Presbyterian Church (USA)

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Applying the Appropriate Leadership Style at the Right Time

DIRECTING

COACHING

SUPPORTING

DELEGATING

CHURCH LEADER TRAINING

Today we're exploring a leadership framework called Situational Leadership II, developed by Ken Blanchard along with Paul Hersey.

This model is all about learning how to adapt your leadership approach — because not everyone you lead is in the same place, and what works for one person may not work for another.

The Core Idea:
There is no single best leadership style.

Effective leaders adjust their behavior, their style, to match the development level of the people they lead in a given moment, for a particular goal or task.

In other words, there's no one-size-fits-all leadership style.

The best leaders are like skilled coaches — they adjust based on the readiness and needs of their team members.

The SLII® Model

by Kenneth H. Blanchard

At the heart of SLII are two big ideas:

- People develop competence and confidence over time.
- Leaders need to adjust their behavior to help them move forward.

Leadership = Flexibility + Connection

Key Questions:

- What does this person need right now?
- How can I provide that?

At the heart of SLII are two big ideas:

1) People develop competence and confidence over time.

2) Leaders need to adjust their behavior to help them move forward.

Think about parenting, mentoring, or teaching.
How you help a beginner is very different from how you help someone who already knows what they're doing.

(Slide/flipchart: "Leadership = Flexibility + Connection")

SLII helps us answer two questions:

"What does this person need right now?"

"How can I provide that?"

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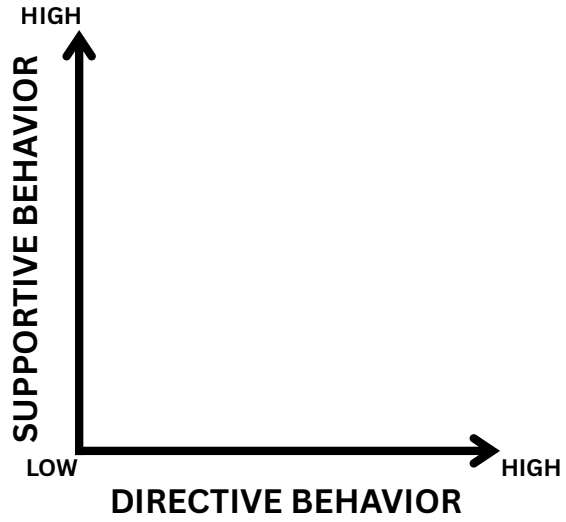


DIRECTIVE BEHAVIORS
Directive behaviors are “actions that shape and control what, how, and when things are done” — giving instructions, setting goals, defining roles, showing “how.”

SUPPORTIVE BEHAVIORS
Supportive behaviors are "actions that develop mutual trust and respect, resulting in increased motivation and confidence" — listening, encouraging, asking for input, showing empathy.

