Situational Leadership® II
The Article

Developing Competence

Gaining Commitment

Retaining Talent

I think people want to be magnificent.

It is the job of the leader

to bring out that magnificence in people

and to create an environment

where they feel safe and supported

and ready to do the best job possible

in accomplishing key goals.

This responsibility is a sacred trust

that should not be violated.

The opportunity to guide others

to their fullest potential is an honor

and one that should not be taken lightly.

As leaders, we hold the lives of others in our hands.

These hands need to be gentle and caring

and always available for support.

<div align="right">

—Ken Blanchard

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The New Role of the Leader

Leadership is a partnership.

The leader's role has shifted dramatically in recent years. In the past, the emphasis was more on the leader as "boss." Today, leaders must be partners with their people; they can no longer lead with position power alone. Leaders must move from the "command-and-control" role of judging and evaluating to a role of ensuring accountability through supporting, coaching, and cheerleading.

Situational Leadership® II is not something you do to people; it's something you do with them.

Situational Leadership® II has endured as an effective approach to managing and motivating people because it fosters a partnership between the leader and the people that leader supports and depends upon. In other words, Situational Leadership® II is not something you do *to* people; it is something you do *with* them. The purpose of Situational Leadership® II is to open up communication and to increase the quality and frequency of conversations about performance and development.
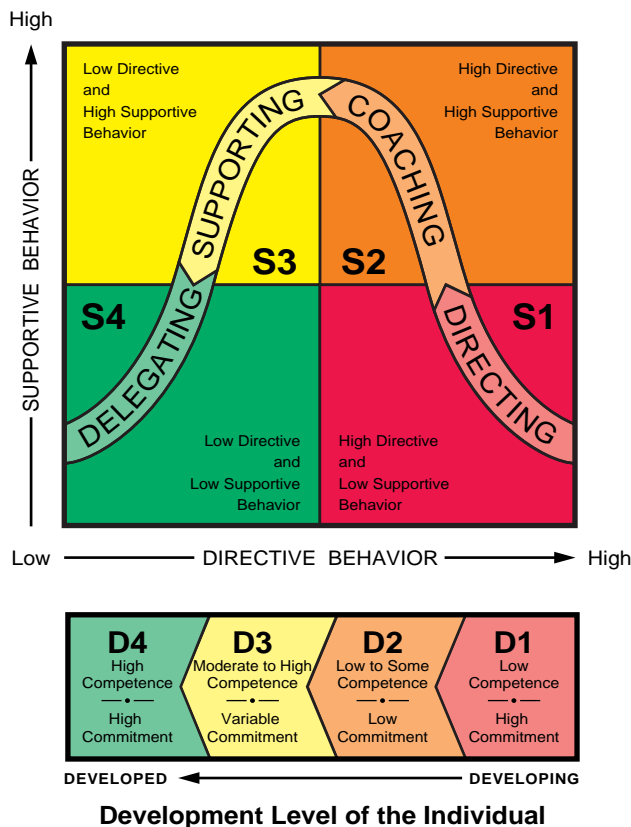
An Overview of Situational Leadership® II

People can and want to develop.

Situational Leadership® II is a process for developing people by providing effective leadership, over time, so that they can reach their highest level of performance. It is based upon a relationship between an individual's development level (various combinations of competence and commitment) on a specific goal or task and the leadership style (various combinations of directive and supportive behavior) that the leader provides.

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* Ken Blanchard originally developed Situational Leadership® with Paul Hersey at Ohio University in 1968. It gained prominence in 1969 in their classic text, *Management of Organizational Behavior,* now in its eighth edition (Prentice Hall, 1996). After finding that some critical aspects of the model were not being validated in practice, Ken created Situational Leadership® II based on the thinking and research of his colleagues at The Ken Blanchard Companies—Don Carew, Eunice Parisi-Carew, Fred Finch, Patricia Zigarmi, Drea Zigarmi, Margie Blanchard, and Laurie Hawkins—as well as on feedback from thousands of users. *Leadership and the One Minute Manager* (Morrow, 1985), coauthored with Patricia and Drea Zigarmi, marked a new generation of Situational Leadership for managers everywhere.

