

Small But Mighty Agency Podcast

Episode 79: 4 Leadership Styles to Get You Out of the One-Size-Fits-All Approach

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Are You Just Delegating or Truly Leading? If you've ever faced disappointment despite 'clear' instructions or felt like your leadership approach isn't resonating – I've been there too. Leadership is more than the oversimplified mantra of "just delegate."

There is much more to growing a business with a team than "just delegate." Because Delegating is one style of leadership out of four styles. I've been doing leadership for 15 years, and I know relying on a one-size-fits-all approach always falls short. In this episode, I dive into 4 leadership styles that go beyond the oversimplified mantra of delegation. I'm talking about adapting your style so that you can build a stronger, more resilient high performing team. Knowing which style to use can make all the difference, whether you're a seasoned leader or stepping into a leadership role for the first time.

Tune in to get the goods on going from a delegator to a dynamic leader who knows how to tap into your team's strengths.

Audrey Joy Kwan

Welcome to the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you're a marketer or consultant, or a creative on a journey of growth from solopreneur to agency owner, follow along because I pull back the curtains on the realities of growing and running a scalable, service-based business and building lean team. I'm your host, Audrey Joy Kwan, I know what it takes to build an agency, whether it's from solo to three, five or twenty. I've done it, including supporting an agency owner to sell and exit. I've coached and consulted over 120 marketers, creatives, and consultants. And I've been behind the scenes of seven figure businesses. I also have a master's degree in communications specializing in organizational development. All this to say, I know what it takes to grow lead and operate a multiple six, and seven figure small but mighty agency. And here on this podcast is where we'll dive right in.

Audrey Joy Kwan

Hey friends, welcome back to the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. As we draw closer to the year-end, I've been thinking about my clients and what they've committed to implementing this year that has helped them grow their business.

I've been sharing with you and my clients – over this podcast and in my social media channels that “just delegate” is generic advice that I hear a lot of – and is taken out of context and prescribed as the solution to help business owners and get back more time.

The challenge with that advice is that it's “one size fits all”.

And “just delegate” was my introduction to leadership 15 years ago, before I had my Master's Degree in Communications.

“You just have to delegate more,” was the advice my then-boss gave me the first time I was given responsibility for more than one direct report.

Back then I had gone from managing marketing events with a direct report of one at the agency I was working at, to overseeing a team of five reports on a marketing campaign for the agency, and the client was a Fortune 100.

That was my introduction to leading a team fifteen years ago.

It's also why I find the oversimplified “just delegate” mantra frustrating. There is much more to growing a business with a team than “just delegate.”

I coach and support my clients in understanding and implementing adaptive leadership. And working on adaptive leadership skills has significantly contributed to their personal and business growth.

Delegating is just one style of leadership out of four styles. We'll get to the four styles today because relying on a one-size-fits-all approach always falls short.

Leaders with high-performing teams choose the style by getting clear on the situation; they are **informed** by the objectives of the task **and** the abilities and enthusiasm *of the individual involved in that task*.

What happens when you “just delegate” without being informed?

Let's look at this scenario:

- You assign a project with little direction and support and confidently say, “Let me know if you need help.”
- She doesn't ask for support and truthfully doesn't know what to ask
- You believe “she's got this”, because she didn't raise any flags
- The results are disappointing because it doesn't live up to the standards you imagined

- She thought she understood what you wanted; you thought you communicated clearly.
- Frustration all-around.

If the story sounds familiar, you're not alone; it's a theme when doers transition to leaders. I'm speaking both from experience and having experienced the same story from the agency leaders I serve.

The good news is that you can break that cycle; the way through that scenario is to apply adaptive leadership and know how to discern which styles to use and when.

For business owners and leaders, one of the challenges is that you are often guided by the examples you have collected in your past on leadership — how you were either led or not led and whether you disagree or agree on the leadership style impacts how you lead.

If a leadership style doesn't work for you, you may lean too much in the opposite direction. It's natural, you don't want to be the leader you didn't like.

If you experienced a leadership style you enjoyed, you might over-emulate that one style. Again, it's natural because it worked well for you.

