



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer Transcript for Episode #035 The Leadership Styles Continuum

January 28, 2016

Amy Climer: Hi everyone! This is Amy Climer. Welcome to the Deliberate Creative Podcast [Episode 35](#). Today's episode is about leadership styles. This episode is specifically dedicated to my friend Mo. Earlier this week Mo and I were hanging out having a beer, a little happy hour get together. We often have really interesting conversations about leadership and group development and team building and yeah, love talking about this stuff with Mo. In our conversation I was talking about Leadership styles. And Mo said "oh, you know, I really need to review that." I said "Oh, I'll do a podcast for you." So Mo, this podcast is for you. We are going to talk about the leadership style continuum. All of us probably have a default style. What is ideal is if we can flex and adjust and adapt our style to the situation and the need of the team that we are leading. Today's episode I am going to explain three different styles in the leadership continuum. This also relates back to last week's episode, [Episode 34](#), about the three elements the team needs to succeed. Those were task, relationship and process. We're going to build on that a little bit. Next week in [Episode 36](#), I am going to talk about the stages of group development and how your leadership style, particularly needs to change based on where the where your group is and their stage of development. We'll talk about that next week. Episode 34, 35 and 36 all go together, although you can understand any of them if you only listened to this one.

[2:30]

1



www.climerconsulting.com



Let's talk about leadership styles. There are three different styles that we are going to focus on today. Probably you could argue that there are dozens of different styles out there if not hundreds. But, these three are main ones and they fall along a continuum. I think that understanding them helps leaders understand when do I need to behave a certain way and when do I need to behave in a different way. The differences between these three leadership styles are based on how decisions are made and how direction is given or used within the group. So on the far left side of the continuum is the autocratic or directive leadership style. In the middle is a democratic leadership style. On the far right is the abdicator or delegative leadership style. So let's talk about each one at a time.

[3:36] Autocratic Leadership Style

The Autocratic leadership style is where the decision making function resides primarily with the assigned leader. If I am the leader I am in charge, I am making the decision. This can be very useful at times. Some of the benefit of this type is that it's fast. We are not spending time talking the decision, it's just made. It can be a very fast process. However, it also discourages group commitment because if the group does not agree with you then they may not be as committed. It does not promote like spontaneity or creativity within the group. Despite that, there are times when this style is very helpful. I think the most obvious time is in a crisis situation. Where we have an emergency and we don't have time to ponder what we should do. We need to act quickly and move forward. This particularly works well if the people involved were trained and they know what to do, specifically the leader. So I want you to imagine a team of EMTs. They come in. They are well trained. They know what to do in these emergency situations. They see what happens. There is this person in charge and they start directing other people. You do not see the EMTs sitting out on the side talking in a huddle while somebody is on the ground bleeding profusely. That would never happen. Well, hopefully that would never happen.

It also can be an effective style if one person in particular has more knowledge, or has more experience in a given situation. Actually a couple of weeks ago I was travelling in Costa Rica and working with Outward Bound. One of the things that happens on Outward Bound, which is an experience where we are out on the wilderness, we are backpacking for multiple days, we are

2



camping, we are completely self-sufficient, we have all our food, all of our gear with us. The leader, the Outward Bound instructors, we tend to have more knowledge and more experience about the given situation. There are times when we will tell the group “This is what you need to do in this situation.” Ninety nine percent of the time, the group would say “yeah, we don’t know anything about this so we are going to follow your directions.” But then there are other times in the same program, same environment, where it is not a safety issue and so we can be more open and flexible, we can use a different leadership style. Autocratic is the most efficient and it can be the most effective in certain situations where you don't want to spend a lot of time weighing all the options or getting everyone’s input. That is the autocratic style or the directive style - another word for it.

