

Can you recall a time when you were poorly coached by a manager? Perhaps you were keen to perform the task, but lacked the resources or skills and were left to sink or swim by a hands-off manager? Or you may have been capable, yet constant direction by a hands-on manager on every small task served to un-motivate you?

Whether you are asked to perform a task or assign it to someone else, it's important to ensure a match between

## Coaching and the Skill/Will Matrix

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the person's ability and willingness to perform the task, and adopting a management style of interaction during the course of the assignment that will help, not hinder, the task being performed well.

This is because simply imposing an invariable management style doesn't guarantee optimal results; like chameleons, the best managers instead adapt their method of interaction to the needs of the people and situations for which they are responsible.

### Skill/Will Matrix

Author Max Landsberg<sup>1</sup> offered the following Skill/Will Matrix and notes for its application as a practical tool to help match a manager's style of interaction with the person's readiness for the task.

To use the matrix:

1. First, identify the person's skill and will to accomplish the specific task. Is their *skill* level for the task (i.e., their experience, training, understanding, and role perception) high or low? Is their *will* to accomplish the task (i.e., their desire to

achieve, their security, confidence, and incentives) high or low?

2. Then, use the matrix to identify an appropriate coaching/management style. For example, use "delegate" for people high in both skill and will, or "guide" for those with high will but low skill for the task.
3. Finally, discuss your intended approach, and your reasons, with the person assigned to complete the task. This discussion will help confirm or clarify your own perceptions of their skill/will, and if necessary allow you to modify your intended interaction style. It also demonstrates your willingness to adapt your style to help their effectiveness, and your investment in their development.

### Skill/Will Matrix and Coaching

**Direct** (skill and will both low)

First, build the will; provide a clear briefing, identify motivations and develop a vision of future performance. Then build the skill; structure tasks for quick wins, coach, and train. Finally, sustain the will; provide frequent feedback, praise and nurture. Throughout, supervise closely with tight control and clear rules and deadlines.

#### Skill/Will Matrix

	Low Skill	High Skill
High	<b>Guide</b>	<b>Delegate</b>
Low Will	<b>Direct</b>	<b>Excite</b>

**Guide** (low skill, high will)

Invest time early on, with full coaching, training, explaining, and answering of questions. Create a risk-free environment to allow early mistakes and learning. Relax control as progress is shown.

**Excite** (high skill, low will)

Identify reasons for the low will (e.g., task/management, style/personal factors). Identify and connect with their key motivating factors. Work on their confidence by developing a vision of how good they could be at completing the task. If the task is not critical to their mainstream role, demonstrate the positive benefits of improved performance to their 'core' activities. Monitor with feedback and praise.

**Delegate** (skill and will both high)

Promote freedom to do the job; set objectives, not methods. Praise, don't ignore. Encourage them to take responsibility and involve them in decision-making. Take appropriate risks, including more stretching tasks. Don't over-manage.

**Be Specific, and Adapt to Growth**

Landsberg also noted the importance of addressing the person's skill and will to complete a *specific* task, for example, "making presentations to the board of directors," rather than the more general "public speaking."

He remarked that good managers should also "adapt to growth." For people with whom you are in a long-term working relationship, you will want them to increase in both skill and will. If they are successful in achieving this, you will also need gradually to adapt your own style en route to "delegate." That is, move from "direct" to "guide" or "excite," and ultimately to "delegate."

This ability, to adapt your own style to different needs and to the growth of people for whom you are responsible, is a hallmark of good coaching as a manager. 

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#### NOTES

1. Max Landsberg, *The Tao of Coaching—Boost your effectiveness at work by inspiring and developing those around you* (Profile Books, 2003).



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