

PRACTICE

It's every leader's responsibility to get comfortable with each end of the empowerment and direction spectrum, and spots in between, too.

The best way to do this is through practice—practicing different body language, tone, word choices, senses of urgency, coaching questions, you name it. See what this does for you, what impact it has on others, and gather some data on where each skill or approach might be the most effective.

INSTRUCTIONS

Schedule a meeting for a group of leaders in your organization. It's terrific if this meeting can be cross-functional, so that everyone can get this practice and see a diverse array of leadership styles!

Split into groups of 3-4 people. One person will play the part of the "manager," another is the "direct report," and everyone else in the small group takes notes to give feedback at the end of each practice round.

When it's your turn to play the "manager," choose where on the empowerment/direction spectrum you want to practice. Maybe you want to practice giving really strong direction. Or maybe you want to practice giving no advice, but instead offer only open coaching questions. The choice is yours!

Choose a scenario you'd like to practice with. It can be real, or you can choose an example scenario from the next page.

Set a timer for 4 minutes of roleplaying the conversation. Afterwards, spend 6 minutes debriefing in your small group:

- What went well?
- What went sideways?
- What does the "manager" want to try out or practice next time?

Then rotate so that everyone has an opportunity to practice.

Over time, you'll begin to figure out when your default approach won't do the trick, and how to safely employ other leadership approaches on the spectrum. It's not comfortable, but it is critical; your team's success and growth will depend on it.

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS

SCENARIO A

Manager: Your direct report has told you they think they deserve a promotion, but you don't think they're ready, because they haven't consistently been performing at a more senior level.

Direct report: You've checked off all of the boxes on what it means to be senior. You did exactly what the career ladder says the work is of a senior person. It's time for you to get a promotion.

SCENARIO B

Manager: Your direct report has asked for an enormous raise. However, you do not believe they're ready for a compensation increase, as it would put them out of band (and much higher than their peers who are much more effective in their roles).

Direct report: You have a job offer from another company for a lot more money. You'd like to stay at this company if they can match the other offer.

SCENARIO C

Manager: You heard from a lot of peer feedback that your direct report is being a jerk in meetings. They're interrupting others, derailing conversations, and causing the team health to disintegrate. You need to deliver this feedback to your report.

Direct report: You're ready for a promotion. You say what needs to be said, you speak truth to power, you've made a huge impact on how much the team has been able to ship.

SCENARIO D

Manager: Your direct report is hesitant to ship incremental improvements to the user experience. They debate ad nauseam each project, and you've heard from the rest of the team that this person is slowing them down.

Direct report: You believe this company doesn't spend enough time on quality. You agree with your team's priorities, but you want to make sure you're not shipping a low quality or partial experience for your users.