[6:28] Democratic Style

The next style is called the democratic style. In this case the decision making process resides within the group. The characteristic of this is it is slower. It is definitely a slower process than directive or autocratic style. But, it also encourages group commitment to the outcome. It produces greater initiative within the group and they are more willing to step forward and jump in ideas. But one of the challenges of this style is that it can produce a disenchanted minority. Let’s say you have a group decision and everybody talked about it. You have raised some different ideas, and then you decide “alright, we need to make a decision.” It could be, say out of ten people, seven people really strongly agree with decision A. But then there are three people that really wanted decision B, but it is not going to happen. We are going with decision A. Depending on the process used and how that happens, that smaller group of three people, they may really be disappointed and frustrated and upset. They might just decide, “I am not going along with this. I am just quietly sabotage this whole situation.” That could be dangerous depending on the situation, depending on all the factors. Now that doesn't mean that every time someone disagree with the decision that they're going to do bad things. No, absolutely not. A lot of times people disagree, but their disagreements are rather minor. Well, “I would have preferred decision B, but I am okay with decision A.” As a leader, your job when you are using the democratic leadership style is to facilitate this process of having different opinions heard,

3



helping people pay attention to the three things we talked about last week: relationship, task and process. In this case, the task is a decision has to be made, we have to get something done. The relationship is how you go about making the decision. Are you paying attention to honoring each other and getting people's voices in the room? Are you paying attention to people's past experience and their knowledge about the decision? That's the relationship.

Then the third is the process. How are you going about making that decision? I think sometimes we hear the word democratic leadership style and we think, especially in the US, we think directly to our government system. We immediately think of voting. Like "oh it's democratic, that means we have to vote." Well, not necessarily. Really what democratic means in this case is that every one's voice is heard and weighed and part of the process. There's a number of ways to come with that final decision besides actually voting. It can be a consensus process where the group, you're getting to a point where everybody agrees pretty much, say on a scale of one to five everybody is like a three, four, or five. Five is the best and they are like. "I am not crazy about it, but I am neutral I am a three. We can move forward." That will be an appropriate consensus style process. Whereas with a strict democratic process where you are using a vote somebody can be a one or two, but everyone else is a five so you move forward and that's where you have the problem with disenfranchised minority. So as a leader your job is to pay attention to this. To see is there a way to bring those who disagree. If they are a one or a two how do we bring them up to a three? What changes need to be made in order to get them to that level? Is it okay they disagree on that strongly? I have seen situations where people feel like "You know what, I completely disagree with this, but if this is what the team decides, I am going to be on board and I am going to help whenever I can." That's really helpful information to know. As a leader if you jump right in, Ok, let's vote and there's not time for conversation you might miss that information. If you vote and do not allow conversation afterwards, you might miss that information of what the minority feels. Or even why people are voting the way they are. Sometimes their reasoning might not be what you think. That is just valuable and part of the process. So you can see that while having all those conversations, this is going to take a little while. It is a helpful process when the objective is to build group cohesiveness when there is available time to have this process. It also can increase group commitment. So if you really want

4



www.climerconsulting.com



full group commitment to something spending the time on a democratic process and playing the role of a democratic leader can be really important. Alright, so we have talked about the autocratic, and most recent one democratic. Now we are going to the third style which is the abdicatic or the delegative leadership style.

[12:10] Abdicatic Style

The word abdicatic comes from the word abdicate which means to give up or to let go of. So if I am abdicating my leadership I am essentially relinquishing it and letting it go, but not one hundred percent. This style provides the group with the most control. In this case the decision making function has been relinquished with the group and really resides within the group. The leader has passed on the decision making power to the group and agrees to abide with their decision. So in a democratic style where you are bringing the group in, you are still part of that decision making process, you have a vote, you're involved, but with the abdicatic style, you let the group decide and you might be a quiet participant, you might be facilitating, but you are really letting go of that power. The value of this is that it can lead to a high sense of accomplishment amongst the group. It can also promote spontaneity and creativity. If a group knows, "Hey, we can get to make the decision all by ourselves, and we get to make decisions without having to consult a leader or get the approval", it can open up some more doors that people might not have thought of otherwise. This style really only works if the group has a high level of experience and skills in the area or the tasks at hand. If a group is brand new at doing something and you just let them go, depending on the context, it could really be frustrating. Now there are other times that maybe that will lead to discovery and maybe that learning could be valuable, but you want to weigh that and decide. What are the situations where I can abdicate and what are the situations where I can not or should not.

