



# LEADER AS COACH

A guide to support leaders to lead differently.

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# Overview

This whitepaper has been created as a guide to support leaders to lead differently.

Why do we need to lead differently? The way we work has changed. Leaders are tired and overworked and they are leading in uncharted waters. Leading remote and hybrid teams is now a normal occurrence and not an exception. The circumstances that leaders used to rely upon to lead aren't the same. Leaders no longer have the same dynamics that they were used to working in. Teams are dispersed, our methods of communication and collaboration have substantially changed, and we are all trying desperately to remain engaged and connected. These changes have created the urgency to now rethink the way we lead.

It's time to look at leadership differently.



## LEADER AS COACH

A leader who is willing to ask more questions than they answer.

You may have chosen a leadership path, or it may have chosen you. Some of us have leadership running through our veins. Leading is all we ever wanted to do. We love setting a vision and mobilising a team to achieve it. Some of us commence our careers in our technical area of expertise, only to find a few years in that we are being provided with opportunities to lead the work we used to do and manage a team too. Whether you chose the path, or it chose you, the leadership lane is where you now find yourself.

This guide has been designed to help you as a leader to lead well. It is a resource that can help you to adapt your leadership style to a new way of working and living. Focusing on coaching as a key method, I'll take you through how you can bring coaching practices into your leadership style to help you lead your team well.

# The Challenges



01

Even though leadership is seen as an esteemed path, it is not necessarily an easy one. There are plenty of challenges that accompany leadership. Some more easily overcome than others. Then let's throw a pandemic in the mix, just to increase the challenge level, shall we?

02

Leaders are feeling overwhelmed and fatigued. The constant changes, new information, and changed directions are exhausting. Finding the energy to deal with the leadership challenges they face is difficult. Between work and personal challenges, there isn't much left in the tank. But somehow, they pull it together to navigate through these uncharted waters. There isn't a playbook for this. It's all quite new.

03

Many leaders are facing a confidence crisis. They are finding it challenging to rely on the same style of leadership they have in the past, as our ways of working have changed. Leaders have a strong desire to be genuine and authentic but this is hard in the current climate.

04

The ability to build and maintain team spirit has continued to be challenging. Leaders have had to work out new ways to keep their teams engaged and connected. Building high performance is also a significant part of this.

05

Given our different ways of working, Leaders are looking for new ways to ignite ideas and promote spark conversations among their teams.

# Developing a deeper understanding of your team

If we use one primary mode to lead, chances are we may not be catering to the individual needs of those in our team. In leadership, one size doesn't fit all. Our team members have different needs, depending on their capabilities and what's happening for them in and out of work.

Leadership modes should be flexible to meet the varying needs of our team. There will be times where you need to be more directive, more supportive, where you need to delegate, and when you need to coach.

These modes were all identified by Ken Blanchard and Paul Hersey when they developed the Situational leadership model. More than fifty years later, the Situational Leadership model is still used in leadership development today. The simplicity of the model, along with the ease of application, is likely what has helped it stand the test of time.