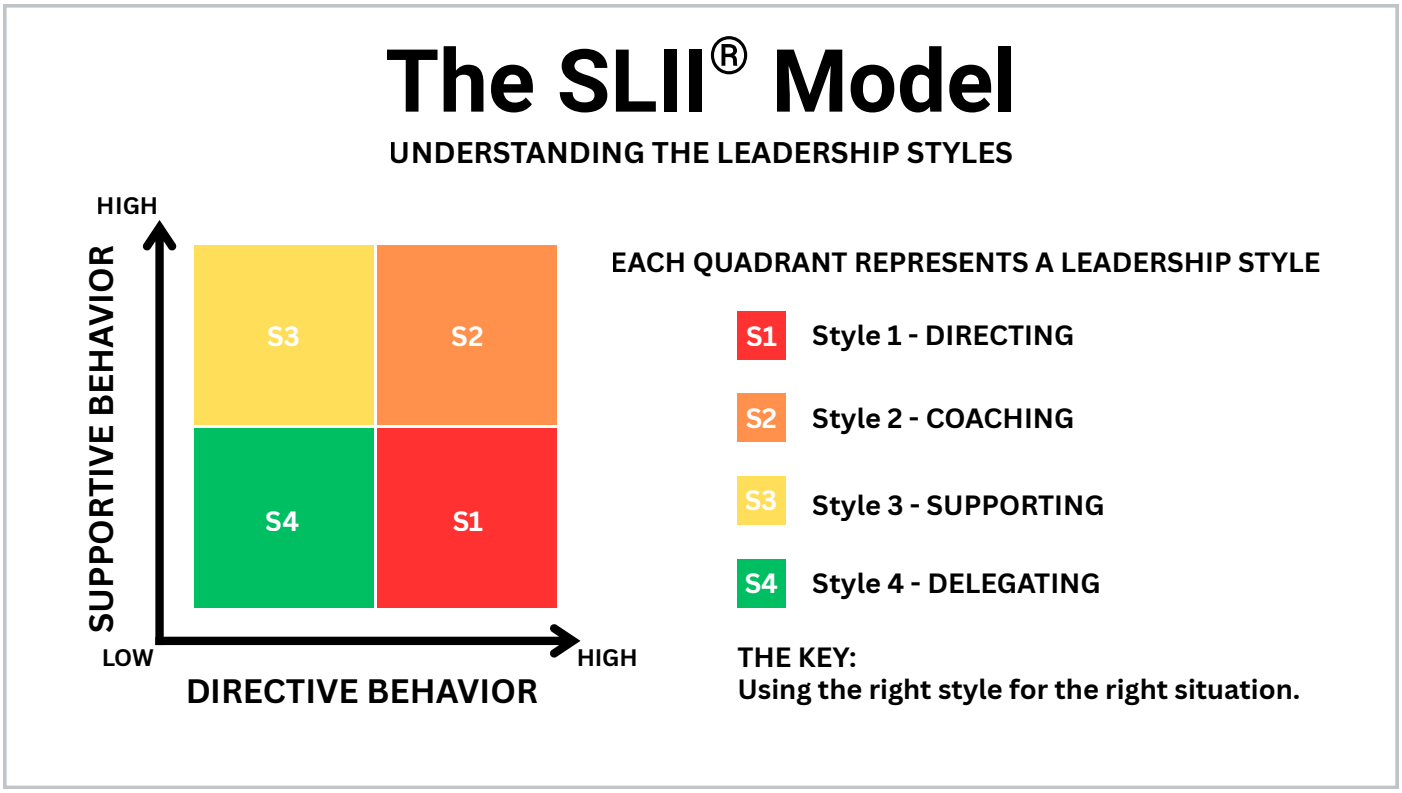
Blanchard describes leadership behavior along two dimensions:

(Draw a two-axis grid:
Directive on the X-axis, Supportive on the Y-axis.)

DIRECTIVE BEHAVIORS are “actions that shape and control what, how, and when things are done” — giving instructions, setting goals, defining roles, showing “how.”

SUPPORTIVE BEHAVIORS are "actions that develop mutual trust and respect, resulting in increased motivation and confidence" — listening, encouraging, asking for input, showing empathy.

When you combine these two, you get four leadership styles.



Each quadrant represents a different leadership style.

Style 1 – Red Zone - DIRECTING
High Direction, Low Support

You tell them what, how, when, and where.

“Here’s how to set this up.”

Style 2 - Orange Zone - COACHING
High Direction, High Support

You still guide, but also explain and encourage.

“Let’s talk through what’s working and what’s not.”

Style 3 – Yellow Zone -SUPPORTING
Low Direction, High Support

You share responsibility and facilitate decisions.

“You’ve got the skills — what do you think the next step is?”

Style 4 – Green Zone -DELEGATING
Low Direction, Low Support

You trust them to act independently.

“You know what to do — let me know how it goes.”

NOTE:
None of these styles are “better” or “worse.”

The key is using the right style for the right situation.

The SLII® Model

UNDERSTANDING THE LEADERSHIP STYLES

S1 - DIRECTING

DIRECTING

High directive/low supportive leader behavior.
The Directing leader is high on direction, low on support. He or she defines roles and goals, provides specific instruction to the individuals, and closely supervises task accomplishment. The leader tells them what, how, when, and where to do various tasks. Problem-solving and decision-making are initiated solely by the leader. Solutions and decisions are announced; communication is largely one-way, and implementation is closely supervised by the leader.