Another important piece about this style is the leader is still responsible for the decision of the group. It should only be used when you have full trust in the group and you know they have the capabilities, the capacity, the experience, and skills to make a sound decision. It can be used in a situation where maybe they don't have the experience, but the decision they make, whatever the choices, is okay. There is not a right or wrong and maybe the consequences are not that

5



www.climerconsulting.com



high. I think about putting a group together to plan an office party. There are so many ways that could be really good. The stakes are not that high, in most cases at least. Most leaders are probably comfortable with the group making all the decision and deciding on different factors on their own. It is also a style that a leader can use to essentially alleviate time from themselves. If they are feeling like their plates are really full and they have a lot going on they can let go of some of those decisions by turning it over to the group. That's the abdicatoric or the delegative leadership style.

Now maybe by now halfway listening you have seen that there's one of those styles where you tend to do more. Maybe you're an autocratic, you are more democratic, or you are more delegative or abdicatoric. Understanding which style is your default is very helpful because then you know it can help you figure out when do I need to change. When do I need to adjust my style? What we are going to talk next week is the different stages of group development and how your style needs to change both in order for the group to develop further and because of their development it almost like a cycle. But you can imagine that if you are an autocratic leader and you are always autocratic leader the group learns to follow directions really well. They do not necessarily learn how to collaborate with each other. What they learn is that is not the appropriate thing to do in this context. They also may have a lot of creative ideas, but they learn not to share them. Being able to move away from autocratic style can help increase creativity, can help increase effectiveness of using all the brains and all the experience in a team.

[17:00] Weekly Challenge

So here is your weekly challenge. For those of you who are regular listeners you know that every week I give a weekly challenge. Something for you to do, for you to work on based on what we talked about today for you to do next week before the next episode comes out. So your job is to talk with three to five people that you work with. Tell them about this three different leadership styles. Have them listen to this podcast episode if that makes sense, or if they are into that. Ask them which style they think you are. Which style are you most likely to use? Do you tend to be more abdicatoric, democratic or autocratic? Find out from three of your colleagues. It is very easy to put ourselves in a category but it may not be accurate. The way others see us is not the way

6



www.climerconsulting.com



we see ourselves. Getting that input from three to five different people will really be a good idea. That's your weekly challenge. If you can do it next week before Episode 36 that would even better as we talked about how or when to flex your styles.

So before I close the day I want to give a shout out to Brian. Brian is a listener who emailed me a couple of weeks ago to tell me how much he enjoyed the podcasts. So first of all thank you Brian for the email and I asked Brian if he could take what he put in the email and put it in the iTunes review which he was very kind to do. I want to read this review to you because I think it's kind of awesome. His screen name is bdcouns and his review is titled "Connecting education in multiple settings" five stars. He writes: "As a teacher in an alternative high school and a facilitator in outdoor adventure education, the content delivered in this podcast is inspiring, practical, and useful. Throughout Amy's variety of topics covered, she does a terrific job of unifying conceptual ideas that run through team facilitation, experiential education, group process, leading professional development, business models, and classroom teaching. It is a refreshing meld and unification for me coming primarily from the classroom teacher side of things, but slowly trying to blend that world with my passions and work experience in outdoor adventure education. Great stuff. The future of education needs your message and ideas!" That's so awesome. Thank you Brian. I really appreciate the review.

If you haven't written a review on [iTunes](#) I would love for you to do that. If you go to climerconsulting.com/iTunes it'll take you right to the iTunes page, you can click on Write a Review, give me an honest review. Tell me what you think of this podcast. It should only take you a couple of minutes. Just a bit of warning that when you do write a review, it takes about 24 hours or so for iTunes to put it up. If you write one do not be alarmed if you do not see it right away. I am not really sure why iTunes does that but that's how it works. By the way I will put some resources in this week's show notes and you can find the notes at climerconsulting.com/035. The other thing you should know is that I regularly teach teams how to use these processes, how to flex their leadership styles, how to understand group dynamics, which we will talk about next week. If that is something you are interested in, shoot me an email, or give me a call. You can find my contact information on my website at

7



www.climerconsulting.com



climerconsulting.com. I would love to talk with you about working with your team. It is one of my favorite things to do. Have a wonderful week and go check out your leadership style, find out what your colleagues think. I will see you next time. Bye.