The Situational Leadership® II Model

Development Level of the Individual

There are four leadership styles and four development levels in the Situational Leadership® II Model. The top of the model illustrates the four leadership styles—Style 1 (Directing), Style 2 (Coaching), Style 3 (Supporting), and Style 4 (Delegating). These leadership styles correspond with the four development levels—D1, D2, D3, and D4—shown on the development level continuum at the bottom of the model.

Development level is goal or task specific.

The goal of Situational Leadership® II is to match the leadership style that is appropriate to an individual's development level at each stage of development *on a specific goal or task*. The leader provides the direction and support that an individual needs in order to move along the development continuum—through the development cycle—from D1 (developing) to D4 (developed). As development level changes, the leader's style should change.

There is no best leadership style. It depends on the situation.

This means that **there is no *best* leadership style** because development level varies from person to person, from goal to goal, and from task to task.

Situational Leadership® II is a partnership model. Since that partnership begins with understanding the needs of the individual with whom the leader is working, development level is addressed first.

Development Level

While there are many variables that can affect an individual's ability to accomplish a goal or complete a task, Situational Leadership® II focuses on one situational variable more than others—the development level of a person on a specific goal or task. Development level is a combination of two factors—competence and commitment.

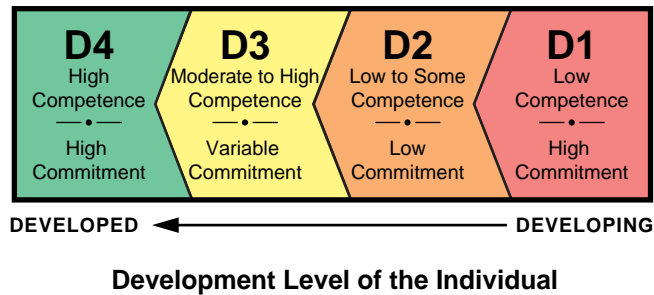*Competence is goal- or task-specific knowledge and skills and transferable skills.*

Competence is the knowledge and skills an individual brings to a goal or task. Competence is best determined by demonstrated performance. It can, however, be developed, over time, with appropriate direction and support. Competence is gained through formal education, on-the-job training, coaching, and experience. Experience includes certain skills that are transferable from a previous job; for example, the ability to plan, organize, problem solve, and communicate well. These skills are generic by nature and are transferable from one goal or task to another.

Commitment is a combination of motivation and confidence.

Commitment is a combination of an individual's motivation and confidence on a goal or task. Motivation is the level of interest and enthusiasm a person has for doing a particular job. Interest and enthusiasm are exhibited behaviorally through animation, energy levels, and verbal cues. Confidence is characterized by a person's self-assuredness. It is the extent to which a person trusts his or her own ability to do the goal or task. If either motivation or confidence is low or lacking, commitment as a whole is considered low.

The four development levels are characterized by combinations of varying amounts of competence and commitment.

The Four Development Levels

D4	D3	D2	D1
High Competence	Moderate to High Competence	Low to Some Competence	Low Competence
—•—	—•—	—•—	—•—
High Commitment	Variable Commitment	Low Commitment	High Commitment

DEVELOPED ◄——————————————— **DEVELOPING**

Development Level of the Individual

Good performance is a journey.

The development of an individual to his or her highest level of performance can be seen as a journey. Although the goal is self-reliance (being able to perform independently), the individual at each level of development has distinctive needs along the way.

D1 *D1—low competence/ high commitment— the Enthusiastic Beginner*

As the development level of an individual increases from D1 to D4, his or her competence and commitment fluctuates. On new tasks where they have little, if any, prior experience, most individuals are enthusiastic and ready to learn (D1). Descriptors for a D1 are ...