The magic of SLII is matching your style of leadership to their development level.

Too much direction for a D4 feels like micromanagement.

Too little direction for a D1 feels like abandonment.

The SLII® Model

UNDERSTANDING THE LEADERSHIP STYLES

S2 - COACHING

COACHING

High directive/high supportive leader behavior.
The Coaching leader is high on both direction and support. He or she explains decisions and solicits suggestions from the follower(s), but continues to direct task accomplishment.The leader still provides a great deal of direction and leads with his/her ideas, but he or she also attempts to hear the individuals' feelings about decisions as well as their ideas and suggestions. While two-way communication and support are increased, control over decision-making remains with the leader.

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The SLII® Model

UNDERSTANDING THE LEADERSHIP STYLES

S3 - SUPPORTING

SUPPORTING

High directive/low supportive leader behavior.
The Supporting leader and the individual make decisions together and then the leader supports the followers' efforts toward task accomplishment. The locus of control for decision-making and problem-solving shifts from leader to the individual. The leader's role is to provide recognition and to actively listen and facilitate problem-solving/ decision-making on the part of the individual. This is appropriate since the individual has the ability and knowledge to do the task whenever the use of S3 is warranted.

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UNDERSTANDING THE LEADERSHIP STYLES

S4 - DELEGATING

DELEGATING

Low directive/low supportive leader behavior.
The Delegating leader provides low support and direction. He or she turns over decisions and responsibility for implementation by the individual. The leader discusses the problems with the individual until joint agreement is achieved on problem definition and then the decision-making process is delegated totally to them. Now it is the individual who has significant control for deciding how tasks are to be accomplished. They are allowed to "run their own show" because they have both competence and confidence to take responsibility for directing their own behavior.

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Learning to Ride a Bike

PICTURE THIS
A father is teaching his young daughter to ride a bicycle.

She’s excited, maybe a little nervous, and this becomes a perfect illustration of how Situational Leadership works in real life.

STAGE 1 - DIRECTING (S1)
At the very beginning, the child doesn’t know how to ride at all. She’s enthusiastic but has no skills yet.

The parent uses a Directing style — high on direction, low on support.

He says things like, “Put your feet on the pedals. Look straight ahead. Keep your balance. I’ll hold the seat.”
He gives clear instructions, close supervision, and lots of structure.

At this point, the child needs specific guidance, not freedom.

STAGE 2 - COACHING(S2)
Now she’s tried a few times. She can pedal a bit, but wobbles and falls. Confidence drops.

The parent shifts to Coaching — still giving direction, but adding more encouragement and explan ation.

He might say, “You’re doing great! Keep pedaling, and I’ll run beside you. Remember, balance comes with practice.”

He’s still leading the way, but now he’s also motivating — blending direction with support to keep her going through the frustration.

STAGE 3 - SUPPORTING (S3)
Soon, she can balance and ride short distances but doubts herself when she starts alone.

The parent moves to a Supporting style — less direction, more encouragement.

He says, “You’ve got this! I’m right here if you need me.”
He doesn’t tell her how to ride anymore; instead, he builds her confidence, offering emotional support and celebrating progress.

The focus is now on empowerment, not instruction.

STAGE 4 DELEGATING
Finally, she’s riding confidently — maybe calling out, “Look, Dad, no hands!”
Now the parent steps back, cheering from the sidelines.

