Want to Know Your Leadership Style? Check for This One Thing.

Popular leadership guides often say that leaders are either task-oriented or people-oriented. Similarly, they say that task-oriented leaders exhibit "hard" behaviors while those that are people-oriented practice "soft" behaviors.

But these are false dichotomies. As leaders, we can be task-*and* people-oriented or exercise hard *and* soft behaviors, depending on our mindset.

Am I Task-Oriented or People-Oriented?

There comes a point in our journeys as leaders when we are forced to grapple with the following question: "How can I have an unflinching focus on results while honoring and seeing people as people?"

Often, we think being focused on results is diametrically opposed to honoring and seeing people as people. We might reason, "To truly drive results, we have to see others solely as the producers of results… as objects!"

This assumption challenges our often equally emphatic promotion of organizational values. Such values usually encourage us to see others as people who matter like we matter. However, when we see others only as vehicles to our desired results, we fail to see them as people.

How, then, can we live our organizational values *and* drive results?

Perhaps the Better Question Is: Are These Two Objectives Mutually Exclusive?

Well, popular culture would at least say they are. Throughout our careers as leaders, we are introduced to various styles of leadership. These styles (and even some personality tests) seem to prompt us to identify ourselves as either "task-oriented" or "people-oriented."

When we identify ourselves with a particular leadership style, it is often based on our behaviors.

Leadership Behaviors Can Be Broadly Divided into Two Types: "Hard" Behaviors and "Soft" Behaviors.

Often we associate the style of being task-oriented with "hard" behaviors. Alternatively, those who predominantly demonstrate "soft" behaviors are considered people-oriented.

Examples of hard behaviors include focusing only on the task at hand, rejecting a request, firing someone, giving someone a poor grade, setting and expecting high standards, rejecting mediocrity, setting challenging goals, not compromising, "telling it like it is," and more.

By contrast, examples of soft behaviors include seeking staff involvement in important decisions, giving praise, giving someone a good grade, being flexible, compromising, saying "yes," avoiding telling truths that might hurt others' feelings, and more.

Herein Lies the Confusion: Good Leaders Demonstrate Both Kinds of Behaviors

As a leader, one primary responsibility is to help team members grow. In fact, if we truly honor our team members and see them as people, we naturally want to help them grow and progress.

But can people grow if we, as leaders, only exhibit soft behaviors? Are we truly honoring others as people?

If we only exhibit soft behaviors toward our team members, we may fail to help them in very pertinent ways. We may fail to give necessary feedback. We may fail to set challenging goals that could help them develop otherwise latent skills.

In fact, growth and development within our teams often require hard behaviors from us. Setting challenging goals, demanding high standards, and even giving difficult feedback are often just what our teams need to step outside their comfort zones. As we exercise these hard behaviors, we help our team members develop to their full potential.

This suggests, then, that to truly honor team members as people, we must implement *both* soft and hard behaviors. Neither of these behaviors types are exclusive to a task- or people-oriented style of leadership; both are essential to good leadership overall.

So What *Does* Distinguish Good Leadership from Poor Leadership? Mindset.

Rather than determining our leadership styles based on our behaviors, we can instead focus on the mindset that is driving our leadership.

We might ask ourselves: Do I have an inward mindset, in which my intentions are about *me*? Or do I have an outward mindset in which my intentions are about *we*?

By Changing Our Mindset from *Me*-focused to *We*-focused, We Are Able To:

- Become truly and fully task-oriented by focusing on helping everyone achieve the organization's results.
- Apply the right actions for any given situation, regardless of whether they fall into the categories of "hard" or "soft" behavior.
- Bring out the full potential in ourselves and others who look up to and rely on us.
- Nurture a culture free of blame and self-focus.

So Is Being a Task-Oriented Leader Mutually Exclusive from Being a People-Oriented Leader?

With an outward mindset, we can be both task-oriented and people-oriented. In fact, the success of our organization *depends* on us being both.

As we develop an outward mindset, we embrace the fact that to

achieve great results, we must unleash the talent, creativity, and dedication within our organization. And to do that to its fullest, we need to see and treat our team members and customers as people.

As leaders, we no longer need to live and grapple with the internal conflict or contradiction between being results- or people- oriented. Instead, we can be unflinchingly focused on results while honoring others as people.

So when identifying your leadership style, consider your mindset.