- Hopeful
- Inexperienced
- Curious
- New/unskilled

- Optimistic
- Eager
- Excited
- Enthusiastic

D2 *D2—low to some competence/low commitment—the Disillusioned Learner*

Soon after beginning a new task, an individual commonly experiences a period of disillusionment. A letdown occurs when a job is more difficult or is, perhaps, different than expected. This disillusionment causes a decrease in commitment (D2). Descriptors for a D2 are ...

- Overwhelmed
- Confused
- Demotivated
- Demoralized

- Frustrated
- Disillusioned
- Discouraged
- Flashes of competence

D3—*moderate to high competence/variable commitment—the Capable, but Cautious, Performer*

If individuals overcome the disillusionment stage and acquire the skills they need, most will then go through a self-doubt stage where they question whether they can perform the task well *on their own.* Their leader may say they are competent, but they are not so sure. In other words, they lack the confidence in their own competence. These alternating feelings of competence and self-doubt cause the variable commitment associated with D3—commitment that fluctuates from excitement to insecurity. Descriptors for a D3 are ...

- Self-critical
- Cautious
- Doubtful
- Capable

- Contributing
- Insecure
- Tentative/unsure
- Bored/apathetic

D4—*high competence/ high commitment—the Self-Reliant Achiever*

With proper support, an individual can eventually become a Self-Reliant Achiever—a D4, who demonstrates a high level of competence and commitment on a specific goal or task. In other words, given the appropriate amounts of direction and support, an individual moves from one level of development to another, from being an *Enthusiastic Beginner* to a *Disillusioned Learner* to a *Capable, but Cautious, Performer* to a *Self-Reliant Achiever.* Descriptors for a D4 are ...

- Justifiably confident
- Consistently competent
- Inspired/inspires others
- Expert

- Autonomous
- Self-assured
- Accomplished
- Self-reliant/self-directed

Development level varies from goal to goal or task to task.

Development level does not apply to the person but rather to the person's competence and commitment to a specific goal or task. An individual is not at any one development level overall. Development level varies from goal to goal and task to task. In other words, an individual can be at one level of development on one goal or task and a different level of development on another goal or task.

Diagnosis, the first skill of a Situational Leader, is assessing an individual's competence and commitment, his or her need for direction and support.

For instance, Casey may be a marketing genius when it comes to rolling out new products and opening new markets—clearly a D4 as demonstrated by the success of her past marketing plans. However, when it comes to setting up a database to track demographics and buying patterns, Casey has little computer expertise beyond email and word processing on her laptop. Depending on her motivation for the task, she could be a D1 or a D2.

By diagnosing development level, a leader can determine which leadership style to use.

Leadership Style

Leadership style is the pattern of behaviors used to influence others, as perceived by them.

Leadership style is the pattern of behavior leaders use, over time, to influence others, as perceived by those being influenced. A leader's self-perception of leadership style is only an indication of his or her intentions and is not necessarily how that leadership style is perceived by others. Studies have shown that this pattern of behavior falls into two basic categories, which are defined in Situational Leadership® II as **Directive Behavior** and **Supportive Behavior**.* Leaders use some combination of these two behaviors.

Directive Behavior—structuring, organizing, teaching, evaluating, supervising

Directive Behavior concentrates on *what* and *how*. It involves telling and showing people what to do, how to do it, when to do it; monitoring performance; and providing frequent feedback on results. Directive Behavior develops competence in others.

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* The terms *Directive Behavior* and *direction* and *Supportive Behavior* and *support* are used interchangeably in this context.

*Supportive Behavior—
listening, facilitating
problem solving, asking,
explaining, encouraging*

Supportive Behavior focuses on developing an individual's commitment and initiative. It also focuses on developing positive attitudes and feelings toward the goal or task. Good examples of Supportive Behavior are listening, facilitating self-reliant problem solving, encouraging, and involving others in decision making. Supportive Behavior builds commitment in others.

When Directive and Supportive Behaviors are placed on the horizontal and vertical axes of the Situational Leadership® II Model, there are four combinations of these two behaviors. These four combinations of Directive and Supportive Behaviors are the four leadership styles in the Situational Leadership® II Model.

