



EPISODE 7: Breaking Down Leadership Styles and Management Theory

Transcript

A friend of mine who works as a supervisor in a hospital foodservice department called me the other day to catch up. As with most adult conversations, once the most important topics such as family were covered, the topic of work eventually came up. He was telling me a new patient services manager started which meant he had a new boss.

This new boss spent no time observing the workplace or workflows. They instead started changing a bunch of things without asking what it was for or why things were done a certain way. When the new manager was approached by the staff who were upset by the sudden changes without any collaboration, the response they were given time and time again was, “I’m a dietitian” with no further explanation.

You may be given a scenario similar to this on the exam and be asked to indicate what type of leadership or management style this manager has. In this episode, you’ll learn about some key management concepts that might not only show up on the exam but will help you as you begin your career as a Registered Dietitian. No matter what you do, whether you work for someone and have a boss or you own a company and are the boss, being mindful of how you conduct yourself and the type of leader you are makes a huge difference to not only the people you work with but also to your customers.

[Music and Intro]

This topic is a good one. An RD-2-be and listener just like you reached out to me and asked if I could cover it. I love hearing from RD’s-2-be like you because the content I cover on this podcast is meant to help you on your journey. If you have a topic you want covered in an episode, please send it my way. You’ll find how to do so - in the show notes.

Ok, let’s get back to the opening story where the new manager came in, made changes without collaborating with anyone and when approached or questioned, said, “I’m a dietitian” to justify the decisions they were making. Keeping this scenario in mind, what type of leadership style is this new manager showing? Is this an autocratic, democratic or bureaucratic leadership style? Let’s look at these styles first.

Autocratic leadership style doesn't ask for anyone's help or input. This type of leader makes decisions they think is best and doesn't ask for anyone else's opinions. They don't consider other approaches or ways of doing things. Thinking about this story, it sure seems that the new manager has an autocratic leadership style. But let's look at the other options and break them down first. Democratic leadership style is one that considers other people's input and allows people to be part of the decision-making process. Others are able to participate and share their thoughts and reasons for why something will or will not work. So let's go back to our story. If the manager was showing democratic leadership style, they would analyze the workflow, ask a lot of questions to gather information and would then share their findings with the team including any concerns they may have. The manager would then ask for the team's input on ways to make things better. Say for example, the new manager noticed that the employee responsible for putting the cold items on the trays on a tray line, seems to be doing a lot of movements. The manager has a meeting and says, "I noticed that the employee putting the cold items on the tray is doing a lot of extra reaching and movements. Looking at the current set up, does anyone have suggestions on how to help decrease the movements this position requires?" Once everyone has shared their feedback and suggestions, a collaborative decision is then made where everyone was able to participate and suggestions and feedback were considered before implementing any changes. That's a democratic leadership style.

Let's look at the same scenario through the lens of a bureaucratic leadership style. This style of management follows a strict and formal hierarchy within an organization. There's a clear chain of command that flows downwards. The chain of command can be found in an organizational chart. In the opening story, if this manager is part of a bureaucratic management, the manager would be told by someone above them that the cold items need to be placed on a specific shelf or in a specific area because all the other locations within that organization do it that way and the goal is for everything to be standardized. The bureaucratic leadership style is often seen in large companies with many locations where everything is done the same. Everyone makes the same items, prepared the same way and the structure for doing so is the same. Direction comes from the top down. The chain of command is important in this management style and should be followed. What does that look like? Say I'm the manager at a popular coffee shop. My boss is Joe Smith. Joe Smith's boss is Miles Johnson. Miles Johnson's boss is Julie Jackson. Because I know how things work in this organization, I know that any new direction is coming from Julie Jackson. If I have any issues or concerns about it before sharing it with my employees, I should address my concerns with my boss Joe Smith. If my boss agrees that I have a valid point and feels him and I can't work through it together, he will then go to his boss Miles Johnson and share the concerns. Typically, I would not go directly to Julie Jackson in a bureaucratic leadership style and would respect the chain of command.

