

Leadership: What's Your "Style"?



In a previous editorial in 2015, I emphasized as to why “leadership is a virtue that orthodontists need to possess.”^[1] Orthodontists, around the globe, lead teams—either in practice, academia, or professional organizations. We all know leadership is an important attribute of professional orthodontic success; however, resources for understanding the phenomenon in the orthodontic workspace are scarce. Practices are transforming, reinventing, and re-engineering to face challenges in the marketplace and commoditization that is a growing global phenomenon. Increased competition is forcing practices to implement patient-driven policies where doctor-driven strategies worked before. To be more adaptable, practices will have to decentralize if they have to grow, especially in growing economies. This is exactly where, leading a team, and managing human resources will be a critical skill set for the millennial orthodontist!

Many professional leaders mistakenly assume that leadership style is a function of personality rather than strategic choice. Instead of choosing the one style that suits their temperament, they should ask which style best addresses the demands of a particular situation.^[2] Research has shown that the most successful leaders have strengths in the following emotional intelligence competencies: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill.

There are six basic styles of leadership, described by Daniel Goleman,^[2] each makes use of the key components of emotional intelligence in different combinations. This is a very critical attribute to success as it influences the entire climate of a practice, department, or an organization. The best leaders don't know just one style of leadership – they're skilled at several and have the flexibility to switch between styles as the circumstances dictate. The six styles are:

1. The coercive style: This “Do what I say” approach can be very effective in a turnaround situation, a disaster in the office, or when working with problem employees. But in most situations, coercive leadership inhibits the flexibility of the establishment/organization and dampens colleagues' motivation.
2. The authoritative style: An authoritative leader takes a “Come with me” approach. The leader states the overall goal but gives people the freedom to choose their own means of achieving it. This style works especially well

- when a practice is adrift or has only one specialist. It is less effective when the leader is working with a team of specialists or working with co-professionals who are more experienced than the leader
3. The affiliative style: The hallmark of the affiliative leader has a “People come first” attitude. This style is particularly useful for building team harmony or increasing morale. However, its exclusive focus on praise can allow poor performance to go uncorrected. In addition, affiliative leaders rarely offer advice, which often leaves team members in a quandary
4. The democratic style: This style's impact on organizational climate is not as high as you might imagine. By giving everyone a voice in decisions, democratic leaders build organizational flexibility, responsibility, and help generate fresh ideas. But sometimes, the price is endless meetings and confused employees who feel leaderless
5. The pace-setting style: A leader, who sets high-performance standards and exemplifies them himself, has a very positive impact on colleagues who are self-motivated and highly competent. However, other team members tend to feel overwhelmed by such a leader's demands for excellence – and often tend to resent his tendency to take over a situation
6. The coaching style: This style focuses more on personal development than on immediate work-related tasks. It works well when colleagues are already aware of their weaknesses and want to improve, but not when they are resistant to changing their ways.

None of these terms will shock workplace veterans, who have chaired orthodontic departments, taught a bunch of residents, or lead an orthodontic practice. For the fresh graduate, this perspective could be an insight that moulds future workplace culture. The more styles a leader has mastered, the better. In particular, being able to switch among the authoritative, affiliative, democratic, and coaching styles “as conditions dictate” creates the best organizational climate and optimize a team's performance. Each style, by name and brief description alone, will likely resonate with anyone who leads, is led, or as is the case with most of us, does both. Coercive leaders demand immediate compliance. Authoritative leaders mobilize people toward a vision. Affiliative leaders create emotional bonds and harmony. Democratic leaders build

consensus through participation. Pace-setting leaders expect excellence and self-direction and Coaching leaders develop people for the future.

Having described the six styles, it is obvious that few individuals have all six styles in their repertory and even fewer know when and how to use them. Solutions to the former are (a) to develop the other traits or (b) have people on your team who possess what you lack.

The key to developing these traits is to understand one's emotional intelligence competence and work assiduously to increase capacities that they lack. For instance, an affiliative leader has strengths in three emotional intelligence competencies: in empathy, in building relationships, and in communication. Empathy is sensing how people are feeling in the moment – allows the affiliative leader to respond to colleagues in a way that is highly congruent with that person's emotions, thus building rapport. The affiliative leader also displays a natural ease in forming new relationships, getting to know someone as a person, and cultivating a bond. Finally, the outstanding affiliative leader has mastered the art of interpersonal communication, particularly in saying just the right thing or making the apt symbolic gesture at just the right moment. For a pace-setting leader who wants to be able to use the affiliative style more often, one would need to improve one's level of empathy and probably skills at building relationships or communicating effectively. As another example, an authoritative leader who wants to add the democratic style to his repertory might need to work on the capabilities of collaboration and communication. Such advice about adding capabilities may seem simplistic, but enhancing emotional intelligence is entirely possible with practice.

Unlike IQ, which is largely genetic-it changes little from childhood-the skills of emotional intelligence can be learned at any age. Growing your emotional intelligence takes practice and commitment. It isn't done in a weekend or during a seminar – it takes diligent practice on the job, over several months. The emotional centers of the brain, not just the neocortex, are involved. The neocortex, the thinking brain that learns technical skills and purely cognitive abilities, gains knowledge very quickly; however, the emotional brain does not. To master a new behavior, the emotional centers need repetition and practice. Improving one's emotional intelligence, then, is akin to changing one's habits. Brain circuits that carry leadership habits have to unlearn the old ones and replace them with the new. At

some point, the new neural pathways become the brain's default option. If people do not see the value of the change, they will not make that effort.

Like relationships or parenting, leadership will never be a precise science. It should not be shrouded with mysticism and an element of voodooism too. Orthodontists should consider professional coaches who can analyze the genetic, psychological, and behavioral components that affect their "leadership performance". The professional terrain is continually changing, and leaders of tomorrow must respond in kind. Hour-to hour, day-to-day, week to week. A savvy orthodontist must play his/her leadership style just like a professional golfer. The golfer who uses the just right club, for the right shot, despite having a bagful of them!

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Access this article online	
<p>Quick Response Code:</p> 	<p>Website: www.apospublications.com</p> <p>DOI: 10.4103/apos.apos_75_18</p>

How to cite this article: Vaid NR. Leadership: What's your "style". *APOS Trends Orthod* 2018;8:119-20.