The Four Leadership Styles
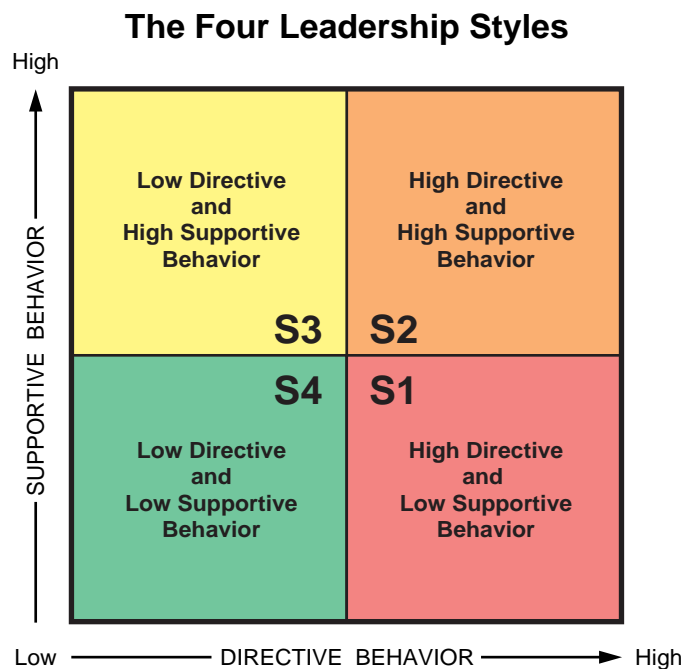
The four styles vary in the amount of direction and support the leader gives and in the individual's involvement in decision making.

S1 *Style 1—high Directive Behavior/low Supportive Behavior— Directing*

Style 1, *Directing,* consists of high Directive Behavior and low Supportive Behavior. In the Directing style, the leader provides specific instructions about what and how goals or tasks will be accomplished. The leader also closely supervises the individual's performance. Most decisions in Style 1 are made by the leader. Descriptors for S1 are ...

- Defining
- Planning/prioritizing
- Orienting
- Teaching/showing and telling how
- Checking/monitoring
- Giving feedback

S2 *Style 2—high Directive Behavior/high Supportive Behavior— Coaching*

Style 2, *Coaching,* is characterized by high Directive Behavior and high Supportive Behavior. The leader explains decisions, solicits suggestions from the individual, praises progress, and continues to direct task accomplishment. Input from the individual is considered, although final decisions are made by the leader. Descriptors for S2 are ...

- Exploring/asking
- Explaining/clarifying
- Redirecting
- Sharing feedback
- Encouraging
- Praising

S3 *Style 3—low Directive Behavior/high Supportive Behavior— Supporting*

Style 3, *Supporting*, provides low Directive Behavior and high Supportive Behavior. A leader using Style 3 listens, encourages, and facilitates self-reliant decision making and problem solving. Descriptors for S3 are ...

- Asking/listening
- Reassuring
- Collaborating
- Facilitating self-reliant problem solving
- Encouraging feedback
- Appreciating

S4 *Style 4—low Directive Behavior/low Supportive Behavior— Delegating*

Style 4, *Delegating,* is a combination of low Directive Behavior and low Supportive Behavior. The leader empowers the individual to act independently and provides the appropriate resources to get the job done. Most decisions are made by the individual. Descriptors for S4 are ...

- Allowing/trusting
- Affirming
- Confirming
- Acknowledging
- Empowering
- Challenging

In all four styles, the leader (1) clarifies expectations and goals, (2) observes and monitors performance, and (3) gives feedback.

Matching Leadership Style to Development Level

In Situational Leadership® II, the goal is a match!

To determine the appropriate leadership style to use with each of the four development levels, draw a vertical line up from a diagnosed development level to the leadership style curve running through the four-quadrant model. The appropriate leadership style—*the match*— is the quadrant where the vertical line intersects the curved line.

