

Six Emotional Leadership Styles



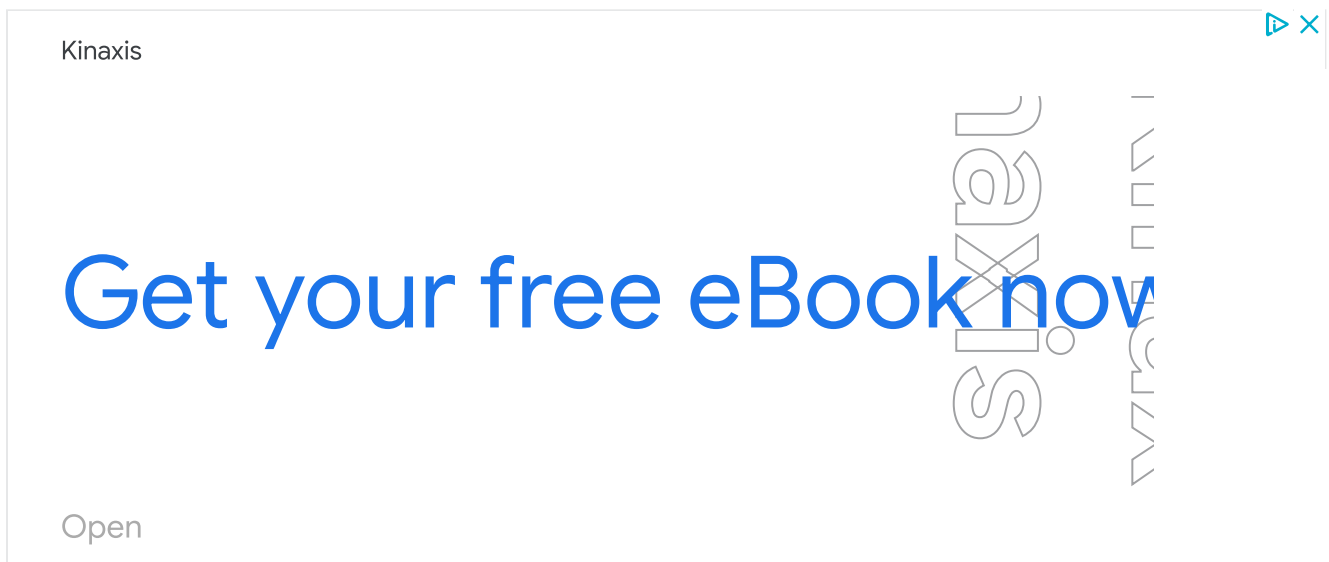
Six Emotional Leadership Styles

📄 Article • 19 min read

Six Emotional Leadership Styles

Choosing the Right Style for the Situation

MTCT By the Mind Tools Content Team



Think for a moment about the best boss that you've ever had. What was it that made working with him or her so rewarding?

Maybe your manager was happy and excited about his work, and that made you feel happy and excited, too. He never got angry when problems came up, but instead focused on finding workable solutions. He was confident, but always ready to hear other people's opinions. As a result, you enjoyed your job and consistently performed well.

Now think about the worst boss you ever had: the one who was ill-tempered, made unrealistic demands without telling you why, and was always "pulling rank." Sure, you worked hard, but only because you were afraid not to. He got

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significant. Scientific [research](#) shows that a leader's emotional state can impact everyone in an organization. [1] The [leader's mood](#) can cause a chain reaction that affects not only morale but also productivity and the bottom line.

So, as a leader, developing a higher level of emotional intelligence (EI) – your ability to manage your own emotions and to read other people's – is an important business skill.

Note:

You can learn more about EI in our articles, [Emotional Intelligence](#), [Emotional Intelligence in Leadership](#) and [Helping Your People Develop Emotional Intelligence](#), and our infographic, [Five Ways to Show Emotional Intelligence](#).

To assess your own EI, try our quiz [How Emotionally Intelligent Are You?](#)

There are six "emotional leadership styles" that are useful in different circumstances. In this article, we'll explore each of them, and look at how you can develop the skills you need to use each one effectively. (Mind Tools Club members can also read [examples](#) of how each style works in practice.)

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The Six Emotional Leadership Styles

Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis, and Annie McKee identified six emotional leadership styles in their 2002 book, "[Primal Leadership.](#)" [2] Each style has a different effect on people's emotions, and each has strengths and weaknesses in different situations.

Four of these styles (Visionary, Coaching, Affiliative, and Democratic) promote harmony and positive outcomes. However, the other two (Commanding and Pacesetting) may create tension and you should only use them in specific circumstances.

Goleman and his co-authors say that you shouldn't use any one style all the time. Instead, use the six styles interchangeably – choose the one that best addresses the situation that you're facing, the people concerned, and the emotions that they're experiencing.

Tip:

Learning how to "read" a situation and the feelings of the people involved will help you to select the appropriate leadership style. Our

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Now, let's examine each style in more detail.

1. The Visionary Leader

The Visionary approach to leadership is summed up by the phrase, "Come with me."

