

Are YOU a Smart Leader?

Years later I can still see in my mind's eye the shattered cabinets strewn like a yard-sale atop the unforgiving concrete floor of the loading dock...

For half a year, between college and grad school, I worked for my father in a family-owned business that designed, fabricated, delivered, and installed high-end, custom-made wood products. I was part of the delivery phase of the business food chain, wheeling around southern California in a white 29-foot split-axel cab-over Ford flatbed truck delivering newly manufactured goods to countless construction sites chomping at the bit for the day when they would morph into hotels and universities and office complexes.

One day, due to the increased workload, an additional driver had been hired and his first day on the job turned out to be quite eventful. George (not his real name—he may still be in a witness protection program J) assured us that he was on familiar turf with the trucks we were using; so when it came time to load his truck, he slipped it into reverse and backed down the incline into the loading dock.

So far, so good.

A load of thirty 4-drawer oak filing cabinets, out-bound for a recently renovated law office in LA, was carefully positioned on his flatbed. The next step was to very slowly pull the truck out of the loading dock to level ground so that the tie-down straps could be winched tightly to secure the load.

That's when it all went south...in a hurry.

Endeavoring to slowly climb his truck up the loading dock incline, he mistakably shoved the gearshift into THIRD gear instead of FIRST gear. (You can see how this is going to turn out, huh?). The engine lugged, started rolling back down the incline, and on impulse George hit the brakes and the cabinets went flying!

Okay, so you ask, what does THAT have to do with life and leadership?

Simply this: **leaders need to know the capacity of those in their charge.** They must be attentive to each person's level of competency. And having assessed that level of competency, provide a requisite level of supervision.

Leaders need to know the capacity of those in their charge.

Ken Blanchard, author of countless leadership books, lays out a very helpful construct in [Leadership and the One Minute Manager](#). His simple model calls out four leadership styles that leaders can leverage based on the competency of their direct report.

- **Style 1: Directing**—The leader provides specific instructions and closely supervises task accomplishment.
- **Style 2: Coaching**—The leader continues to direct and closely supervise task accomplishment,

but also explains decisions, solicits suggestions, and supports progress.

- **Style 3: Supporting**—The leader facilitates and supports his/her direct report efforts toward task accomplishment and shares responsibility for decision-making with them.
- **Style 4: Delegating**—The leader turns over responsibility for decision-making and problem-solving to his/her direct report.

Using the language of this construct, our friend George received “delegation”. Unfortunately, what he really needed was a truckload (pun intended) of “direction”.

So who are the people in your tribe of leadership influence? And have you rightly gauged the style of leadership that is needed for them to be successful?

Ultimately, this is a call for leaders to be ATTENTIVE—attentive to whom they are supervising, and equally important, the task being performed. Attentive because in one task a person may bring very limited experience and require a lot of DIRECTING, but in another task the same person may be quite accomplished and all that is needed is DELEGATING. **In short, it’s “situational leadership”—matching your style of leadership both with the person AND the situation.**

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A leader must constantly ask the question: “What does THIS person need in THIS situation to be successful?”

Take a moment to think about two or three influencers who through the years have provided you with this kind of leadership intentionality.

And thank them.

Then pass it on.

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