

Situational Leadership: Leading with Discernment



Capacity: Leadership

Baton Exchange

Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. In God’s kingdom, leaders are called to serve diverse people in varying circumstances, adapting their approach while maintaining faithfulness to biblical principles. Situational leadership—a model that emphasizes adapting leadership style based on the readiness, maturity, and needs of those being led—aligns closely with scriptural examples and Christlike servant leadership. By understanding situational leadership from a biblical lens, leaders can glorify God, serve effectively, and develop others in alignment with His purposes.

Jesus exemplified situational leadership throughout His ministry. He corrected Peter differently than He instructed the crowds, guided His disciples differently based on their spiritual maturity, and responded uniquely to leaders, sinners, and seekers. Scripture encourages leaders to discern the appropriate approach to nurture, correct, empower, and shepherd others.

Proverbs 3:5–6 reminds leaders to *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”* Situational leadership requires both wisdom and discernment, recognizing that the Holy Spirit equips leaders to respond effectively to each person and circumstance.

BIBLICAL PRECEPTS FOR SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

1. Adaptation for the Sake of Others

Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 9:22: *“I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”* Situational leadership aligns with this principle, adjusting approach based on the needs, maturity, and abilities of those being led, without compromising integrity or biblical truth.

2. Servant-Hearted Leadership

Leadership in the Bible is fundamentally service-oriented. Jesus stated, *“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant”* (Matthew 20:26). Situational leaders discern how to serve their team in each unique context, providing guidance, support, or freedom as appropriate.

3. Discernment and Wisdom

Proverbs 2:6 affirms, *“For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.”* Situational leaders rely on God’s wisdom to determine when to direct, coach, support, or delegate.

4. Stewardship of People and Influence

Leaders are stewards of God’s people (1 Peter 5:2–3). Effective situational leadership requires observing, understanding, and responding to people in ways that promote growth and honor God.

5. Encouraging Growth and Maturity

Godly leadership nurtures growth in character, skills, and faith. Situational leadership provides the flexibility to challenge, mentor, and empower individuals according to their readiness.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

1. Assess Readiness and Maturity

Situational leadership begins with understanding the development level of the team or individual. Readiness includes competence, experience, confidence, and spiritual maturity. Leaders must evaluate where guidance, coaching, support, or delegation is required.

2. Match Leadership Style to the Situation

Situational leadership involves four primary approaches:

- **Directing (High Directive, Low Supportive):** Provides clear instructions and close supervision for individuals with low competence but high enthusiasm. Example: Moses guiding inexperienced Israelites through the wilderness (Exodus 18:13–26).
- **Coaching (High Directive, High Supportive):** Combines direction with encouragement for individuals developing skills but needing guidance. Example: Jesus mentoring Peter and the disciples (Luke 22:31–32).
- **Supporting (Low Directive, High Supportive):** Offers encouragement and involvement for capable individuals needing confidence or motivation. Example: Paul encouraging new believers in their faith journey (Acts 14:21–22).
- **Delegating (Low Directive, Low Supportive):** Entrusts responsibility to mature, competent individuals. Example: Joseph empowering administrators in Egypt (Genesis 41:46–49).

3. Be Flexible and Observant

Situational leadership requires sensitivity to changing needs, challenges, and growth. Leaders must observe and adjust approaches without being rigid or inconsistent.

4. Maintain Integrity and Biblical Values

Adaptation does not mean compromise. All leadership must reflect honesty, humility, love, and accountability (Proverbs 10:9, Colossians 3:23).

5. Communicate Clearly

Each leadership style involves intentional communication: setting expectations, providing feedback, and clarifying roles. Miscommunication undermines growth and trust.

6. Focus on Growth and Empowerment

Situational leaders aim to increase the capacity, confidence, and maturity of those they lead. Leadership is measured by the development of others, not only outcomes.

BEST PRACTICES FOR PRACTICING SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

1. Evaluate Individuals and Teams Regularly

Understand competence, motivation, and spiritual maturity. Observe strengths, weaknesses, and relational dynamics to tailor your leadership approach.

