**Leadership Styles: Autocratic Leadership**



**What is it?**

In an autocratic leadership style, the person in charge has total authority and control over decision making. By virtue of their position and job responsibilities, they not only control the efforts of the team, but monitor them for completion –often under close scrutiny

This style is reminiscent of the earliest tribes and empires. Obviously, our historical movement toward democracy brings a negative connotation to autocracy, but in some situations, it is the most appropriate type of leadership. That, of course, doesn’t mean a blank check to ignore the wellbeing of his subordinate.

**When is it used?**

The autocratic leadership style is best used in situations where control is necessary, often where there is little margin for error. When conditions are dangerous, rigid rules can keep people out of harm’s way. Many times, the subordinate staff is inexperienced or unfamiliar with the type of work and heavy oversight is necessary.

Rigid organizations often use this style. It has been known to be very paternalistic, and in highly-professional, independent minded teams, it can lead to resentment and strained morale.

**Good fits for Autocratic Leadership:**

* Military
* Manufacturing
* Construction

**How to be effective with this position:**

It’s easy to see the immediate goal of this type of leadership: use your expertise to get the job done. Make sure that everyone is exactly where they need to be and doing their job, while the important tasks are handled quickly and correctly.

In many ways this is the oldest leadership style, dating back to the early empires. It’s very intuitive to tell people what needs to be done by when.

It is difficult balancing the use of authority with the morale of the team. Too much direct scrutiny will make your subordinates miserable, and being too heavy handed will squelch all group input. Being an effective autocratic leader means being very intentional about when and how demands are made of the team.

Here are some things to keep in mind to be an effective when acting as an autocratic leader:

* **Respect your Subordinates:** It’s easy to end up as rigid as the rules you are trying to enforce. It’s important that you stay fair and acknowledge that everyone brings something to the table, even if they don’t call the shots. Making subordinates realize they are respected keeps moral up and resentment low; every functional team is built on a foundation of mutual respect.
* **Explain the rules:** Your people know they have to follow procedure, but it helps them do a better job if they know why.
* **Be consistent:** If your role in the team is to enforce the company line, you have to make sure you do so consistently and fairly. It’s easy to respect someone objective, but hard to trust someone who applies policy differently in similar circumstances.
* **Educate before you enforce:** Having everyone understand your expectations up front will mean less surprises down the road. Being above board from the outset prevents a lot of miscommunications and misunderstandings.
* **Listen, even if you don’t change:** We all want to feel like our opinions are appreciated, even if they aren’t going to lead to immediate change and being a leader means that your team will want to bring their opinions to you. It’s important to be clear that they are heard, no matter the outcome.