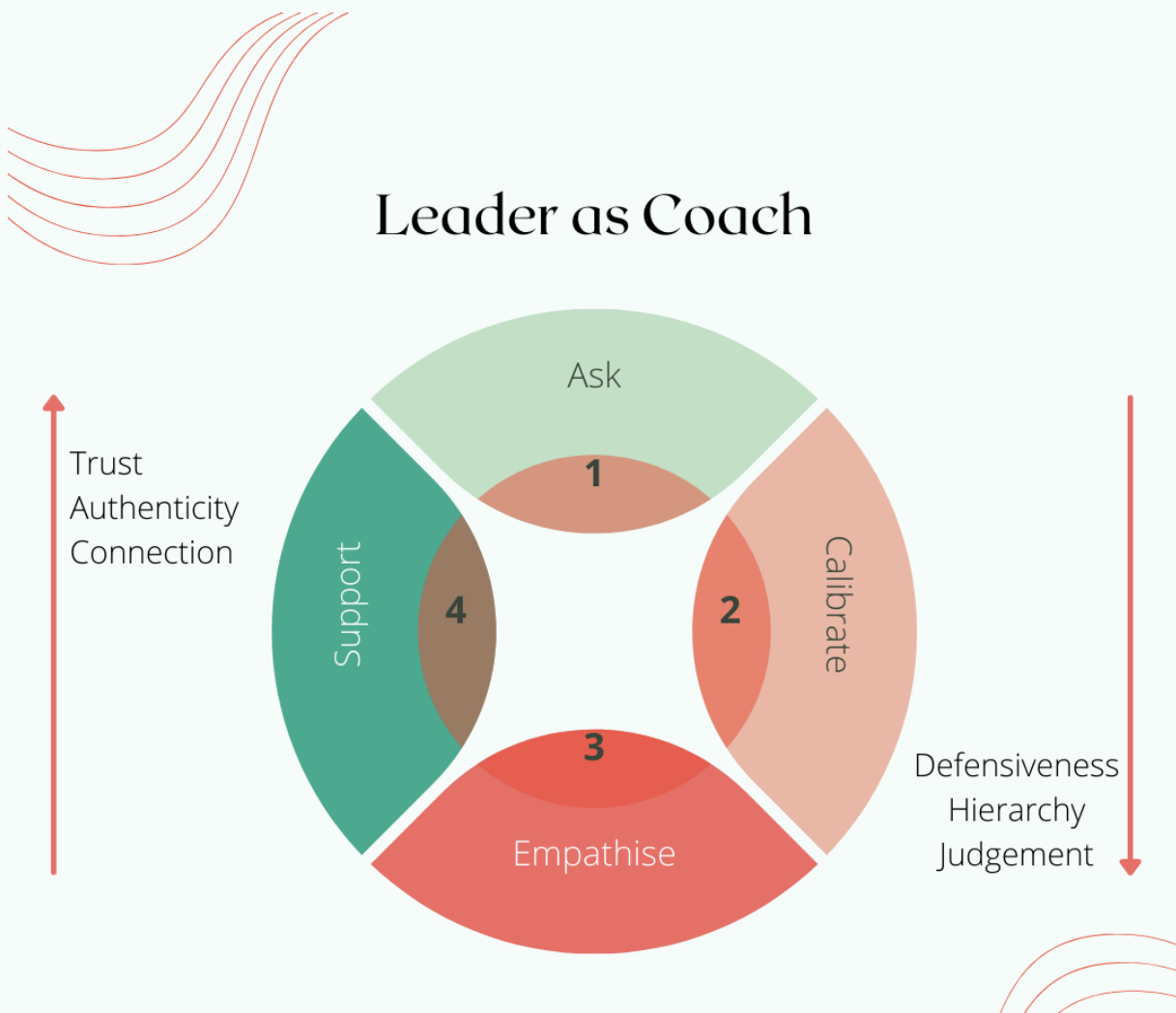
The leader determines which style might be best suited to their team member based on the development stage of their employee. The benefit of this model is that the leader is required to tune into the needs of their employees, rather than leading in one mode. It is more adaptive and places the employee at the centre of the best leadership style required for any situation.

# Coaching in Leadership



Now more than ever there is an opportunity for the Coaching leadership mode to shine. When a leader adopts a coaching mode, trust, authenticity and connection increase between the leader and their team, at an individual and collective level. Defensiveness, hierarchy and judgment decrease, promoting stronger team relationships.

## Leader as Coach- The Model.



# The role of the Leader as Coach



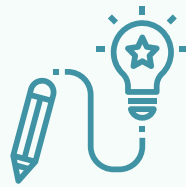
When a leader takes on a coaching style, leadership does look different. Firstly, leadership in this mode is more collaborative. The leader will ask more than tell. In asking they will seek to explore rather than direct. The leader demonstrates a genuine curiosity when seeking to understand, rather than seeking to prove a point. There is a focus on collaboration, guidance, and support. The leader seeks to bring out the best in the team at a team and individual level. Development is based on individual, and team needs and is explored and enabled regularly.

In the Leader as Coach model, four key modes are identified.



## **ASK**

By asking questions, the leader becomes the learner, as opposed to the knower.



## **CALIBRATE**

Leaders are required to synthesise information, and identify the gaps.



## **SUPPORT**

Support in the coaching mode of leadership is contextual and subjective.



## **EMPATHISE**

Empathy limits judgement and helps to view the situation from an alternative perspective.

# The modes explained



## ASK

Leaders can be really good at telling but asking is different. Through asking, leaders pose more questions than they answer. It takes more vulnerability to ask questions than answer them when you are the leader. However, in coaching, asking questions is critical. You can't rely on assumptions and judgements. Asking questions, helps to clarify, and it helps the leader to be in a position of genuinely seeking to understand. It helps the leader to elicit information and get a clearer picture of the facts (O'Connor and Lages 2004). By asking questions, you take on the role of the learners as the learner, as opposed to the leader as the knower (Kofman, 2006).