Ok. Let's summarize these 3 leadership styles. Autocratic leadership style is when a manager makes decisions without any input or employee feedback. They see something that is a concern and they make a decision. Democratic leadership style is when the staff and employees participate in the decision making process and have a say in any changes that need to be made. Lastly, bureaucratic leadership style is when there's a clear and formal hierarchy that manages from the top down with the goal of standardizing how things are done. This is more commonly seen in large businesses and organizations where things need to be done the same in every location.

After going through these 3 different styles, I'm comfortable with my original answer. The manager who is new to their role in a foodservice facility who came in and made changes without anyone's input is showing an autocratic leadership style.

So let's move on and discuss a particular management theory called Mintzberg's Management Theory. Mintzberg has written books on management so there's a lot of information available on this management theory if you're interested. In this episode, I'm gonna summarize it and tie it together with something you may be confronted with as a dietitian. Mintzberg believes that people learn skills best through experience, not just by sitting in a classroom. So with this philosophy, everyone in an organization should have the opportunity to practice different managerial roles that he says fall into 3 main categories: Interpersonal, Informational and Decision-Making.

The definition of interpersonal is "relating to relationships or communication between people". So this is where people skills are very important. Within the interpersonal category, there are 3 roles. The Figurehead role, Leadership role, and Liaison role.

The figurehead role is when a manager represents the company publicly either by events or other social activities.

The leadership role is when a manager coaches, supports, and guides their team. This is basically when a manager motivates and inspires the people on their team and connects them to the reason for why things are done a certain way in an organization.

The liaison is basically responsible for networking and building contacts which can include outside of the organization.

Those are the 3 main roles within the interpersonal category.

Moving on to the informational category which is where managers take on roles that communicate, distribute, manage, and monitor. These roles are largely responsible for updating and sharing important information.

- The monitor gathers information inside and outside of their company. They identify issues and look at changes that need to be made within the organization.
- The disseminator shares important information with their employees that they need to know.
- The spokesperson shares information externally. Basically, they speak on behalf of the organization. This role is sometimes called a brand spokesperson or an ambassador.
- The last category is the decision-making category which has 4 managerial roles.
- The entrepreneur role is when a manager is innovative and comes up with new ideas or ways to do things. They then implement these new strategies to drive the company forward.
- The disturbance-handler is when a manager deals with any roadblocks or issues that can interfere with the success of a newly implemented strategy. So one minute a manager could be the entrepreneur coming up with the new ideas and the next step handling roadblocks and putting out fires interfering with the smooth implementation.
- The resource-allocator is when a manager oversees resources which can be anything from financial, technology and human resources activities.
- And lastly, the negotiator is responsible for participating in negotiations within a department or organization.

In my experience, managers jump from one role to the next throughout any given day. No two days are exactly the same.

So let's put a couple of these into some scenarios a dietitian may find themselves in.

Let's say Julia is a representative for an almond company and is asked to go to the Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo, more popularly known as FNCE. She's been asked to share information about a new almond product that's available to the public. What role is she playing at FNCE? Well, she's speaking to people outside of her organization about a new product. She's representing the company or brand. So at FNCE, she's taken on the Spokesperson role.

After the conference, Julia goes back to work and is asked to share new information with her employees. She's now moved into the disseminator role.

These things happen all the time. It's very realistic to move from one role to the next.

The relationship between a manager and employees is essential for well functioning teams. When there's a new member on the team especially when there's a new boss, it can take a while to adjust to a new boss's management style. New relationships that takes time. A lot of time is spent at work and people need to feel connected, supported, and respected in the workplace. Data shows that people are more likely to leave a bad boss than they are to leave a job. Now more than ever, people are selective on where they work and what they will and will not deal with at the workplace. Communication is key to building strong relationships. It's also essential to connect people to the why. Why things are done a certain way? Why it's important to fulfill certain tasks. When people feel connected to the why, that's when they're most motivated and willing to give their best work.

Stay on top of your study game. There's no limits or boundaries to achieving the success you so deeply desire. Until next time my friend.

[Music and Outro]