

JST & Dr Eve Poole Leadership Development Series:

Flexing Style

One of the Critical Incidents of leadership is learning how to flex your leadership style. One way to address this is to use the model about types of 'helping' conversations designed by John Heron. He draws a distinction between 'push' styles and 'pull' styles. He calls his push styles 'authoritative interventions' and his pull ones 'facilitative interventions'. He has three styles for each. His premise is that a good conversationalist will regard these six as the basic dance steps which, when mastered and combined, will produce the full variety of dances that any conversation may require.

Push Styles

- 1 Prescribing – telling someone what to do
- 2 Informing – providing information or options
- 3 Confronting – holding a mirror up, either positively or negatively

Pull Styles

- 1 Cathartic – releasing emotions that may be blocking progress
- 2 Catalytic – asking questions to speed the thinking process along
- 3 Supporting – expressing solidarity and support

For example, you might say to a colleague: 'You could do A or B, but I always find that A works best – let me know if you need help with it.' This conversation comprises informing, prescribing, then supporting. Or, 'I heard some great feedback about you the other day. People think you are A and B. Why don't you try for that promotion now?' This combines confronting, informing, prescribing. Or 'You seem upset. How can I help?' - a cathartic and catalytic intervention. So the dance need not be long, just expertly constructed. Equally you can use this approach to programme a lengthier interaction, perhaps a coaching conversation, or a conversation about priorities or difficulties.

To improve your skill in this area, start taking notes in meetings about what kinds of interventions are being used. Is the tone more push (authoritative) or pull (facilitative)? Are there any of the six styles that are not present at all? If any are neglected, you might want to add them into the discussion.

When you feel confident, start noticing your own habits and patterns and gently vary them to increase your range. Some styles you will find easier than others, but knowing you can use them all will help you feel that you have more choice in the conversations you have, and more options at your disposal if the conversation does not go the way you planned.

Please email us if you have any questions: alumni@johnsmithtrust.org