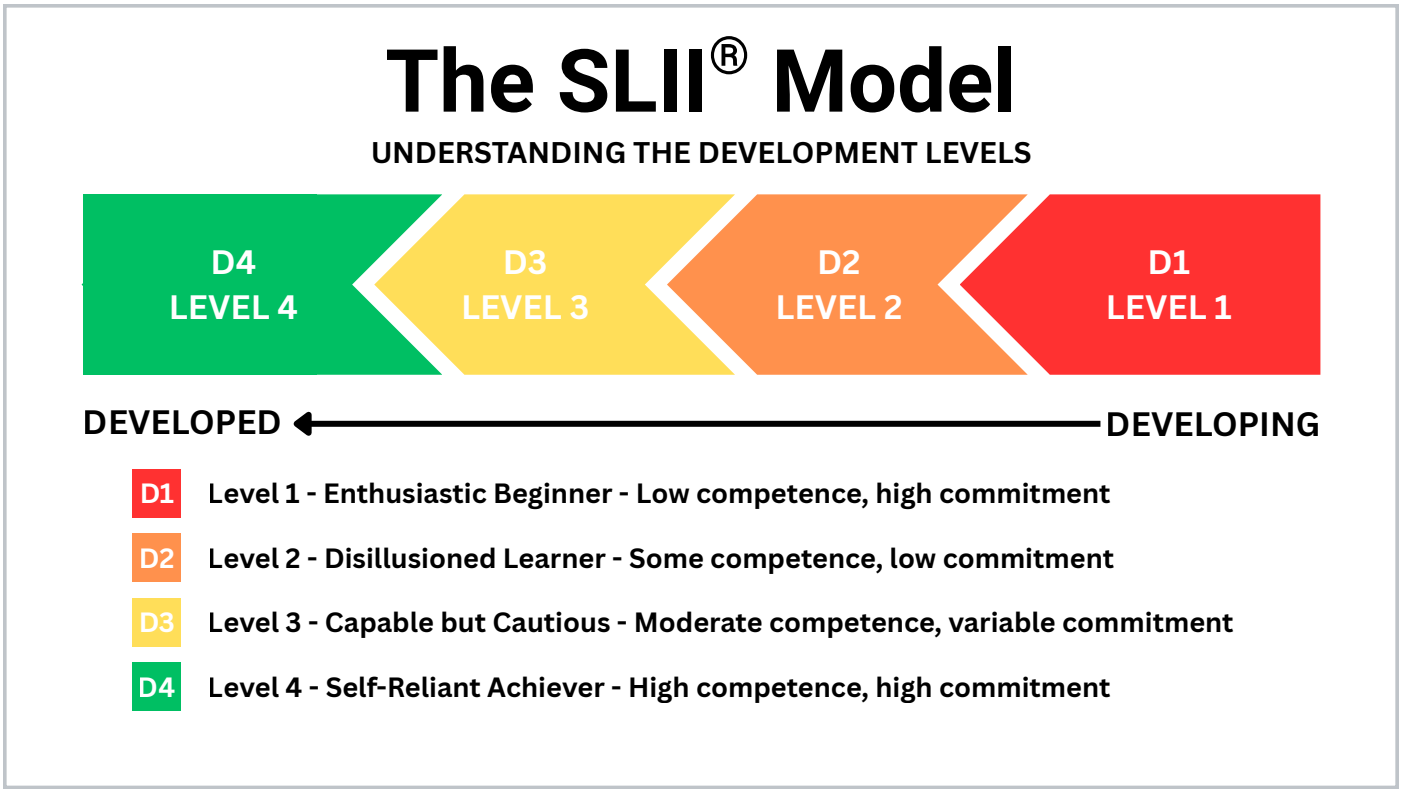
The Delegating style is low direction, low support.
He trusts her to ride, explore, and enjoy the freedom.

His leadership has accomplished its purpose — she’s capable and confident on her own.

WRAP UP
In just one bike lesson, we see how leadership isn’t one-size-fits-all.

It shifts — from directing to coaching, to supporting, to delegating — as competence and confidence grow.

Good leaders, like good parents, match their style to the learner’s development level and help people move toward independence with competence and confidence.



To know which style to use, you first assess where the person is in their development for that specific task.

There are four levels of development that correspond to the four styles of leadership.

And the individual needs to be assessed on two variables, their...
COMPETENCE
and
COMMITMENT

COMPETENCE
• How strong are the individual's demonstrated task knowledge and skills?

• How strong are the individual's relevant transferable skills?

COMMITMENT
• How motivated, interested, or enthusiastic is the individual?

• How confident or self-assured is the individual?

Once you've assessed these variables, you can identify their level of development.

