

Your Personal Style of Leadership

Know what it is and how to maximize its potential

4. The Leader Who Is Motivated By ACCOMPLISHMENT (conclusion)

This fourth installment is as much about foreman Leo as it is about his boss Henry.

Leo, the ACCOMPLISHMENT-motivated type of leader who gets in trouble because of his impatient and aggressive ways, is lucky to have in Henry an immediate superior who understands Leo's type and who is aware that all types have a main feature that is often too pronounced and prevents the person from asserting fully the qualities of their type.

You will recall that Henry calmed down Leo after he stormed out of the production meeting with his team, and he got Leo to reflect on the events leading up to the aborted production meeting. Henry and Leo agreed that Leo would go and have a coffee in the conference room and review the minutes of the last management meeting, while Henry would meet with Leo's team to give them a chance to voice their side of the story to him.

Let's sit in on Henry's meeting with Leo's team.

As the team members outline their position, Henry realizes that their comments confirm his view about Joe's need for coaching (see the previous installment for more details). Being a born diplomat, Henry says to the team that he is aware it is not just Joe who is interested in productivity, but that they, the team members, are interested too. "Therefore", he says, "there is no fundamental problem here, just a disagreement about the ways and methods to use in trying to achieve the common goal".

He tells the team not to worry, that he agrees they should have a say, and that he is already working with Joe on the proper approach for everyone concerned. He assures them that they will hear from Joe and from him before the end of the day.

Although Henry realizes that he is being a bit optimistic, knowing that Joe might not be able to adapt quickly enough, he feels that he needs to take this chance. He doesn't want the situation to escalate. After all, his own credibility is on the line. Having many talents and relationship skills, Henry tends to get involved in

too many projects, which is the main reason why he neglected to coach Joe from the day he was promoted to foreman.

Henry's meeting with the team turns out to be very positive and reassuring to the team.

At 11:30, Henry and Joe sit down together as planned and Henry reassures Joe about his team's reaction and about Henry's plan to give them feedback once he and Joe come to an agreement about the way to proceed. Henry then asks Joe what he discovered when going through the minutes of the management meeting. Joe says that he made one important note in the margin of the minutes: 'Take a deep breath and calm down'. He explains to Henry that when he gets worked up he tends to ignore others around him and doesn't even notice what's going on around him. He realizes now that because of this he missed much of the discussion recorded in the minutes. He had been so upset when the Personnel Department representative, a junior staff manager, started to outline the new approach in employer-employee relations, that he never managed to calm down enough to follow the proceedings of the meeting. For a while it had been almost as if he wasn't there.

Henry congratulates Joe on this personal insight, and he coaches Joe on how to write a goal that spells out the leadership behavior Joe wants to develop. He also makes sure that the goal includes a way to measure success in achieving the goal. Joe's goal statement reads as follows:

"Goal: Whenever I notice my adrenalin rushing in, I take a deep breath and count to three before reacting."

Then he writes down the way to measure his goal:

"Measurement: Before quitting work at night, I review the day in my mind, counting the number of challenging situations I faced, and I write this number down in my agenda. I also write down the number of times I remembered to take a deep breath and to count to three and control my tendency to overreact".

Henry and Joe then discuss the rate of success that should be expected. Henry explains the importance of not aiming for perfection, of being modest in the beginning in order to have a chance to see progress and to avoid feeling discouraged. Joe decides that at the end of the first week he would consider himself successful if he succeeded three times out of ten to take a deep breath and count to three.

Henry applauds him for being realistic, pointing out that in the end it is Joe himself who has to provide the motivation from week to week. Starting out with a modest goal will enable him to congratulate himself every week after reaching his weekly level of success. Henry adds that feeling successful in the first few weeks is crucial to being able to continue progressing toward the later, more ambitious levels.

As to that ambition, Joe puts down his final success rate at 90 %. He doesn't set it at 100 % because he is heeding another of Henry's recommendations, that of not aiming for perfection with personal improvement goals, because "we are who we are", as Joe had stated himself earlier, and we will remain the type of person we are. However, we can improve on the way we function as the type of person we are, by reducing or controlling the main feature of our type if it is too strong in us.

In order to further reassure Joe, Henry reminds him that there is nothing wrong with wanting to ACCOMPLISH things, stressing that this is not something Joe has to give up. What Joe needs to do is what he has formulated indirectly in his goal: reduce the fear of being ineffective when the focus is not exclusively on task accomplishment. He must realize that paying attention to important relationship matters helps to increase effectiveness.

Prompted by Henry's coaching, Joe visualizes his future reactions to Walter's attempts to bring up problems and suggestions. He is apprehensive about what his new leadership behavior will do to his image as a foreman. He shares with Henry his concern about the impression his new behavior will make on his team. Henry responds by coaching him on active listening techniques and on the positive reactions they tend to produce on all sides.

Time passes unnoticed until Henry happens to glance at his watch. It is way passed lunch time, and Henry and Joe decide to have a take-out sandwich delivered so they can finish what they have started. Henry nudges Joe toward a decision about the things Joe is going to say to his team when the time comes to meet with them. Joe wants to think about it, but Henry insists and tries to make Joe realize without delay that he needs to admit to the team in some way that he has to change certain aspects of his approach. Joe has a hard time with this. He doesn't want to look like a fool in front of his team, but as they keep discussing, Joe finally agrees with Henry's view that a leader who admits a mistake to his team increases his team's respect for him. Joe ends up with a simple plan that both he and Henry feel good about. This is the plan.