Matching Leadership Style to Development Level

Development Level of the Individual

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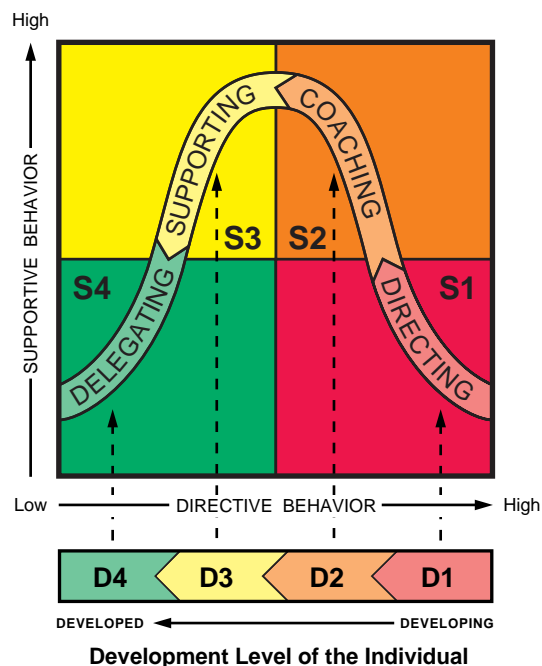
As a result, Development Level 1 (D1) would get a Directing (S1) leadership style. Development Level 2 (D2) would get a Coaching (S2) leadership style, etc.

Since D1s have commitment but lack competence, the leader needs to provide high direction (S1—Directing). D2s, who lack both competence and commitment, need the leader to provide both high direction and high support (S2—Coaching). D3s have competence but variable commitment, and, therefore, need high support (S3—Supporting) from the leader. Since D4s have both competence and commitment, leaders need to provide little direction or support (S4—Delegating).

Directing (S1) is for Development Level 1 (D1).

Directing is for Development Level 1. Style 1 is effective with an individual at D1 because the high direction builds the task knowledge and skills that the individual needs. There is less need for support at this level, since the individual is eager to get started and learn.

Coaching (S2) is for Development Level 2 (D2).

Coaching is for Development Level 2. The individual at D2 needs Style 2, with continued high direction to develop competence and increased support to counter the drop in commitment.

Supporting (S3) is for Development Level 3 (D3).

Supporting is for Development Level 3. An individual at D3 has variable commitment and, therefore, benefits from the high Supportive Behavior of Style 3 to reinforce shaky confidence and overcome motivational problems. Since competence is moderate to high at this level, little direction is needed.

Delegating (S4) is for Development Level 4 (D4).

Delegating is for Development Level 4. At D4, an individual is highly competent and highly committed. The low direction and low support of Style 4 are appropriate, since this individual is able to provide his or her own direction and support.

Oversupervison = S1 or S2 with a D3 or D4

Undersupervison = S3 or S4 with a D1 or D2

Leadership style needs to be matched to the individual's development level to ensure that competence and commitment will increase. When people are oversupervised or undersupervised, that is, given too much or too little direction, there is a negative impact on their development.

Flexibility, the second skill of a Situational Leader, is the ability to use a variety of leadership styles comfortably.

As the individual moves from one development level to the next, from D1 to D2, D3, and D4, the leader's style should change accordingly. Yet, research shows that most leaders have a preferred leadership style.

> *Research data on the Leader Behavior Analysis II® (LBAII®)* indicates that 54 percent of leaders tend to use only one style; 35 percent tend to use two styles; 10 percent tend to use three styles; only 1 percent use four styles.*

To be effective, leaders must be able to use all four leadership styles. They must learn to be *flexible*.

Partnering for Performance, the third skill of a Situational Leader, is reaching agreements with individuals about their development level and the leadership style they need to help them achieve individual and organization goals.

Partnering for Performance

Partnering for Performance is gaining the individual's permission to use the leadership style that is a match for the individual's development level. In partnering, the leader and the individual agree on goals, development level, leadership style, future leadership behaviors, how to stay in touch, and how often to stay in touch. Teaching Situational Leadership® II to individuals helps them understand their role in the partnership.

Once goals have been agreed to and both the leader and the individual know Situational Leadership® II, they can mutually diagnose the individual's development level and agree on an appropriate leadership style.