Level 1 - Enthusiastic Beginner

Low competence, high commitment

Level 2 - Disillusioned Learner
Some competence, low commitment

Level 3 - Capable but Cautious
Moderate competence, variable commitment

Level 4 - Self-Reliant Achiever
High Competence, High Commitment

Think of a new volunteer, employee, or committee member.

At first, they're excited but don't know how things work — that's D1.

A few weeks in, they realize it's harder than they thought — D2.

Over time, they get more skilled but may still need reassurance — D3.

Eventually, they become confident and capable — D4.

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UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENT LEVELS

D1 - ENTHUSIASTIC BEGINNER

They are often:

- hopeful
- inexperienced
- curious
- new/unskilled
- optimistic
- excited
- eager/enthusiastic

They may:

- be new to the task or goal
- be eager to learn
- be willing to take direction
- not recognize sacred cows
- not know what they don't know
- do the wrong thing
- have confidence based on hopes

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UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENT LEVELS

D2 - DISILLUSIONED LEARNER

They are often:

- overwhelmed
- confused
- demotivated
- demoralized
- frustrated
- disillusioned
- discouraged

They may:

- not be competent yet
- be ready to quit
- be developing and learning - mistakes are part of the process
- need reassurance
- be unreliable, inconsistent
- still not recognize sacred cows
- be damaging to others
- show flashes of competence

When someone stays too long in D2 — the “Disillusioned Learner” stage — the danger to the church as a system is significant, because this stage is marked by low confidence, growing frustration, and waning commitment. If not addressed, it creates a ripple effect that weakens both morale and mission.

Here’s how it plays out systemically:

1. Ministry Energy Drains
A D2 leader has learned enough to see how hard the work really is, but not yet enough to feel confident doing it well. When that discouragement lingers:

Tasks feel heavier.

Meetings become about problems, not possibilities.

Momentum stalls.

If multiple people in a ministry or committee remain in D2, the system shifts from hopeful engagement to exhausted maintenance.

2. Negative Contagion

Attitudes are contagious.

Persistent discouragement spreads quickly—especially in close-knit congregations.

Other volunteers begin doubting themselves.

The culture becomes risk-averse (“Let’s not try that again”).

Innovation and creativity shrink.

What began as one discouraged worker becomes a collective slump in confidence and vision.

3. Overfunctioning Leaders and Underdeveloped Followers

When someone lingers in D2, servant leaders often respond by “rescuing” them—taking the task back, doing it for them, or micromanaging.
The result?

The discouraged person never grows into competence (D3 or D4).

The leader becomes overextended.

The system reinforces dependency rather than development.

Over time, the church ends up with a few tired doers and many passive watchers.

4. Mission Drift

A congregation full of D2s focuses on survival, not mission. People lose sight of why the work matt ers.
Without re-inspiring vision (the servant leader’s “leadership” role), ministries stop adapting and start protecting their comfort zones.
The church plateaus—not because of lack of faith, but because of unresolved discouragement.

5. Spiritual Cost

Prolonged discouragement erodes joy and calling.
Leaders lose their sense of “I’m serving Christ” and start thinking “I’m just doing church work.”
That disconnect can quietly lead to burnout, withdrawal, or even conflict.

The Way Forward

The servant leader’s role is to recognize D2 early and respond with the S2 Coaching style:

Offer both direction and encouragement.

Celebrate small wins.

Remind them of the “why” behind the work.

Keep hope visible until confidence returns.

Summary:
If D2 becomes permanent, discouragement becomes culture.
If the leader coaches through it, D2 becomes the birthplace of growth and resilience.

