their tasks, it strengthens morale. Successively, a motivating work environment can boost productivity as well as employee retention.

As many [HR companies](#) know, employee turnover has a high cost for businesses with recruitment, hiring, and training to replace workers who leave the company. The high morale and support a situational leader contributes to a business can aid in reducing employee turnover.

Overall, Kenneth Blanchard explains situational leadership's importance best, "Everyone has peak performance potential -- you just need to know where they are coming from and meet them there."