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* The Leader Behavior Analysis II (LBAII) is an instrument designed to measure both self and others' perceptions of leader flexibility, as well as the leader's effectiveness in choosing an appropriate leadership style. Zigarmi, Drea, Carl Edeburn, Ken Blanchard, *Getting to Know the LBAII®: Research, Validity, and Reliability of the Self and Other Forms, 4th Edition.* (Escondido: The Ken Blanchard Companies, 1997.)

People thrive on involvement and communication.

Communication should continue as the leader manages the individual's performance, using the agreed-upon leadership style. New goals, priorities, and changes in development level should trigger more dialogue and changes in leadership style.

The Development Cycle

The development cycle is used to describe the sequential progress of an individual through the four development levels.

Five Steps in Developing the Competence and Commitment of Others:

1. Tell
2. Show
3. Observe performance
4. Praise progress, or
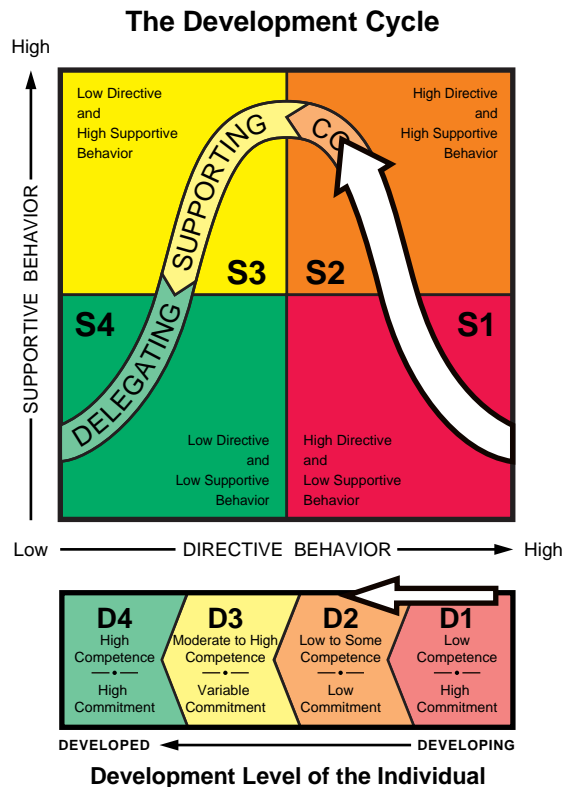*5. Redirect*

An individual on a new goal or task will go through four predictable and sequential development levels. The progress of an individual through the four levels of development is called the development cycle.

In developing Self-Reliant Achievers, the factor that triggers a change in leadership style is performance. Improvements in performance prompt forward shifts in leadership style along the bell-shaped curve from S1 to S2 to S3 to S4, one style at a time.

**The Development Cycle**

Development Level of the Individual

Usually, an individual undertakes a new task as a D1. In some cases, however, an individual may enter the development cycle as a D2. This situation can be the result of an involuntary transfer or other job- or nonjob-related issues. Since both competence and commitment are low, Style 2, with an emphasis on active listening, would be appropriate.

The Regressive Cycle

The regressive cycle is used to describe a decline in performance (regression).

Just as improvements in performance call for forward shifts in leadership style along the bell-shaped curve, decreases in performance require backward shifts in leadership style. This is called the regressive cycle. In other words, whenever an individual performs at a lower level than previously demonstrated, the leader should adjust his or her behavior to respond to the individual's current development level.