Joe is going to swallow his pride and tell his team that after the blowout in the morning and the subsequent discussion with Henry he realizes that he had been

too focused on his own ideas about how to do things and how to improve things. After all, they were the ones doing the work, and he should listen to their suggestions and discuss them with them. From now on, there would be inscribed in the agenda of every Friday meeting the item "Suggestions and discussion", which would be followed, where applicable, by collective decision making. Joe and Henry agree that this innovation, coupled with Joe's new behavior of greater patience and of active listening, is the best way to improve the atmosphere in the team.

Henry then springs a surprise on Joe: "Joe, it's 3:30. Your team quits at 4:00. I told them that we would get back to them before the day is over. I will call Walter now on the telephone and tell him that you and I have agreed on the next step and that you will meet with the entire team in the conference room in five minutes to let them know what we have decided."

Joe: "What about you, aren't you going to come too?"

Henry: "Do you really think I need to? You are their foreman and you have just made some excellent decisions. You don't need me to be your messenger. You will announce the changes yourself. You're still in charge, you know. And I know you'll do a good job. How about it?"

Joe (feeling encouraged by Henry's comments): "I'll do it if you want me to. I have no problem talking to them. I have done it for almost three months now, and I didn't do too badly until this morning."

Henry cringes inside at the defensiveness of Joe's remarks. He realizes that there is a lot of coaching that will be required with Joe. However, he is confident that he can meet the coaching challenge. He tells Joe: "I am sure you'll do fine, Joe. Let me know after your meeting how things went, so I can congratulate you. I'll wait for you in my office."

Twenty minutes later, Joe comes back to Henry's office. Just by looking at Joe, Henry can tell that Joe is satisfied with himself -- perhaps a little too satisfied, Henry thinks!

Joe sits down with a slight grin on his face, saying nothing. This is not what usually happens when Joe goes to see Henry! Henry purposely waits.

Joe: "Don't you want to know what happened?"

Henry: "It looks like things went OK. Am I right?"

Joe: “Yep! Everyone agreed with my suggestion for future meetings. I scheduled the first meeting for Monday morning at 08:00. I asked them to make sure they were prepared to give their ideas and suggestions, because we have that production shortfall to tackle next week and we can’t afford to waste lot of time debating things. You know, Walter again started to complain that I was still pushing ahead too fast, but Ben suggested that they should all try the new formula before jumping to conclusions. I was pleased because they all agreed with Ben”.

Henry can see that his suspicion is confirmed. Joe still has a hard time controlling his highly task oriented approach, his need for accomplishment, come what may. But he doesn’t think this is the time to talk to Joe about it. He’ll do it next week. Right now, what Joe needs is a pat on the back. After all, Joe has taken what for him is a big step.

Henry: “Congratulations, Joe! You have done well. Let’s you and I celebrate the occasion. Why don’t I take you out for supper? I know a good place. We can talk and look ahead to next week.”

They both call home to let their families know. They spend over three hours having a drink, eating supper and, under Henry’s diplomatic guidance, agree on further sessions together to catch up on the coaching that Henry failed to provide when Joe was promoted three months ago.

That’s what happened on that Friday at work in the life of foreman Joe, a type of leader whose motivation for ACCOMPLISHMENT is extremely dominant. What came after that? Well, things went uphill for Joe from then on. There were some of the normal ups and downs, but nothing major. Henry soon introduced a win-win agreement, which gave an opportunity to Joe to write down not only his leadership commitments, but also to specify in writing what support commitments he thought he required of Henry. They established a schedule for regular meetings to evaluate each other’s performance. When the yearly evaluation time arrived, Joe knew already where he stood and was able to focus on his performance commitments for the next evaluation period. He was very happy with the win-win approach, as he realized that he had come a long way with the help of the periodic meetings with Henry. He later asked Henry for help in establishing win-win agreements with his team, and Joe’s relationships with the team improved steadily.

Joe turned from an excessively task-driven foreman to a leader who knew how to balance tasks and relationships. He succeeded in becoming comfortable with using a participative management style. His team felt empowered and they

regularly initiated improvements. Under Henry's guidance, Joe succeeded in establishing a continuous improvement spirit in his team, and the team became an example for other teams to emulate.

What can we learn from Joe's example?

1. Even if a leader has very strong, perhaps even extreme, behavior tendencies which impair his leadership qualities, he is not necessarily beyond hope.
2. Whatever the nature of the unbalanced motivation, a leader can learn to control it if he receives competent long-term coaching.
3. The coach's challenge is two-fold: a) he needs to know how to get the other person to want to be coached; b) he has to understand the type of coaching that is required, realizing that different types of individuals need to be given different styles of coaching.
4. Joe was fortunate to have a superior who was able to provide the type of coaching he required.

In the next installment you will learn the rule about who can best coach whom. Every leader's main motivation determines what type of coach is best for him. You'll find out why Henry was the right type of coach for Joe. You'll also start learning more about Henry's leadership style, including the improvements he requires in order to be able to fully assert his strengths.