## CALIBRATE

A coach will calibrate what they are hearing, seeing and observing through the interaction with the person they are coaching. The term is used in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) where the practitioner brings together a variety of inputs that help them make sense of the situation. (O'Connor and Lages 2004). Calibrating refers to the "process of attuning oneself to the non-verbal signals that indicate a particular state in the other person" (Grinder and Bandler, 1987). For Leaders, the skill of calibrating is an important one. Leaders are required to synthesise information, make sense of the information they have, and identify the gaps in the information they require. When leaders can do this through the coaching mode, they are more carefully tuning in to create a fuller picture that will help them best guide their team member.



## EMPATHISE

The ability to empathise in leadership and in coaching, is the same. Empathy is about care, support, and understanding another person's perspective in a more profound way. "Empathy starts with curiosity" (Bregman 2020). This frame is useful in the context of using coaching as a leadership mode, because before one can feel and demonstrate empathy for the position another person may be in, it is useful to be curious, as this will generate questions and keep the mind open to learning more. Empathy limits initial and quick judgements and helps us to view the situation from one or more alternative perspectives.



## SUPPORT

Support in a leadership setting isn't about necessarily solving the problem. It is however about assessing what is required for the person. For some, they will need more hands-on support, which may involve providing direction, instructions, and for the leader to remove barriers and blockages. For others, support may be about needing a sounding board from the leader, so they can bounce an idea, but continue to navigate through the issue they are facing. The type of support a leader can provide in the coaching mode of leadership is completely contextual and subjective. A leader can lean on the "ask" mode to determine the best type of support that will be useful for their team member.

# Support to overcome the leadership challenges you may be facing

If you are feeling that your team are...	The focus is	The coaching action is	Connection and Engagement
Energised	Action	Inspire	✓
Empowered	Accountability	Support	✓
Engaged	Purpose	Connect	✓
Disconnected	Reconnection	Communicate	⚠
Dubious	Trust	Empathise	⚠
Disengaged	Connection	Ask	⚠



Recognising where your team is and the focus and action you can take supports you to keep your team connected and engaged.

Retention, connection, and engagement are also all positively impacted.



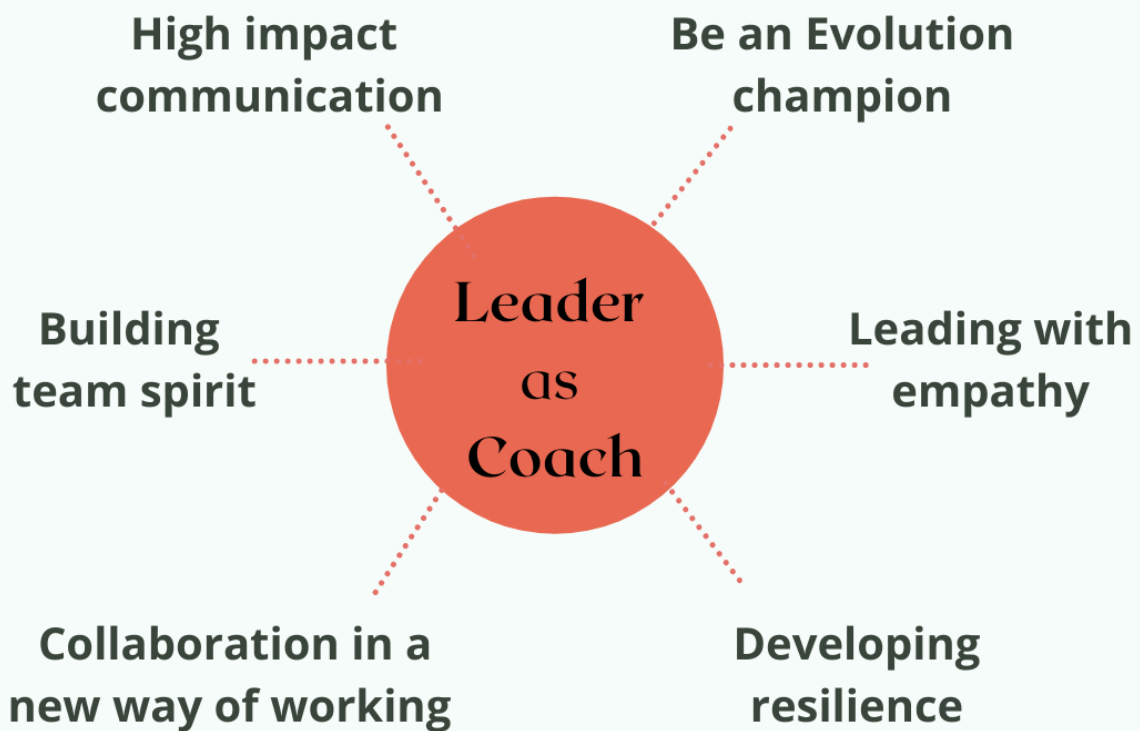
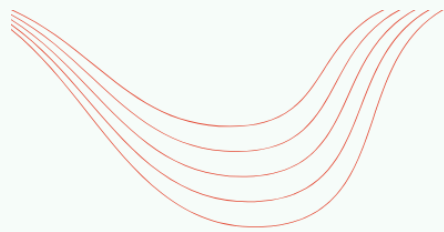
# What does Coaching in leadership look like?



