**Leadership Styles: Democratic Leadership Style**

**What is it?**

The democratic leadership style is a very open and collegial style of running a team. Ideas move freely amongst the group and are discussed openly. Everyone is given a seat at the table, and discussion is relatively free-flowing.

This style is needed in dynamic and rapidly changing environments where very little can be taken as a constant. In these fast moving organizations, every option for improvement has to be considered to keep the group from falling out of date.

The democratic leadership style means facilitating the conversation, encouraging people to share their ideas, and then synthesizing all the available information into the best possible decision. The democratic leader must also be able to communicate that decision back to the group to bring unity the plan is chosen.

**When is it Used?**

When situations change frequently, democratic leadership offers a great deal of flexibility to adapt to better ways of doing things. Unfortunately, it is also somewhat slow to make a decision in this structure, so while it may embrace newer and better methods; it might not do so very quickly.

Democratic leadership style can bring the best out of an experienced and professional team. It capitalizes on their skills and talents by letting them share their views, rather than simply expecting them to conform.

If a decision is very complex and broad, it is important to have the different areas of expertise represented and contributing input – this is where democratic leader shines.

**Good fits for Democratic Leadership:**

* **Creative groups (advertising, design):** ideas need to flow in creative environments to find create new concepts and designs.
* **Consulting:** when paid to explore problems and find solutions, your role will be to explore the possibilities in depth, and that means there has to be a great deal of exploration and open discussion.
* **Much of the Service industry:** new ideas allow for more flexibility to changing customer demands.
* **Education:** few places need to be open to different ideas than education, both by educators and their students.

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

* **Keep communication open:** If the marketplace of ideas is going to be open for business, everyone needs to feel comfortable enough to put their ideas on the table. The democratic leadership style thrives when all the considerations are laid out for everyone to examine.
* **Focus the discussion:** It’s hard to keep unstructured discussion productive. It’s the leader’s job to balance being open to ideas and keeping everything on-topic. If the conversation begins to stray, remind everyone of the goal on hand and then steer it back. Make sure to take note of off-topic comments and try to return to them when they are pertinent.
* **Be ready to commit:** In the democratic leadership style, you get presented with so many possibilities and suggestions that it can be overwhelming and difficult to commit. But as the leader, when the time comes, you have to choose and do so with conviction. The team depends on the clear and unambiguous mandates to be committed.
* **Respect the ideas:** You and your team might not agree with every idea, and that’s ok. It is important, however, that you create a healthy environment where those ideas are entertained and considered --not maligned-- or the flow of ideas will slow to a trickle.
* **Explain, but don’t apologize:** You want the advocates of the solutions that were not selected to understand that their thoughts were considered and had validity, but that ultimately you had strong reasons to go a different direction. It’s important that the decision be communicated, but you should not apologize for deciding on what you think.