

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



In a new series, **Carol Wilson** identifies the tools and models frequently used during coaching projects. This month, she looks at Blanchard and Hersey's *Situational Leadership* model

Fifty years ago the world was a far more authoritarian place than it is now. On the whole, people did what their parents told them to, then what their teachers said and, eventually, followed a boss's instructions at work. Politicians, policemen and the clergy were regarded as figures of authority and treated with respect. But all this started to change with the social revolution of the 1960s.

Ken Blanchard and Professor Paul Hersey created the first *Situational Leadership* model back in 1969, more than a decade before Blanchard and Johnson's groundbreaking book *The One Minute Manager* saw publication.

The book identified that different types of management are required in different situations in order to keep motivation high; no-one had worried much about motivation before this because, after the 1930s depression and a war, if you were lucky enough to get a job, you would normally keep it for the whole of your working life – and there was not much in the way of handouts for the unemployed.

The 1960s led to a time of prosperity when education and healthcare were free for the masses and of a high standard, and jobs were plentiful. To entice the right calibre of employee, businesses had to

start thinking about how to keep their staff happy.

The original *Situational Leadership* model comprised four quadrants and is still in use in organisations and promoted by Paul Hersey today. It is shown in Table 1 below.

During the 1980s, Blanchard renamed the quadrants, calling his model *Situational Leadership II* and amicably agreeing with Hersey that each could promote his own model. Blanchard's quadrants contain the following labels:

Style
1. Directing
2. Coaching
3. Supporting
4. Delegating

This change was made to reflect Blanchard's belief that people enter a task with a high level of commitment, which drops once they have met some challenges and their initial enthusiasm is curbed. The term 'coaching' is used here because it relates to a sports coach, who would be concerned not only with an athlete's technique but also with maintaining the athlete's motivation and persistence.

Some confusion has arisen from the use of the word 'coaching' in this model, as it has come to have a different meaning today than the one originally intended.

Table 1

STYLE	SITUATION	TYPE OF EMPLOYEE
1. TELLING	The leader gives straightforward directions and instructions; the employee is low on experience and ability in regard to the task	Trainee
2. SELLING	The leader still directs but starts to get buy-in from the employee by giving him the space to start taking ownership of the task	Team member
3. PARTICIPATING	The employee has gained some confidence and is encouraged to manage the work and use the leader as a sounding board and source of support; decision-making is shared	Supervisor/Manager
4. DELEGATING	The employee knows the job possibly better than the leader by now and can be left alone to get on with it	Department head

When it is understood that this quadrant refers to a conventional sports coaching style, we can then infer that a performance coaching style in the modern sense of the phrase can be applied to all four quadrants in both models; performance coaching is not merely a set of skills, nor is it about asking questions all the time – it is a mindset, a behaviour and an attitude that encompasses treating people with respect and believing in their ability to raise the bar of their own knowledge, skills, experience and performance.

Therefore all four of the quadrants can and must be delivered in a coaching style, whatever they happen to be called from model to model, for successful leadership to flourish and staff to remain motivated.

The fundamental principle of the *Situational Leadership* model is that there is a time and a place for all types of leadership; when someone runs into the room shouting 'fire!' a good leader (or any sane human being for that matter) will not ask 'and how do you *feel* about the fire?'

When the situation calls for it (hence the use of the term 'situational'), it is not only acceptable but also *desirable* to:

- direct people with clearly stated expectations or straight answers and tell them what to do;
- guide people towards a solution by demonstrating, encouraging, supporting and asking them to draw on their own resources;
- ask people for their own solutions and recognise their achievements; and
- leave people alone to get on with it once they know what they are doing.

In any of these situations, unacceptable behaviour would be that which demeans people, reduces their confidence or attempts to manipulate them into making a decision that they do not really buy into.

The fundamental principle of the *Situational Leadership* model is that there is a time and a place for all types of leadership; when someone runs into the room shouting 'fire!' a good leader (or any sane human being for that matter) will not ask 'and how do you *feel* about the fire?'

The situations are flexible and interchangeable; there may be times when a very senior and experienced person needs direction, even from those who work for him. If this is done in a coaching style, the person will not feel threatened or demeaned.

Similarly, there are times when a beginner has grasped something more quickly than usual and will take great pleasure and motivation in being allowed to run with it.

A key attitude in any of the quadrants is to remain solution-focused throughout, as this will shrink the difficulties and generate more energy with which to deal with them.

When working with any model it is important to remember that the model is a *tool*, not a master, and a *framework*, not a container.

A leader's own intuition should always be followed if it appears to conflict with his understanding of the model.

Starting with the self-published best seller *The One Minute Manager* in 1981, Blanchard has built a highly successful business empire and written many books about leadership, details of which can be found on www.kenblanchard.com.

Hersey founded the Centre for Leadership Studies and continues to lecture on the original *Situational Leadership* model. He is a renowned speaker on management, has authored many articles and books on the subject, and is a consultant to industrial, government and military organisations. More details can be found on <http://www.situational.com/>. ■

Carol Wilson is managing director of Performance Coach Training, a joint venture with coaching pioneer Sir John Whitmore's Performance Consultants International, and is head of accreditation and honorary vice-president at the Association for Coaching. She can be contacted on +44 (0)1932 702657, at carolwilson@performancecoachtraining.com or via www.performancecoachtraining.com