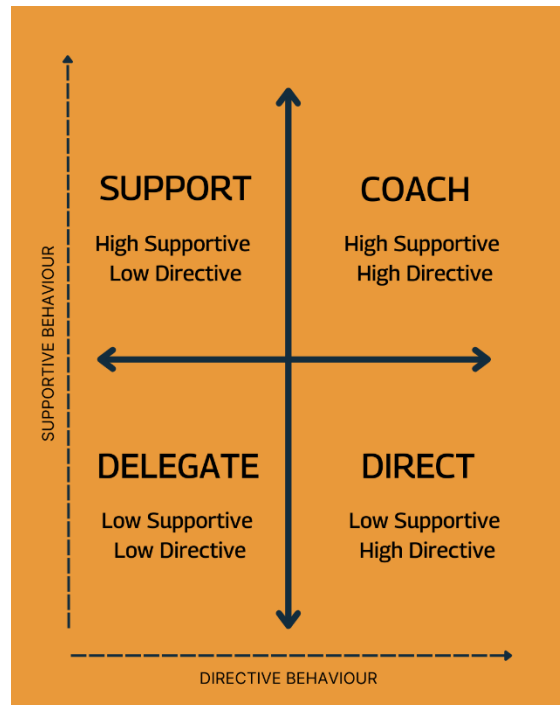
The challenge is if you are only limited to one perspective of leadership, the one you prefer, you are missing out on what makes leaders genuinely effective, and that is the ability to meet people where they are so you can help them grow.

Let's look at the four styles *and look at them without judgment because each style has a purpose and place.*

The four styles of leadership are

- Support
- Coach
- Delegate
- Direct

What makes each style different are the levels of supportive behaviour and directive behaviour involved.



Supportive behaviour is encouragement and empathy to motivate team members, showing understanding and concern for their needs and challenges.

Directive behaviour is meeting goals and standards with clear instructions and expectations on what needs to be done and how it should be done.

I've placed each leadership style on an XY Grid in a blog post on LinkedIn that I'll link to in the show notes to make it easier for you to visualize.

Support is high supportive, low directive.
 Coach is high supportive, high directive.
 Delegate is low supportive, low directive.
 Direct is low supportive, high directive.

Again, if you click on the link in the show notes it will take you to a blog post that will plot these 4 leadership styles in an XY grid to show you how they are different from each other.

Adaptive leadership is choosing the style based on the other person's experience of the task or goal and their competence and motivation, and that's how you help others grow faster.

A leader knows when to be more supportive and when to be more directive as needed to help people grow. It means you are flexible in style; you flex your leadership style by evaluating what will support the person to grow for the given task or project.

I want to provide you with more context on the styles and when to use them:

Supportive

Supportive leadership gives the individual space to prove themselves and lead the process with little direction because there is a track record of experience working with you.

Support is provided by helping people think through decisions because a track record of working with you and a track record of competency is established. This style is low directive and is vital when team members are competent but may need more confidence or motivation.

Coaching

Coaching leadership is about identifying and nurturing the potential of each team member. And yes, it's a more time-intensive approach, but it creates long-term benefits for your business.

This style is highly valuable when team members have the potential but need guidance to improve their skills or performance. It provides more directive behaviour than supportive leadership because of the need to enhance skills or performance.

Directive

Directive leadership is providing clear directions and quick decisions.

This style is most effective in situations requiring immediate action or urgency and when the team lacks knowledge or experience.

Directive leaders lay out specific guidelines, procedures, and standards.

Delegate

Delegative leadership is handing out a task or assignment with little direction and little support.

This style works well for leaders when they fully trust the person's decision-making abilities on the task or goal because they are both skilled and motivated and have a track record of working with you successfully.

As you understand the nuanced dynamics of leadership styles, it becomes clear that it goes far beyond the oversimplified mantra of "just delegate."

To wrap this episode up:

Effective leadership is about versatility and adaptability. It's about recognizing that different situations and team members require different approaches.

Whether choosing support, coaching, providing clear directives, or delegating tasks – one is not better than the other; what matters is knowing how and when to use each style because each style uniquely nurtures growth and achieves goals.

And so, the key is your ability to discern which style to use based on the competence and motivation of your team members for the task at hand.

With the adaptive approach, you move beyond a one-size-fits-all model to unlock your full potential as a leader and your team's potential.

In summary This journey from doer to leader is not about rigidly adhering to a single style but rather developing the flexibility to switch between styles as the situation demands.

The result is more dynamic, responsive, and effective leadership that creates high-performing teams.

That's it for this episode. If you enjoyed this episode, please share it, or rate and review it!

Thanks for being here, and I'll see you on the next one!

Audrey Joy Kwan

Hey, there. Thanks for hanging out with me at the Small But Mighty Agency Podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, it would mean the world to me if you hit the follow or subscribe button in your podcast app and share it with a friend and I'll see you in the next one.