The SLII® Model

UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENT LEVELS

D3 - CAUTIOUS BUT CAPABLE

They are often:

- self-critical
- cautious
- doubtful
- capable
- contributing
- insecure
- tentative/unsure

They may:

- be addicted to support
- need confidence built
- make productive contributions

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UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENT LEVELS

D4 - SELF-RELIANT PERFORMER

They are often:

- justifiably confident
- consistently competent
- inspired/inspires others
- autonomous
- self-assured
- accomplished
- self-reliant/self-directed

They may:

- be recognized by others as experts
- trust their own ability to work independently
- be proactive
- be asked to do too much

The SLII® Model

DEVELOPMENT LEVEL	MATCHING STYLE	LEADERSHIP FOCUS
D1 - Enthusiastic Beginner	S1 - Directing	Give clear instructions/Explain exactly what, when, and how/ Monitor closely
D2 - Disillusioned Learner	S2 - Coaching	Continue to direct but add lots of support/Teach, listen, encourage.
D3 - Cautious but Capable	S3 - Supporting	Collaboration/share decision-making/Ask questions, affirm, build confidence
D4 - Self-Reliant Performer	S4 - Delegating	Trust and Empowerment/ Turn over responsibility/ Check in occasionally

The magic of SLII is matching your style of leadership to their development level.

Too much direction for a D4 feels like micromanagement.

Too little direction for a D1 feels like abandonment.

Learning to Drive

LEARNING TO DRIVE
Let's take another example — a parent teaching their teenager how to drive.

It's a great illustration of how people move back and forth through the stages of development, depending on the task and the situation.

STAGE 1 – DIRECTING (D1 / S1)
The lesson starts in a quiet church parking lot.

The teenager knows nothing about driving yet but is excited and eager to learn — that's low competence, high commitment.

The parent uses a Directing style: clear, step-by-step instructions and close supervision.

"Put the car in drive. Keep your foot on the brake. Now slowly ease forward. Turn the wheel a little. "

The leader provides high direction and tight control, because safety and skill-building come first.

The teen needs instruction, not autonomy.

STAGE 2 - COACHING (D2 / S2)
After a few sessions, the teen can start and stop smoothly, turn corners, and even park.

But once they leave the safety of the parking lot and hit a quiet neighborhood street — where the car actually goes 35 miles per hour — suddenly they're anxious again.

(NEXT SLIDE)

In the City

Their confidence drops even though their skills are growing.

This is the Coaching phase — the parent still gives direction, but adds more encouragement and explanation.

“You’re doing fine! Remember to check your mirrors, stay centered, and breathe. You’ve got this.”

The leader provides both structure and support, helping the teen push through the fear of real-world conditions.

STAGE 3 - SUPPORTING (D3 / S3)
After a while, the teen gets comfortable with local streets. They can merge onto a busy street, park in a public parking lot, maybe even parallel park. They feel like they know what they're doing.

But... what happens when they are asked to go on a busy highway where the speed limit is 70 MPH...

(NEXT SLIDE)

On the Highway

Their confidence dips again.
Anxiety peaks again. They become unsure of themselves.

Even experienced learners can slide back to earlier development stages when facing something new or complex.

Now, the parent uses a Supporting style — less direction, more reassurance.

“You know how to do this. I’m right here beside you. Take your time — wait for the opening, and then merge when you’re ready.”

The leader’s job now is to build confidence, not just competence — to remind the learner that they already have what it takes.

STAGE 4 – DELEGATING (D4 / S4)
Eventually, the teenager becomes confident and capable — cruising down the highway, handling city traffic, parking in tight spots.

The parent moves to a Delegating style — low direction, low support.
“You can drive us to church today.”

The leader steps back, allowing independence, but remains available if needed.

The teen now owns the skill — the parent has successfully equipped them for self-direction.

WRAP UP
This example shows that leadership isn't static — it flexes as the learner grows and as the situation changes.

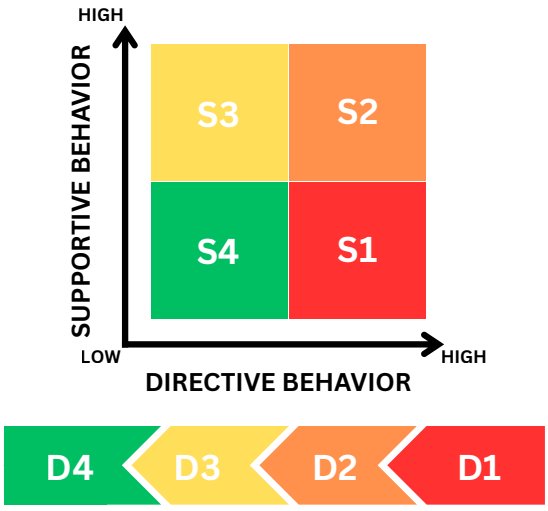
A teenager may move from D1 to D4 in one area — like parking — but slide back to D2 or D3 when facing something new, like driving in the rain or navigating downtown traffic.