Visionary leaders are inspiring. They tell their teams where they're heading, but don't dictate how they're going to get there – they encourage their team members to use their own [initiative](#) to solve a problem or to meet a target. [Empathy](#) is the most important aspect of Visionary leadership.

When to Use It

Visionary leadership is most effective when your organization needs a new vision or a dramatic new direction, or for helping your team to [manage change](#). However, it's less likely to be effective when you're working with a team that's more experienced than you are. In these cases, democratic leadership is more likely to be effective.

Visionary leadership can create the most positive results of all the six leadership styles, but it may also be overbearing if you use it too much.

How to Develop It

To develop a Visionary leadership style focus on increasing your expertise, [vision](#), [self-confidence](#), and empathy. Get excited about change, and let your team see your enthusiasm – remember, it's infectious!

You also need to convince others of your vision, so focus on improving your [communication](#) and [presentation](#) skills.

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The Coaching leadership style connects a team member's [personal goals](#) and [values](#) with the organization's goals. This style is empathic and encouraging, and you can use it when you want to focus on developing people for future success.

This style centers on having in-depth conversations that may have little to do with people's current work, instead focusing on long-term life plans and how these connect with the organization's mission.

This style has a positive impact. It establishes [rapport](#) and [trust](#), and increases [motivation](#).

When to Use It

Use the Coaching style when you have a team member who needs help building long-term skills, or if you feel that he or she is "adrift" in your organization and could benefit from a coaching or mentoring relationship.

However, coaching can fail when it's used with an employee who is not making an effort, or who needs a lot of direction and feedback. In these cases, Pacesetting or Commanding leadership may be more effective.

How to Develop It

To develop a Coaching style, learn how to engage in informal [coaching](#) and [mentoring](#).

It's also important to get to know the people on your team. When you know your people, you're better able to see when they need guidance or advice. Use [Management by Wandering Around](#) to keep in touch with their needs.

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The Affiliative leadership style promotes harmony within the team, and emphasizes emotional connections. It connects people by encouraging inclusion and resolving conflict. To use this style you need to value others' emotions and have a strong awareness of their emotional needs.

When to Use It

Use this style whenever there is team tension or conflict, when [trust](#) has been broken, or if the team needs to be motivated through a stressful time.

How to Develop It

Leaders who use the Affiliative style are highly focused on emotion. So, learn how to [resolve conflict](#) and [how to be optimistic](#). Our article on [managing emotion in your team](#) will also help.

4. The Democratic Leader

The Democratic Leader asks, "What do you think?"

The Democratic leadership style focuses on collaboration. Leaders using this leadership style actively seek input from their teams, and they rely more on listening than directing.

When to Use It

This style is best used when you need to get your team on board with an idea or build consensus. It's also effective when you need your team's input.

The Democratic leadership style shouldn't be used with people who are inexperienced, lack competence, or aren't well informed about a situation. It's

To develop a Democratic leadership style, involve your team in [problem solving](#) and [decision making](#), and teach them the skills that they need to do this. Also try to improve your [active listening](#) and facilitation skills.

5. The Pacesetter Leader

The Pacesetter leader says, "Do as I do, now."

The Pacesetter leadership style focuses on performance and achieving goals. Pacesetter leaders expect excellence from their teams, and they will often jump in themselves to make sure that targets are met.

This style doesn't "coddle" poor performers – everyone is held to a high standard.

While this can be a successful style, it can have a negative effect on the team, leading to burnout, exhaustion and high staff turnover.

When to Use It

Try the Pacesetter leadership style when you need to get high-quality results from a motivated team, quickly.

How to Develop It

Because the Pacesetter style focuses on high performance, learn how to improve the quality of your team's work using techniques such as [Six Sigma](#) and [Kaizen](#). Train your people well and engage in [high-performance coaching](#) to help them to become as effective as possible.

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The Commanding Leader

The Commanding Leader demands, "Do what I tell you."

Commanding leaders use an autocratic approach. This often depends on orders, the (often unspoken) threat of disciplinary action, and tight control.

So, it's important to remember that people in democratic countries are used to having a high level of control over their lives and their work, and that this approach could deprive them of this. What's more, because this leadership style is so often misused, it can have a profoundly negative effect on a team.

When to Use It

The Commanding leadership style is best used in crises to jump-start fast-paced change and with problem team members.

How to Develop It

Be cautious when setting out to develop a Commanding leadership style. Remember, this style is very easily misused, and it should only be used when absolutely necessary.

To work effectively in these high-pressure situations, learn how to [manage a crisis](#)[↗], [think on your feet](#)[↗], and make [good decisions under pressure](#)[↗].

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The Six Emotional Leadership Styles provide just one approach to thinking about your leadership style. You can find out about many other approaches in our [Leadership Styles](#) article.

Key Points

Evidence shows that a leader's emotional state can resonate throughout an organization, affecting its culture and productivity. Therefore emotional intelligence (EI) is a key leadership skill.

