

# Situational Leadership Theory

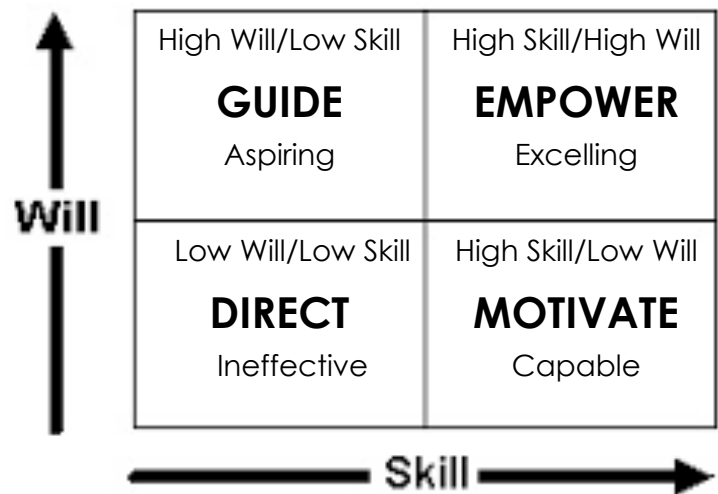
## Developing Skill & Will

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The Situational Leadership Theory, developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, emphasizes the need for leaders to adjust their leadership style or stance—coaching, consulting, supporting, directing—based on the development level of individuals and teams.

The Skill and Will Matrix is a framework for understanding how individuals' skills (skill ability-how capable they are) and will (motivation-willingness to perform) intersect in various contexts.

By using appropriate language, feedback, and ideas, leaders are better able to move people within the matrix, helping them either develop their skills, increase their motivation, or both. Here's how you might approach it:



### High Will / Low Skill (GUIDE)

These individuals are motivated but lack the necessary skills. The goal is to help them build confidence and capability. Language and actions should be encouraging, facilitating autonomy while providing support.

Key Characteristics	Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has desire to complete the task, but lacks the needed skill to do so</li><li>• Enthusiastic</li><li>• Desire to excel</li><li>• Often new to their career or to the role</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recognize their drive: "Your enthusiasm for this is exactly what we need to push this forward. Now let's focus on developing the skills to match your passion."</li><li>• Provide learning opportunities: "I can get you some resources or training to help build your skills in this area. It's a great opportunity for growth."</li><li>• Focus on potential: "You have the right mindset to succeed here, and with some coaching, I'm confident you'll master the skills you need."</li><li>• Empower with responsibility: "I'll give you a manageable piece of this project, and you can start applying what you've learned so far."</li><li>• Encourage experimentation: "Don't worry about making mistakes. Learning through trial and error is how we grow."</li></ul>
Strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide proper training in a risk free environment</li><li>• Invest in building their skills</li><li>• Appreciate their motivation offer guidance, stepping back as progress is demonstrated</li><li>• Provide positive, evidence-based feedback: to encourage and empower</li><li>• Balance your knowledge with their knowledge; knowing when to consult and when to gain their perspectives first</li></ul>	

### High Skill / High Will (EMPOWER)

These individuals are both skilled and motivated. The challenge is to keep them engaged and continue to foster growth. Language and interactions should convey trust and independence, empowering the team member.

Key Characteristics	Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Has both the skill and Will to complete the task</li><li>• Looking for opportunities to grow themselves and often others</li><li>• Eager to learn and develop new skills, Reflective, motivated and driven</li><li>• High performer both independently and interdependently</li><li>• Seeks feedback for growth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide autonomy and ownership: "You've demonstrated your expertise here, and I want to empower you to take the lead on this initiative."</li><li>• Challenge them further: "You've mastered this, now let's push your limits and aim for something even bigger."</li><li>• Offer opportunities for growth: "How can we provide new challenges or stretch goals for you to keep growing and excelling?"</li><li>• Highlight their impact: "Your work on this project has set a new standard. What do you think we could do to further elevate the team?"</li><li>• Keep them connected to the larger vision: "You're an integral part of our success. Let's explore how we can align your personal goals with the broader team vision."</li></ul>
Strategies	
Delegate responsibilities in areas they wish to grow and learn within Provide motivating challenges Empower with autonomy and trust Offer leadership opportunities Collaborate on projects and decision-making, Praise publicly and privately	

### Low Will / Low Skill (DIRECT)

This quadrant represents individuals who struggle with both the technical aspects and the motivation. Your focus should be on both skill development and boosting engagement. Language and actions should be clear, authoritative in nature, and include specific timelines and outcomes.

