

How To Lead Your Route (66)

Route leaders create a shared vision among the route members, bring together the various needed operational parts, and guide the involvement of members so that the route can achieve its goals. Like any organisation, your route will elect or appoint members to lead by filling formal positions, while some may also lead informally, without being given a specific leadership portfolio.

When you find yourself in a situation where leadership is required, you have the responsibility of creating the environment for good results to be achieved. But what are the choices you have in leading and what should you be looking out for when stepping forward to serve your route as leader?

This Guide will help you understand what is involved in leadership and what choices you have in the style of leadership that will be most productive for your specific situation. It should be read together with other Guides covering the various leadership positions.

Why leadership is important

Your route may be part of the Open Africa network, but it is also an autonomous organisation (perhaps a voluntary association, nonprofit company, co-operative or trust). As an organisation, the route sets its own priorities and functions independently of associated parties such as the Open Africa Head Office.

You are coming together in the route to achieve your shared objectives with building and promoting a destination route that will bring more economic activity to your area, which will help grow local tourism businesses and help improve the quality of life of your local communities. While your route's intentions may be noble, you will only achieve good results if

you are able to organise all the available resources behind your route's objectives and attend to the actions needed to make it all happen.

It is the task of the leaders to create new possibilities – they are tasked with ensuring that the bigger ideas of your route are brought to life through the activities of your members. Good leaders are able to explain the ideas behind the route so that it attracts wide support, and they are able to translate these ideas into the practical activities needed to achieve good results.

Without good leadership, the potential of your route will remain unarticulated, the idea of a growing local economy will gain little support, the resources available to get things done will be too limited, and the actions to be taken will not be defined.

If you are elected or appointed to a leadership role in your route, it becomes your duty to ensure that the ideas behind the route inspire others to join in, and it is your task to guide the members to work together in achieving the desired result of attracting more and more visitors to the route.

What is leadership?

Leadership does not entail getting overworked in doing everything that needs to be done. Nor is it sitting back and enjoying the status of recognition. Leadership is about ensuring that the objectives of your route are achieved through the collective effort of your route members.

The temptation (and trap) for people newly appointed into leadership positions is to take on all the tasks to get things done. But this is not a very effective way of building a strong route. Remember, you also have members! It is the task of the leaders to create the environment for things to happen and to guide members so that they work together in achieving

the route's goals. However, it is not their task to do all the work!

The opposite is also true... it is not the role of leaders to catch the limelight and make public appearances, just to then sit back and wait for others to do the hard work. Good leaders show the way, organise the needed resources, and guide the participation of all the involved parties so that the route can achieve its goals.

We can summarise good leadership into three points:

- Put into words the new possibilities worth pursuing.
- Harness the support needed and gather the resources to make it a reality.
- Make explicit the needed actions and keep everyone involved in achieving the desired results.

The route leaders are responsible for all three these elements of leadership. They need to understand what can be done to grow the route, to inspire others to join in, and to organise the route activities so that things get done.

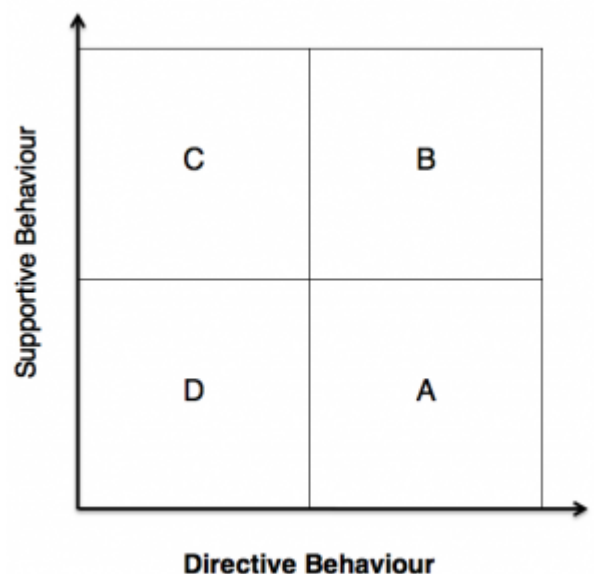
The leadership style may vary from situation to situation. Think for instance of a group of well-established businesspeople coming together to organise an event, compared to a group of high school kids organising a similar event. The leadership style will have to be different in these two situations, otherwise the participants may either feel micro-managed and leave, or they may feel anxious about what must happen, since they are not familiar with the demands. For each of these situations, a different leadership style would be appropriate to achieve the needed outcomes.

There are many tools available to help leaders adjust their leadership style to a situation. One such tool is the Situational Leadership model of Ken Blanchard. According to this model, leaders should be aware that they can offer leadership through a combination of directive behaviour

(giving instructions) and supportive behaviour (offering guidance). In each situation, leaders should be conscious that their style should be informed by where the people they are leading are at.

The combination of directive and supporting behaviour by leaders can be described in an easy graph, where these two behaviours are plotted on a horizontal and vertical lines, where both are low at the bottom/left and are high at the top/right. The graph can then be divided into four areas, each representing a leadership style combining these two aspects of leadership, with the result shown below.

We can adjust Blanchard's model to our own situations to provide us with guidance on which leadership style would have the best results. The explanation below is such an adjustment of the model.



Instructive leadership

A leadership style represented by A in the graph is strong at offering direction and is more instructive than supportive. This leadership style is appropriate in situations where the members are all very new to the environment, are unsure about how things are done, and have little contextual experience.

