

Which Type of Leader Are You?



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Leadership is not a monolithic concept but rather a multidimensional practice that draws upon different skills, behaviors, and intentions. In this article, Paul B. Thornton outlines four distinct types of leaders: Thought Leaders, Task Leaders, Inspirational Leaders, and Servant Leaders, each contributing uniquely to the improvement of individuals, teams, and organizations. This framework provides a practical lens for self-reflection and leadership development, encouraging readers to explore and blend different leadership approaches for maximum effectiveness.

Overview

All leaders have the same goal: to improve the status quo. To help individuals, teams, and organizations perform at a higher level.

I believe there are four types of leaders. Each type uses a specific approach to influence and inspire people to make positive changes. In today's dynamic environments, leadership is less about rigid hierarchies and more about the capacity to guide change, spark innovation, and foster performance. According to Thornton (n.d.), effective leaders strive to improve the status quo by adopting one or more of four archetypes:

- **Thought Leaders** drive change through new ideas and perspectives.
- **Task Leaders** mobilize action and momentum.
- **Inspirational Leaders** motivate through passion and vision.
- **Servant Leaders** enable success by supporting others.

Each leadership type reflects a different but equally valuable method for influencing people and facilitating progress. Understanding these leadership styles allows professionals to assess their strengths, adapt to diverse situations, and expand their impact.

1. Thought Leaders

These leaders introduce ideas that help us see problems and opportunities in new ways. Oliver Wendell Holmes, a 19th-century American poet, made an important point when he said, "The human mind once stretched to a new idea never goes back to its original dimension."

Some ideas are game-changers, creating entire industries. Other times, their ideas generate more minor, incremental changes. But all change starts with an idea. Thought leaders share their ideas in meetings, articles, books, journals, TED talks, blogs, and webinars.

Two things that make thought leaders stand out are a) their ability to produce original and innovative ideas, and b) their

talent for presenting their ideas in a clear, concise, and understandable manner.

Give it a try. At your next meeting, come prepared to present one new idea for one of the topics on the agenda.

2. Task Leaders

These leaders inspire us because they are action-oriented. They take the initiative by defining goals, assigning roles and responsibilities, setting deadlines, and tracking progress. Above all, they are decisive and visibly engaged.

While the thought leader thinks, the task leader takes action!

They generate momentum. Task leaders do not wait for perfect conditions; they take initiative and foster progress through small wins that energize the team.

The one thing that makes task leaders stand out is their willingness to take the initiative while others sit around and talk.

Try it: take action on a problem that needs to be solved.

3. Inspirational Leaders

These leaders inspire us with their passion and uplifting messages! They bring optimism and energy to every interaction and meeting. They elevate our gaze from current problems to future possibilities. Their words and stories motivate us to change the status quo. The one thing that makes inspirational leaders stand out is their passion and conviction for their ideas.

Author and leadership guru, John C. Maxwell (2007), said that when you are passionate about something, you are all in. These leaders are all in!

Give it a try. Over the next 30 days, inspire someone to take the lead role on an important project.

4. Servant Leaders

These leaders provide the assistance and support necessary for us to effect change. They frequently eliminate obstacles that hinder people's progress.

Being a "Servant Leader" consists of two parts:

- a) The leading part involves describing your mission, vision, values, and strategy.
- b) The serving part involves asking, "How can I help?" and then providing the required resources.

The one thing that sets servant leaders apart is their willingness to serve and help others succeed. They create an environment that enables people to do their best work (Greenleaf, 1977).

Try it out. Next week, ask two people how you can help them perform better in some aspect of their job.

5. Combinations

Indeed, many leaders embody a combination of two or more of the types described above. The more comfortable you become with each type, the more effective you will be, as different situations require various approaches. The more tools you have in your toolbox, the more adaptable you can be.

Be a leader. Add value. Improve the status quo.

Conclusion

Leadership is not about choosing one path, it is about mastering the range of styles and knowing when to deploy each one. The most effective leaders are those who understand their own tendencies, develop complementary approaches, and adapt fluidly to different contexts. Whether sparking new ideas, leading decisive action, inspiring belief, or serving others, leaders must be dynamic and multidimensional.

References

1. Greenleaf, R. K. (1977). *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*. Paulist Press.
2. Maxwell, J. C. (2007). *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You*. Thomas Nelson.

Biography:

Paul B. Thornton is an author and speaker. His books are available on Amazon and include: *Leadership Styles*, *The Leadership Process*, and *Organizational Alignment for Peak Performance*.

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