Key Characteristics	Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May have failed in previous attempts and is afraid to fail again</li><li>• Apathetic</li><li>• May be in the wrong role or not a may not be a good fit for the team/organization</li><li>• Could be afraid to ask for help</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start with encouragement: "I know this task may feel challenging right now, but I believe you can develop the skills needed with the right support."</li><li>• Set clear, achievable goals: "Let's break this down into smaller steps so that you can build confidence as you go."</li><li>• Build a growth mindset: "Everyone starts somewhere, and every challenge is a chance to</li></ul>
Strategies	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide direction identified reasons for low motivation</li> <li>• Supervise more closely with clear deadlines and outcomes</li> <li>• Be specific related to necessary changes</li> <li>• Provide frequent, specific, and targeted feedback related to the defined outcomes</li> <li>• Provide training and support; Outline a performance and training plan for success</li> <li>• Recognize that they may not be a good fit for the position, the team, or the organization</li> </ul>	<p>grow. We'll work on this together."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide support and mentorship: "I'll be here to guide you through the next few steps. You're not alone in this process."</li> <li>• Celebrate small wins: "Great progress on this task! You're on the right path—keep it up!"</li> </ul>
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### High Skill / Low Will (MOTIVATE)

People in this quadrant are capable but lack motivation. Your aim is to reignite their will to act or push them to a higher level of engagement. Use language that encourages involvement and provides guidance.

Key Characteristics	Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the skills but lacks motivation to complete the tasks and/or the learning</li> <li>• Possibly has hit a plateau</li> <li>• Needs a new challenge</li> <li>• Maybe jaded by past experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge their capability: "You have the experience and expertise to lead this project. I know you can make a significant impact here."</li> <li>• Appeal to purpose: "How do you see this work aligning with your personal or professional goals? Let's tap into what excites you."</li> <li>• Offer autonomy: "What aspects of this project would you like to take full ownership of?"</li> <li>• Challenge them: "I believe you could achieve more with this task. How do you think you could stretch yourself further?"</li> <li>• Provide clear impact: "Your leadership here could change the direction of this initiative. It's an opportunity to shape something important."</li> </ul>
Strategies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discover what motivates them</li> <li>• Build a relationship with them</li> <li>• Identify reasons for low will</li> <li>• Create incentives</li> <li>• Provide opportunities that align with what excites them</li> <li>• Reinforce the outcomes and positive behaviors that are noticed</li> <li>• Recognize them for their efforts with evidence-based feedback and praise, Consider whether the individual would be happier in a different role</li> </ul>	

### Key Principles for Moving People on the Matrix

1. Individualization: Understand the specific needs and motivations of each person. Tailor your language and approach accordingly to engage them.
2. Incremental Support: When moving people from low to high skill or will, use gradual steps—small successes create momentum.
3. Clear Feedback: Provide constructive, evidence-based feedback that reinforces both the process and the outcome.
4. Continuous Challenge: Even for those in the "High Skill, High Will" quadrant, maintain a culture of learning and continuous improvement.
5. Emphasize Purpose: Help people connect what they are doing to something larger than the task at hand. This appeals to both their skills and their intrinsic motivation.

6. Listen with Intention: Pay attention to your biases and know when to paraphrase, question to surface their values, beliefs, assumptions and identity.

By acting with intention you can help individuals progress within the Skill and Will Matrix, ultimately improving performance, engagement, and growth.

#### **REFERENCES**

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