



# Finding the Right Leadership Style

Business leaders reflect on their career history to discuss how, and why, they've adapted their approach to leading a team. Mary-Anne Baldwin reports

**G**uiding people and situations is not a one-size fits all game; leadership styles must evolve to suit the environment and people around them. As such, a good leader will be responsive, adaptive and open to feedback, all of which takes excellent emotional intelligence.

"Leading a team largely comes down to engagement. Get people inspired enough and they'll follow you on whatever journey you wish to take them," explains **Tom Beedham**, Director of Programme Management at Criticaleye. "Of course, complexity comes when leading teams of different

personalities, cultures or geographies – but it's your job as a leader to read the room. Regular feedback on your leadership style can help with this."

Here, we ask business leaders how, and why, they've adapted their leadership styles over the years: >



### Caroline Rainbird

Director of Regulatory Affairs  
Royal Bank of Scotland

I reflect a lot on the styles I come across in other individuals, and try to incorporate those I have an affinity with into what I do. For example, I've been influenced by leaders who have listened to me and adapted their approach.

I try to have a very open, inclusive and affiliative style. I want to make it clear to people that while I have views and opinions, I don't know everything and want to hear their ideas.

When I took on my current role, I was not a subject matter expert and had a lot to get through. I needed to engage with the experts around me but they didn't work at the pace I wanted. I realised I had to slow down in order to go faster and modify my approach in an engaging way.

As a leader, it's really important to role model behaviour but also to show that you're adapting and learning yourself.

I choose people in the organisation who I trust to get feedback on how my leadership style lands, because if it's not working I need to know and to modify it where I can.

Across the bank, we're rolling out a new and consistent approach to leadership. One great part of this is continuous observational feedback and coaching, under which I locate the skills I can work on to improve my leadership style. I then work on that skill until it becomes authentic and sustainable. It's being rolled out from the top, throughout the organisation.

*“In my view, a good chairman needs to be a chameleon and able to adapt their leadership style to fit the particular situation”*



### Alastair Lyons

Chairman, Admiral Group

Early on in my career, when I was a CFO, I asked my then Chair of Audit whether I was capable of stepping up to the role of CEO. He told me yes, but only if I learnt how to leave the office without checking if the windows were open. I was known for my detailed approach and had to learn to let go.

My leadership style as a chairman has also developed over the 16 years I've held the role across different businesses. I now have a much greater focus on the strategic, rather than operational, elements. I've also developed my ability to communicate both internally and externally, and understand the importance of really knowing the mindset of all stakeholders, including what is not said as much as what is.

In my view, a good chairman needs to be a chameleon and able to adapt their leadership style to fit the

particular situation. I enjoy deciphering how to work with people, understanding the person, what their strengths are, what their fears are, and how they like to interact so that I can properly engage with them.

Those I've found hardest to work with have very set ideas on how to get things done and resistance to input, mixed with a strong belief in their own importance. That kind of person I find difficult to relate to.



### Gary Kildare

Chief HR Officer, Europe, IBM

If there are aspects of your personality that you don't like, you can certainly make adjustments to them. However, it's important that you're natural; don't spend time trying to be something you're not.

I think the same is true in leadership – being a leader can be tough enough without trying to fake it. Also a message often has more impact when delivered in a natural style.

There are many examples of people having to behave in a particular way because circumstances or situations demand it, but it's not something they can do long term. Ultimately your true mettle will show through and it's often at points of high pressure.

What you should focus attention on is changing your unproductive or negative habits, such as micro-managing,

inspecting, checking and reviewing. Over time this will change your behaviour.

We all need feedback but it must be constructive, just being told what you do wrong won't help. You must also decide how much stock you take in others' opinions, while being open to change. I'd hate to be like an actor on opening night who celebrates the good reviews but completely ignores the bad.

*“What you should focus attention on is changing your unproductive or negative habits, such as micro-managing, inspecting, checking and reviewing”*



### Margaret Rumpf

General Manager, Hong Kong & Macau  
Emerging Markets & Asia Pacific  
GlaxoSmithKline

Everyone has comparable expertise by the time they are in a senior executive role, but what distinguishes someone above the rest is their ability to communicate, inspire and engage different people across the organisation. That means being able to adapt one's leadership style to suit the relevant audience.

I think it is incredibly important to know – and adapt to – who you are influencing, their perspective and the reason why they would buy into your message. It sounds really simple, but I see too many people trying to drive their own agenda and then asking why people haven't followed in their direction. This takes time and effort.

I ensure the key message is clear and consistent no matter who I speak to, but how I frame the idea will be different depending on the audience. I also look at my circle of influence to ensure I cover everyone, not just those above me.