2. Pray for Discernment

Ask God to guide your leadership style and provide insight into the hearts and needs of your team (James 1:5). Situational leadership is ultimately guided by the Spirit.

3. Communicate Expectations Clearly

Even when adapting style, clarity is essential. Outline tasks, responsibilities, and goals while adjusting support and direction.

4. Provide Appropriate Support

Whether directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating, leaders must offer guidance proportionate to the readiness of the team member.

5. Develop Leaders Within the Team

Train, mentor, and empower individuals to grow toward maturity, enabling delegation and multiplication of leadership. Paul's mentorship of Timothy (2 Timothy 2:2) exemplifies this approach.

6. Monitor Progress and Adjust

Situational leadership is dynamic. Continuously assess performance, confidence, and growth, adjusting your approach to provide the necessary guidance and support.

7. Encourage Reflection and Feedback

Invite feedback from those you lead. Reflect on successes and challenges to improve leadership effectiveness and align with God's purposes.

BENEFITS OF SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

1. Increased Team Effectiveness

By tailoring approach to readiness and skill, situational leadership maximizes productivity, learning, and collaboration.

2. Accelerated Growth

Individuals develop faster when leaders provide guidance appropriate to their maturity level, increasing confidence and competence.

3. Improved Relationships

Flexibility in leadership builds trust, respect, and loyalty. Team members feel understood, valued, and supported.

4. Resilience in Change

Situational leadership allows leaders to adapt to changing circumstances, team composition, and challenges without sacrificing effectiveness.

5. Servant-Leadership in Practice

Situational leadership emphasizes service, empowering others, and prioritizing growth over control or personal gain.

6. Alignment with Godly Leadership Principles

By integrating biblical wisdom, situational leaders honor God, exercise stewardship responsibly, and model Christlike adaptability and love.

ASK YOUR MENTOR

1. How have you applied situational leadership in ministry or work environments?
 2. How do you discern the appropriate leadership approach for different individuals or situations?
 3. Which biblical examples have shaped your understanding of adaptive leadership?
 4. How do you balance flexibility with consistency in values and expectations?
 5. What strategies help you develop others toward maturity and independence?
 6. How do you evaluate growth and adjust your leadership style accordingly?
 7. How have you handled situations where leadership style adjustments were resisted?
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Reflect & Respond/Self-Rate

Rate yourself 1–5 (1 = rarely true, 5 = consistently true):

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| 1. Am I aware of the readiness, skills, and motivations of those I lead? | |
| 2. How flexible am I in adjusting leadership style to meet needs? | |
| 3. Do I maintain biblical principles while adapting my approach? | |
| 4. How effectively do I communicate expectations and provide support? | |
| 5. Do I prioritize the growth and development of team members? | |
| 6. How do I evaluate my own effectiveness as a situational leader? | |
| 7. Where do I need improvement in observation, discernment, or adaptability? | |

Creative Connection and/or Role Play

Think of a song, character or person from a book, movie or history, or an everyday item that personifies the main idea of this lesson and share it. Or, if applicable to this lesson, role play a practice from this article with your mentor.

Prompt to Reflect and Journal

Take 10–15 minutes to reflect: “Lord, how have I adapted my leadership style to meet the needs of those I lead? In what situations have I succeeded or struggled in providing the right balance of direction and support? How can I better align my approach with God’s principles and the growth of others?”

Write about recent examples and identify specific opportunities to adjust your leadership approach.

Action Step

This week, apply situational leadership intentionally:

1. Choose one team member or ministry area.
 2. Assess their competence, confidence, and spiritual maturity.
 3. Select the appropriate leadership approach (direct, coach, support, delegate).
 4. Pray for discernment and guidance.
 5. Take intentional action to lead in alignment with their readiness and God’s purposes.
 6. Reflect afterward: “*Did this approach serve the individual well and honor God?*”
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Sources & Resources

- Holy Bible (NIV, ESV)
- Blanchard, Ken & Hersey, Paul. *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources*
- *Situational Leadership II* – Ken Blanchard & Paul Hersey