Effective leaders recognize where their followers are for each specific task, and they adapt — directing when needed, supporting when confidence wavers, and delegating when independence takes hold.

Just like good parents, good leaders don't lead one way all the time — they lead the right way for the moment.

The SLII® Model

ASSESSING THE STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP NEEDS



SCENARIOS

- Sunday School Teacher
- Youth Sponsor
- Mission Team Chair
- AV Booth Volunteer
- Associate Pastor
- Deacon Leading Care Team

ASSESSMENT PRACTICE
Let's practice assessing the stage of development and leadership needs of people in various scenarios.

INSTRUCTIONS
Consider each scenario carefully. With a partner, discuss:

• What is the task this person is performing?

• What is their development level (D1–D4)?

• What leadership style (S1–S4) would best support them right now?

• What would you say or do to help them succeed?

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Case #1 - Sunday School Teacher
Maria has volunteered to teach the 3rd–5th grade Sunday School class. She loves kids and has plenty of enthusiasm but hasn't taught before. She's unsure how to use the curriculum or manage time and behavior.

Task:
Teaching Sunday School and managing a classroom.

Development Level:
D1 – Enthusiastic Beginner.

Leadership Style:
S1 – Directing.

Leader Action:
Give clear instructions, model lessons, provide detailed guidance on classroom flow, and observe early sessions. Offer plenty of structure and feedback.

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Case #2 - Youth Sponsor
Mike has served with the youth for 15 years. He's creative, organized, and relational. He doesn't need oversight—he mentors new volunteers and models faithful leadership.

Task:
Planning and leading youth ministry activities.

Development Level:
D4 – Self-Reliant Achiever.

Leadership Style:
S4 – Delegating.

Leader Action:
Empower them to mentor others, seek their counsel for new initiatives, and express gratitude for their consistent, high-level leadership.

****
Case #3 - Mission Team Chair
Robert led a successful food drive last year but hesitates to plan another outreach because turnout was low last spring. He has skills but lacks confidence in his team's commitment.

Task:
Planning and executing new outreach projects.

Development Level:
D3 – Capable but Cautious Performer.

Leadership Style:
S3 – Supporting.

Leader Action:
Reflect on past successes, brainstorm together, express confidence, and co-create plans to rebuild enthusiasm and ownership.

****

Case #4 - Volunteer in the AV Booth
Josh is tech-savvy and thrilled to help with livestreaming worship. However, he's never used the church's soundboard and feels anxious about "messing up" during worship.

Task:
Running sound and livestream equipment.

Development Level:
D1 – Enthusiastic Beginner.

Leadership Style:
S1 – Directing.

Leader Action:
Demonstrate equipment use, provide a checklist, supervise during first few Sundays, and celebrate small wins.

****

Case #5 - Associate Pastor
Mark is gifted and experienced but sometimes hesitates to lead new initiatives without explicit approval. He's capable but cautious after a prior idea was rejected.

Task:
Leading new initiatives and collaborating with peers.

Development Level:
D3 – Capable but Cautious Performer.

Leadership Style:
S3 – Supporting.

Leader Action:
Empower through trust, invite their input, affirm their gifts, and clarify that they have permission to i

nnovate.

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Case #6 - Deacon Leading a Care Team
Tina has been a deacon for six months. She knows her responsibilities and loves people but hesitates to delegate or organize visits without checking everything with the pastor first.

Task:
Organizing visits and delegating to team members.

