The Colors of Leadership:

Integrating Different Styles in Your Organization

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Have you ever worked with a group, either as a leader or member, and wondered why you found some people more difficult to work with than others? It's not likely that they are actually difficult people. It can even be that you are difficult. The difficulty can be attributed to the fact that people have different personality types and leadership styles. The more we all understand these types and styles, the better we all can work together.

No matter what your role is as the leader or a group member, the key to working with anyone is to better understand their strengths and limitations, and tailor your style to fit the situation and the people you encounter.
Get to Know Your Color Chart

There are four main personality types/leadership styles, or colors, to keep in mind: Green, Gold, Orange, and Blue. Each is distinct. While most people can be included in more than one color category, each will have a dominant color. (I learned this leadership color scheme from the Utah Leadership Training Institute for Skills USA, which endorses the color scheme's dissemination.)

Green

A Green leader can usually be spotted as the loner of the group. They prefer to do things by themselves because they believe things get done better that way. Greens have very exacting standards and don't feel comfortable trusting others with crucial tasks. A Green leader is likely to delegate mainly busy work that anybody can do.

A Green leader does not deal well with emotional situations and will do everything in their power to avoid confronting someone. They are likely to fear that the person being confronted may cry, and that's the worst possible outcome for a Green.

However, you can always trust a Green to do whatever task you assign them. You may become concerned because they rarely ask for help, and it's like pulling teeth to get a progress report, but they will do everything in their power to pull through for you.

A Green leader is motivated by adoration. They want people to look up to them and to see them as the most competent person for any job. To achieve this, they focus a lot on tangible awards they can hang on their walls or show to others. This person works best with Gold leaders.

Gold

The Gold leader is the most common. It's not that this is necessarily the best type of leader, but a person with a Gold leadership style naturally stands out as the most dependable. A Gold's motto is, "Early is on time, on time is late, and late is never acceptable." They maintain a hard line on what is professional, appropriate, and necessary. This is the leader who keeps everyone on task and working.

A Gold leader needs to have agendas for every meeting and a to-do list for every person being given an assignment. They are incredibly organized. Because of their professional demeanor, Greens will trust them with more important tasks, but other colors may not feel comfortable confiding in them about group issues.

A Gold leader doesn't need much recognition, though. They like knowing they have been part of something successful and see their leadership as the key ingredient of that success. Probably the best fear of a Gold leader is that they can keep Oranges under control and work well with virtually any color.

Orange

Find the person in your group who is constantly moving and has a hard time focusing on any one task, and you have most likely located an Orange leader. This person is the life of the party and may well be the reason many others in the group show up. They are definitely people persons and want to make everything your group does the most fun it possibly can be.

An Orange leader tries to play with every personality type and doesn't always understand why Greens are standoffish and Golds are so concerned about getting things done. But an Orange leader does a wonderful job of advertising. They are able to engage perfect strangers in conversation and make them want to come to your event.

Orange people make your events the kind audiences remember and want to attend again in the future. An Orange is motivated by fun. Whatever your group wants to do, an Orange needs to be able to have fun with it or they won't do it.
Commonalities Among Colors

- They each want to be the right person for the job.
- They each make a wonderful leader in their own way.
- None fits entirely into one color category.

The color of their leadership style, will help you understand them and improve your ability to work with them.

- No person is entirely one color. You may know a Green who is also very organized. It's not even unheard of for a Green to show Blue or Orange tendencies. Don’t fall into the trap of labeling someone as a particular color and assuming they won’t ever change or act differently. The best leader is one who understands the strengths and weaknesses in each color and recognizes those same strengths and limitations in themselves. Some leaders really work hard to learn attributes they like about each color to become more well-rounded leaders. It’s possible.

Blue

Completing the group of leadership styles is that of the Blue leader. This person is crucial to the mental and emotional well being of your committee. A Blue leader makes sure everyone is involved and gives input on decisions being made. If you want a group to reach a consensus, have a Blue lead the discussion. They focus on people being comfortable with the decisions the group makes.