Here are some differences between a leader that leads through a management mode, and a leader that leads through coaching mode.

Leader as Manager	Leader as Coach
Higher ratio of answers provided versus questions asked	Higher ratio of questions asked versus answers provided
Judgemental	Supportive
Focus on weaknesses and development areas	Focus on strengths and opportunities
Directive mode	Exploring mode
Seeks to prove a point	Seeks to understand
Solves problems through action	Solves problems through facilitating outcomes
Tends to be a hierarchical leader	Tends to be a consultative leader
Asserts authority	Shares accountability
Focus on team performance	Focus on team and individual performance
Focus on results	Focus on empathy

# The Leader as Coach Program



In acknowledging the importance of using coaching as a key mode in leadership, six key ways to incorporate coaching into your leadership style are identified.

# Let's explore the Leader as Coach Program



## **Leading with Empathy**

Leading with empathy is about knowing how to best support your team based on their needs. It's about knowing what empathy looks like in leadership, and how you can use it to build interpersonal relationships. It's about real connection and a deeper level of understanding of each other in the team.

## **High impact communication**

High impact communication is about communicating effectively in a variety of settings and using different modes. We can't rely on gathering everyone in one spot all the time, but equally, we don't want to only offer a one-way zoom box as our primary communication tool. This is about attentively listening to others and encouraging open expression, diverse ideas, and opinions which promote psychological safety.

## **Building team spirit**

Building team spirit is about establishing common objectives and a shared mindset, creating feelings of belonging and strong team morale. It's also about fostering open dialogue and collaboration among the team. Here we also focus on high performance. Team spirit is fundamental to creating a high performing team.

## **Collaboration in a new way of working**

Collaboration is easy when we are all in the same place and when we have limited cognitive diversity. Here we all think the same, and it feels harmonious, however it is temporary. Over time a team that lacks cognitive diversity becomes stale and unimaginative. Learning to work well with different styles is a key factor in a successful team.

## **Developing resilience**

I am surprised at the number of times I hear people say, "I hate that word (resilience)." I disagree. I love the word resilience. For me, it reminds me of a piece of elastic and ensuring that the elastic has enough give to withstand movement, without abruptly bouncing back and snapping on my fingers (ouch that hurts!). For Leaders this is about maintaining confidence under pressure, handling difficult situations effectively, and bouncing back from adversity.

## **Be an evolution champion**

Change is slippery and hard to "manage" it. Change consists of people. The best way to help people with change is to acknowledge that change can be hard, emotional, surprising, and unexpected. Leaders can be Evolution Champions by approaching the uncertainty of change with confidence. They can choose to be calm and productive even when things are stressful. Leaders can also deal constructively with problems that do not have clear solutions or outcomes. This seems to be a more realistic way of supporting people through change.

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## WHY WORK WITH ME?

Individual and team performance is where I spend most of my time. I step into the role of helping you and your team to feel greater fulfilment. I'll help you to define what fulfilment means to you and then together we will set a path to get you there.

I help people to live better, work smarter and be authentic. It takes less energy to be yourself, and it builds trust. Trust is my core principle.

My clients describe me as innovative and pragmatic. My family tell me I'm nurturing and impatient. How would I describe myself? An eternal optimist curious about different perspectives.

What got me here?

A whole lot of varied life experience! And a few other things...

I have led HR teams and held c-suite roles in Human Resources in a variety of industries including technology, health, financial services and higher education. I am a highly experienced Executive Coach having worked with all levels of leaders across most sectors. I also serve on the Board of a public hospital.

I work with organisations to help them to develop a culture that delivers an optimal experience for their teams and their customers. I am also an author, speaker and facilitator and my focus areas are team and individual performance, leadership development and ways of working.