They need to be told what to do and they need clear instructions on how to do it.

We can call this an instructive style – commands are given for members to execute.

It should be clear that this leadership style will only bring good results in situations where members are still learning about what the tourism industry is about and where they are new at running their own businesses. It is very similar to a work environment where a boss employs staff and tells them exactly what to do by when and how. There is very little scope for anyone to show initiative and find their own way of doing things.

An instructive leadership style depends on the leader deciding and then telling the members what to do. This is not likely to be a very productive approach for most routes, since route members are independent business owners who would most likely not appreciate a style in which they are told what to do. It would be unsurprising to see many members disengaging when such a style is used, so be cautious to use this leadership style in a route context. It may be what works well in your individual business when you deal with employees, but it may be disastrous in a route context.

Mentorship

Many routes may find a more supportive style appropriate, where members are engaged in discussion about what should be done and how it should be done. The style represented by B above combines much supportive behaviour with much directive behaviour. While there is more engagement by the leader employing this style, the level of directing the members is still high. The members will be talking and making their views heard, but the leader will still push hard on his or her understanding of what should be done and how the members should be doing it.

We can call this style mentorship: members discuss what should be done and are then given clear direction on doing it based on the expertise of the leader.

Mentorship works well where the leaders are much more experienced than the members. In some routes, this may be the case, and members may appreciate the strong style of taking charge of decisions. However, when there are several independently-minded members with a fair amount of their own experience (even if much less than that of the leader), they may find the forceful decision-making of the mentorship style to be offensive and, as a result, it may not work well. Under such conditions, another style will work better...

Coaching

Leaders do not have to be experts in the field of operation, but they need to be able to shape the space for effective execution. This is specifically true when route members are well equipped to act independently, but where the specific context of the route activities require guidance. C in the graph represents this space, where supportive behaviour is high and directive behaviour is low.

We can call this a coaching style of leadership – members need guidance in talking about the situation and are well equipped to decide about the best way to proceed themselves.

This is a good leadership style for many routes where the members' level of experience and competencies are high. They can get things done without direct involvement of the leaders, but appropriate support in shaping the discussions and decision-making is much appreciated by members.

Delegation

The last of the four leadership styles we can call delegation – members can be left to achieve the defined outcomes without

much involvement by the leaders.

This leadership style involves very little, if any supportive or directive behaviour. It is a “hands-off” approach to leadership, where the members are allowed to get on with things and report on the outcomes.

Delegation works very well where members are independent operators with all the competencies needed to achieve good results. They are best left alone to deliver on what they promise. Leaders should however be mindful that, in many instances, members may act as if they are ready for a delegation style, but are not. It would therefore not be a bad idea to include regular reportbacks when this style is used, so that the leaders can decide to revert to another leadership style if the situation dictates.

Who is involved in leadership

Leadership is not the task of any one individual – it is the combined effort of all the route members. Some members are given the responsibility to fill specific leadership portfolios, while others will help guide the route in achieving its goals through their involvement in various route activities, but without filling any specific portfolio.

Leadership is a collective responsibility. It would be impossible for one individual to be great at all the required leadership competencies. Some people are better at creating vision and inspiration, while others are better at meticulous planning and keeping track of activities. In combining leadership into the responsibility of a collective, a route may benefit from the competencies of people with different strengths. In this sense, it is true that all members are also leaders.

As an organisation that needs to attend to specific organisational functions, the route will assign

responsibilities or portfolios to specific route leaders. They are mostly elected members who serve on the Executive Committee (if the route is a voluntary association), or other route governing structure such as a Board of Directors (if the route is a nonprofit company) or a Board of Trustees (if the route is a trust).

On each of these governing bodies (Executive Committee, Board of Directors or Board of Trustees), the serving members are likely to be assigned portfolios. It is expected of such members to lead the route in all aspects relating to that portfolio and to manage the detailed affairs of the applicable portfolio. In this way, the responsibility for the portfolio goes beyond leadership; it also covers the management of the detailed activities and seeing to it that all the required tasks and activities are completed on time.

Your route is bound to be organised around several route projects, with each project having assigned members to serve on the project team. These members are acting as leaders for the project, and the Project Coordinator is specifically tasked with guiding the project, not only as leader, but also as project manager responsible for making sure the project proceeds according to plan and within budget.

As an Open Africa route, you are also part of a larger network, where the leadership offered by Open Africa offers you access to external resources that would otherwise not be available. The leadership offered by Open Africa staff and associates can be invaluable, especially during the time that your route is being established.

Leadership is an all-pervasive aspect of growing your route to have a good impact on your local economy and member businesses. By adopting a good and appropriate approach to leadership, the chance to succeed increases.

Use of this Guide

This Guide will help you understand the role of leadership in the route and the choices you have in adopting a productive approach based on your route's situation. It does not provide you with detailed instructions on filling leadership roles (for this, see the other listed Guides). You are likely to get best use of the Guide by reading it and then discussing it with other route leaders (perhaps even organise a short workshop around leadership to discuss it), with the aim of finding the best approach to leadership suitable to your specific situation.

Other Guides and Videos

These other Guides and Resources in the Open Africa Route Toolkit will be of use:

- Guide: [How To Serve As Chairperson](#)
- Guide: [How To Serve As Treasurer](#)
- Guide: [How To Serve As Secretary](#)
- Video: [How To Chair A Meeting](#)
- Video: [Ken Blanchard On Situational Leadership](#)