

# Management Theories & Support Traits for Direct Support Professionals (DSPs)

The number of children and adults being diagnosed with intellectual disabilities (ID) and developmental disabilities (DD) continues to increase in the United States. Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) have a critical role in the lives of people with disabilities as both care givers and role models. In general, most DSPs love what they do and are passionate about their work. While the job itself can be very rewarding, DSPs face many challenges and difficulties that lead to work stress and high turnover rates. As with any profession, DSPs encompass a wide variety of people; people who do not have the same learning styles, who perceive roles in various ways, and manage stress in different ways. In light of this, the management of DSPs is a fundamental role that takes on a lot of significance for agencies, which can in turn hinder the development or assist it in flourishing.

What does it take to become a successful leader/manager? Based on Psychological research over the years, there are certain traits that have been commonly found among successful leaders. These traits include the following:

**Emotional Stability** Leaders need to be able to endure times of frustration and stress.

They must be levelheaded and have the maturity to deal with anything that they are obligated to face.

**Tough-Mindedness** Good leaders are practical, logical, and to the point.

They tend to not have overbearingly sentimental attachments and are comfortable with criticism.

**Enthusiasm** Leaders tend to be seen as energetic, active, and expressive.

They are more open to change and are seen as optimistic.

**Social Boldness** Leaders tend to be natural risk-takers. They are by and large thick skinned and are frequently socially aggressive. They are receptive to others and tend to have emotional stamina.

**Dominance** Leaders are, more often than not, competitive & decisive. They enjoy overcoming obstacles that are put in front of them. They are confident in their thinking approach, along with how they react with others.

**Self-Assurance** Being resilient and having self-confidence are common threads among leaders.

They are usually secure and free from guilt with past mistakes, and failures have little effect on them.

**Compulsiveness** Good leaders have been found to be very protective of their integrity and reputation and consequently tend to be socially aware and careful when making decisions or determining specific actions.

**Conscientiousness** Good leaders are driven by their sense of responsibility and tend to be exacting in character.

They have a high standard of excellence and a desire to always do one's best while being very self-disciplined.

Along with the discussed traits it is also important that good leaders motivate and lead their team in new directions. To help motivate others it has been found during Psychological research that, at least, the following personality traits must be present:

- Maturity
- Empathy
- Charisma
- High Energy
- Intuition
- Team Orientation

Most personality traits will determine who will be at ease in leading others. Leaders are not born and it is vital to remember that people are always learning, changing, and growing.

As with any other situation, no employee is the same and each person learns and flourishes differently. Having said this, there is no one management style that will work for every person, program, residential house, or agency. The best advice that can be said is to get to know and learn about the employees that are under your management and be willing to adapt to the needs of the program/agency and the employees. With this information, we have reviewed various leadership theories and will be presenting the theories that could be the most beneficial when working with DSPs. These theories are Transformational & Transactional Leadership, Servant Leadership, and Adaptive Leadership.

## Transformational & Transactional Leadership

These two leadership approaches are commonly used together for the most effective leadership.

**Transactional** is when the management and employees agree to complete and provide each other things that both need. There are two components: contingent rewards and management by exception.

**Contingent Rewards** are rewards based on performance.

**Management by Exception** is when little supervision is necessary under normal circumstance.

**Transformational** transforms and motivates employees by making them more aware of the importance of task outcomes, encouraging them to surpass their own self-interest for the sake of the organization or team, and stimulating their higher-order needs. This practice includes four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual motivation, and individualized consideration.

**Idealized Influence** Management who behave in ways that result in becoming role models for the employees. Employees can identify with the management and want to imitate them.

**Inspirational Motivation** Management has the ability to inspire confidence, motivation and a sense of purpose in the employees. This requires excellent communication skills as the management must convey messages with power, a sense of authority, and precision while pointing out the positive with enthusiasm.

**Intellectual Stimulation** The management supports the employees by involving them in decision making and stimulating their efforts to be as creative and innovative while identifying solutions. Management helps employees see the big picture and helps them succeed in their efforts.

**Individualized Consideration** The management coaches and mentors employees as individuals and continuously has personalized interactions with the staff. This involves motivating employees by their needs and customizes each person's training to allow them to grow and become fulfilled in their positions.

## Adaptive Leadership

A successful adaptive manager has a practical approach to change and helps the employees and organizations adapt and thrive in changing environments. There are four principles that create the leadership framework of adaptive leaders:

**Navigating Business Environments** Embrace flexibility and think of approaches to issues other than how it has always been done.

**Leading with Empathy** Treat employees with empathy and compassion to meet their needs to understand where they are coming from.

**Learning Through Self-Correction and Reflection** Continuously try new things and recognize that mistakes will be made, while understanding that things that worked yesterday will not work tomorrow.

**Creating Win-Win Solutions** Managers do not solely focus on the success of the program or organization but works to develop success for the field in general through collaboration with other organizations. Finding solutions that work for multiple organizations will bring in larger success.

## Servant Leadership

This leadership approach is relatively new and focuses on the relationship between the management and employees. It is based on the philosophy that the management should first focus/serve the employees through ethical and moral principles.

Ten characteristics of a servant leader include:

- Listening
- Empathy
- Healing Broken Spirits
- Awareness
- Persuasion
- Broad Conceptual Thinking
- Foresight
- Commitment to the Growth of People
- Building Community
- Stewardship

*\*Research continues to expand to fully illustrate its potential.*

Even though there are different ways and styles to lead, it is important that leaders have a positive influence on their employees and can act as role models by demonstrating appropriate behaviors and examples. Each of the theories listed brings about ethical standards and a culture of trust between the management and employees, which in turn leads to overall organization effectiveness. Another reason as to why these three theories were chosen was because the Human Service field is constantly adapting and changing to improve the performance of organizations for the people that are served. This means that management must also continue to learn and change through leadership training and continuing education, as each of the listed theories allow growth for the employees, managers, and the organization as a whole.

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