The Regressive Cycle

Development Level of the Individual
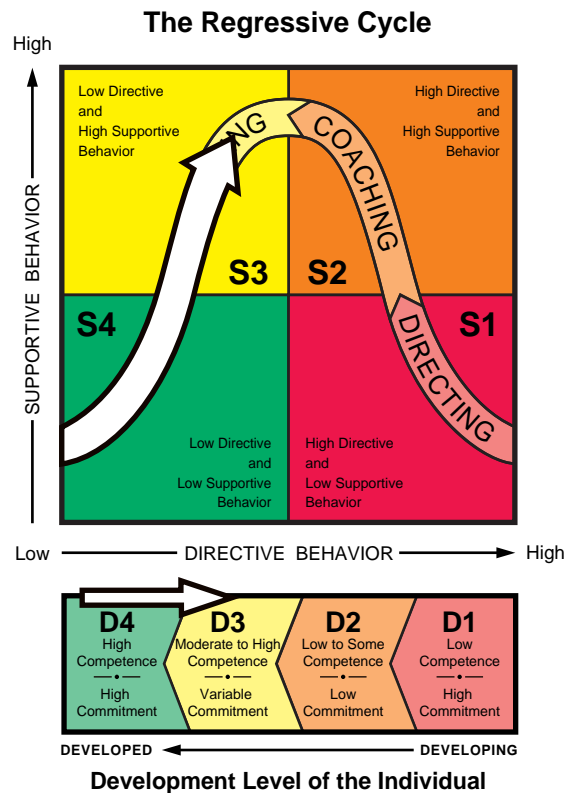
For example, a highly experienced individual might start missing deadlines or the quality of his or her work may decrease. Rumors of a buyout or perhaps a family crisis may be affecting this individual's performance. In this situation, shifting from a Delegating style to a Supporting style would be appropriate.

Imagine the curve going through the four leadership styles on the Situational Leadership® II Model as a railroad track. Each of the four styles is a station along the way. If you want to go to S4 (Delegating) from S1 (Directing), you have to stop at S2 (Coaching) and S3 (Supporting).

The same is true for the regressive cycle. If a leader is at S4 (Delegating) with someone and his or her performance begins to slip, the leader must move back one stop to S3 (Supporting) to determine the performance problem. Once the problem is identified, if the leader feels the individual can get his or her performance back on track, a return to S4 is appropriate. If, however, it is obvious that the individual needs some help, the leader can move back one more stop to S2 (Coaching).

Furthermore, when leaders bypass a station along the railroad track, performance and development get "off-track" and people get hurt. A common example is the "leave-alone-zap" leadership style, which occurs when a leader tells an inexperienced person what to do (S1) and then jumps to an inappropriate Delegating style (S4), only to return to S1, yelling and screaming, when performance doesn't meet expectations.

In both the development cycle and regressive cycles, changes in leadership style should be made, either forward or backward, one style at a time.

Summary

Situational Leadership® II is more than a model for leading and developing people. It encourages ongoing conversation in a spirit of partnership as individuals learn to take responsibility for their own decision making and problem solving. Leaders realize their role is to provide individuals with whatever it takes—clear goals, direction, support, training, feedback, and recognition—to help the people they work with become more self-directed, self-motivated, and self-reliant.

Conversely, individuals begin to realize that their *own* behavior determines the leadership style used with them. Thus, Situational Leadership® II becomes a vehicle for individuals to use when asking for the help they need in order to develop.

Through Situational Leadership® II, the frequency and quality of conversations about performance and development increase and the organization develops and retains its most talented people.

*Other Applications**

While Situational Leadership® II has been widely accepted as a means for developing individuals, it is also a valuable model for promoting self-development, for building high performing teams, and for initiating and implementing change at the organizational level.

Self-Development: Individuals can use the Situational Leadership® II Model to identify their own development level and take the initiative to get the direction and support they need.

Team Development: Situational Leadership® II is also useful in the development of teams. Stages of development are determined by a group's productivity and morale. The team leader's and the team members' *Directive Behavior* and *Supportive Behavior* facilitate growth through each of the four stages.

Organizational Change: At the organizational level, *Directive Behavior* becomes *focusing behavior* and *Supportive Behavior* becomes *inspiring behavior*. Four combinations of *focusing* and *inspiring behaviors* are used to address concerns people express in the process of organizational change.

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* For more information, refer to The Ken Blanchard Companies' programs on Situational Self Leadership (self-development), Building High Performing Teams® (group development), and Situational Leadership® II—Change Management (organizational change).

Further Reading

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