However, one problem you will have is keeping a touchy-feely Blue leader from driving a Green leader insane. Whenever a Blue talks about feelings, a Green is likely to shut down mentally. Keep in mind that Greens don’t need help in making up their minds, so let the Blues worry about other group members. You may need to actively steer Blues away from Greens.

A Blue needs a lot of outward praise. It doesn’t matter if you tell them “good job” or give them a plaque and flowers. It’s all the same to them. The catch is, your praise of a Blue must be given in front of the group. Everyone needs to be appreciative of a Blue or the Blue feels neglected.

Understand There Are Commonalities Among Colors

There are some things all colors have in common:
- They each want to know they are the right person for the job. It's a great feeling to think you are the only person who can be trusted with an important task. Even Oranges will calm down a bit when you let them know you are counting on them to do something that really matters.
- Each color makes a wonderful leader in its own way. Don’t ever discredit someone as a leader due to their particular leadership style. Knowing more about anyone and what motivates them, such as

Open Your Coloring Box

So, how do you put your newfound knowledge of leadership colors into action? Let’s examine a scenario. You are in charge of planning an all-night party at your school and want it to be the best your campus has ever seen (isn’t that always the goal?). You haven’t selected a theme or a date yet, but your committee has already been chosen for you. The leadership style that best describes you is Green (because that’s sometimes the most challenging for a leader) and your committee consists of eight people, two of each color.

Knowing what the different colors are like, you decide that the first meeting is going to be a brainstorming session to come up with a theme, date and basic assignments for everyone. Here are some things you might want to do:
- Create an agenda so the Golds know you mean business (this will also help keep the Oranges on task);
- Tell the Oranges the meeting starts about 15 minutes before it actually does (they are great workers, but get side-tracked and are often late);
- Allow for time during the meeting for the Blues to stop everything periodically to make sure everyone is okay with the decision-making process and the decisions the committee is making;
- Allow only enough chairs in your meeting room for the number of people on your committee (so the Greens can’t sit away from the group and be disconnected); and
Pick Your Colors

- Assign publicity and promotion to Oranges.
- Put Golds in charge of research and logistics.
- Have Blues work with Golds and Oranges to keep Oranges on target and help keep Golds from feeling overwhelmed.
- Allow Greens to execute individualized tasks.

- During the meeting, be as diplomatic in the process as possible—Golds will feel they've given their input, Greens will feel they didn't have to, Oranges will be able to enthusiastically ramble, and Blues will feel the process was fair.

Pick Your Colors

What kinds of assignments do you give these people? The Oranges are constantly creative, so put them in charge of publicity and promotion. Remember, a lot of people go to a party just because they know certain people will be there. Usually those certain people are Oranges.

You might put Golds in charge of researching what dates are available on campus. In fact, they probably already have everything written in their day planners. Golds are also very good with logistics, so let them make maps of where everything will be located the night of the party and take notes of everyone's progress during committee meetings.

You might have a Blue working with each of those groups. They will keep the Oranges in touch with reality and help keep the Golds from becoming overwhelmed. Sometimes, no matter how large the committee, Golds feel like they are doing everything.

As for the Greens, have them make phone calls to companies to negotiate for decorations and equipment or soliciting local businesses for sponsorships. Even though they don't necessarily play well with others, they can be wonderful business people and these are jobs they can do by themselves.

Let Your Colors Shine

Obviously, you need to oversee everything. As the group leader, it's your job to make sure that the delegation is fair, efficient and effective. You also need to be able to work with any of these groups and assist them in their processes. You don't want your committee to be fragmented into four disparate groups. The more your group works together, the better, because you want well-rounded thinking from a diversified group.

You will likely be pleased to discover your colors temper each other and blend fairly well. Differences do attract in this case, and each color is capable of respecting the others' styles.

About the Author

Travis Smith - Enjoying a music minor at Webster State University (MO). Travis is a lover of dance and theatre, and this experience will be a great experience for him.

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