According to Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis and Annie McKee, there are six "emotional leadership" styles – Visionary, Coaching, Affiliative, Democratic, Pacesetting, and Commanding. Each one has a different effect on the people who you're leading.

Each style works best in different situations, resonating differently with your team, and producing different results.

Anyone can learn how to use these leadership styles. However, take care to choose the style that's best suited to the needs of your team and the specific situation.

The Six Emotional Leadership Styles in Action

It's not always easy to know which of the six emotional leadership styles you should adopt in any given situation. To help you to choose, consider how each

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Imagine that, in order to meet some aggressive sales goals, you've decided to overhaul the way that your department connects with new clients. The techniques and processes you've developed are radically different from the ones that your people are used to and you're concerned that the team will be resistant to change.

However, you're genuinely excited about the new process and confident that these changes will boost team members' morale – and their productivity. You adopt the Visionary approach to help to get them on board with your ideas.

When your team members pick up on your [energy](#), excitement and sincerity, they get excited, too. You've communicated your vision and [motivation](#) clearly, and shown [empathy](#) by explaining how it can benefit everyone. Your team members know it's up to them to use the new system to make things happen and they're willing to put in the extra work needed to learn new skills.

2. The Coaching Leader: "Try This"

Jim, a new hire on your team, is having trouble adapting to his new role. He's been with the organization for only a month, but you can tell that he's [dissatisfied](#). Your organization requires "face time" at the office and Jim misses the freedom of [remote working](#), which he did at his old job. You also get the feeling that he'd like a position with more responsibility.

You meet with Jim and you help him see that being in the office five days a week does have distinct advantages over working from home. For instance, showing up every day allows him to bond with the team and network with colleagues who could turn into strategic allies in the future. You also encourage him to use your organization's training library, which he can visit on his lunch break to learn the skills he needs for a promotion.

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After your talk Jim takes your advice and starts making the most of his time in the office. He works on his projects with dedication, impressing both you and your boss.

3. The Affiliative Leader: "People Come First"

After a difficult year, Karen's boss has been asked to leave. Although he was proficient at his job, his management style was dictatorial. It didn't matter what he had to do or whose feelings he hurt – meeting department goals was his top priority.

Karen has been asked to take over his position and, although she's excited about the opportunity, she's now in charge of a team that is emotionally battered and untrusting. She decides to focus on her team's [emotional needs](#) before doing any work on department goals and future projects.

Her first few meetings are just spent talking. She allows everyone to open up about how their old boss made them feel. They're allowed time to vent their anger and frustration. They quickly realize that, although they went through their own tough times, they all experienced similar emotions.

After two meetings the atmosphere in the team is better and more open to new relationships. Because people's emotional needs were met first, they are now ready to focus on new projects and goals.

4. The Democratic Leader: "What Do You Think?"

Your department has lost money over the past two quarters and you're eager to reverse this. You know that if you can't figure out how to make your department profitable soon, something radical (and unpleasant) will have to be done to stem the losses.

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making a positive contribution to solving the problem.

You schedule a meeting with your team to discuss the situation, giving it a week to prepare. At the meeting, you ask people to present their ideas. Then, you give them the floor: for the rest of the meeting, you just [listen](#) .

Your team members talk through their options and you reach a consensus on what to do next.

5. The Pacesetter Leader: "Do as I Do, Now"

Although the holidays are coming up, your boss is pressing you to improve your team's numbers by the end of the quarter, which is only a few weeks away. Your team members are motivated and capable, but they're also tired. They're not looking forward to a last-minute push right before their break.

You decide to move forward anyway. You know they can handle the pressure and, if they meet their performance goals, they'll be rewarded with a great end-of-year bonus. So, you get them fired up one more time, asking everyone to work extra hours to ensure success. You also work extra hours yourself and you help anyone who falls behind.

You know it's a "big ask," and that it may have a negative effect on your team in the short term, but you decide it's in everyone's best interests to comply with the boss's wishes on this occasion. You know your team's limits and you'll be in a good position to push back if it happens again, or if the boss's demands keep increasing.

6. The Commanding Leader: "Do What I Tell You"

Eric has just learned that his CEO is stepping down, as of today.

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He tries to collaborate with some of his allies, but everyone has their own ideas about what needs to happen. The team is arguing constantly and Eric realizes that nothing is going to get done unless he [takes the lead](#).

He starts issuing orders to those closest to him, almost without thinking. His tone is firm and authoritative, and there's no room for debate. Quickly, the room quiets down and he outlines what needs to happen within the next few hours. His [initiative](#) and [self-control](#) quiet the fears of everyone in the room, and things get done quickly.

When the crisis has passed, Eric switches to a more democratic leadership style, respecting the experience and expertise of his executive team.

References

[1] Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. and McKee, A. (2001). *Primal Leadership: The Hidden Driver of Great Performance* [online]. Available [here](#). [Accessed July 18, 2017.]

[2] Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. and McKee, A. (2013). '[Primal Leadership](#),' Brighton, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press.

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