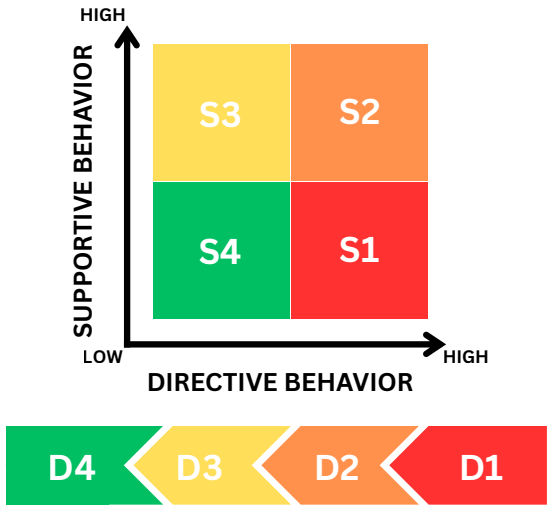
Development Level:
D3 – Capable but Cautious Performer.

Leadership Style:
S3 – Supporting.

Leader Action:
Ask for their ideas, affirm their competence, share decision-making, and encourage them to take more initiative with confidence.

The SLII® Model

ASSESSING THE STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP NEEDS



SCENARIOS

- Finance Committee Member
- Choir Director
- Elder on Session
- Worship Band Musician
- Clerk of Session
- Youth Ministry Volunteer

Case #7 - Finance Committee Member
Evelyn has joined the Finance Committee. She knows accounting but feels overwhelmed by per capita, restricted funds, and denominational reports. Her enthusiasm is fading as she realizes how complex it is.

Task:
Managing church finances with new terminology and reports.

Development Level:
D2 – Disillusioned Learner.

Leadership Style:
S2 – Coaching.

Leader Action:
Clarify unfamiliar processes, walk through reports together, and acknowledge the learning curve. Balance direction with reassurance.

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Case #8 - Choir Director
Angela has directed the choir for years. She plans rehearsals, recruits members, and collaborates with the pastor. She knows her work and enjoys mentoring others.

Task:
Leading worship music and coordinating volunteers.

Development Level:
D4 – Self-Reliant Achiever.

Leadership Style:
S4 – Delegating.

Leader Action:
Provide vision and goals, trust their leadership, celebrate accomplishments, and give freedom to manage details independently.

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Case #9 - Elder on Session
David is excited to serve on Session. He's passionate about ministry but doesn't yet understand Presbyterian polity or how Session makes decisions. He feels a little lost in meetings but is eager to learn.

Task:
Participating in Session meetings and understanding polity.

Development Level:
D1 – Enthusiastic Beginner.

Leadership Style:
S1 – Directing.

Leader Action:
Orient them with materials, explain procedures, pair them with a mentor elder, and walk through sample decisions step-by-step.

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Case #10 - Worship Band Musician
John was thrilled to join the praise band, but after a few chaotic rehearsals, he's discouraged by lack of communication and consistency. He's started showing up less often.

Task:
Playing regularly and collaborating with the band.

Development Level:

D2 – Disillusioned Learner.

Leadership Style:
S2 – Coaching.

Leader Action:
Talk through frustrations, affirm their contribution, clarify rehearsal expectations, and provide both guidance and emotional support.

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Case #11 - Clerk of Session
Ruth has served as Clerk for over a decade. She knows Presbyterian procedure, manages records, and helps to keep meetings running smoothly. She trains new elders with grace and clarit y.

Task:
Managing records and facilitating Session business.

Development Level:
D4 – Self-Reliant Achiever.

Leadership Style:
S4 – Delegating.

Leader Action:
Offer appreciation, solicit periodic updates, and invite them to mentor new clerks or elders.

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Case #12 - Youth Ministry Volunteer
Samantha started the year excited about youth group. A few months in, attendance is spotty, and she's frustrated that parents don't respond to messages. She wonders if she's cut out for this.

Task:
Engaging with youth and maintaining consistency.

Development Level:
D2 – Disillusioned Learner.

Leadership Style:
S2 – Coaching.

Leader Action:
Offer encouragement, empathize with frustration, help problem-solve communication challenges, and reinforce the importance of their role.

Let’s take a breath and think about what we’ve learned today.

You’ve seen that leadership isn’t one-size-fits-all.

It’s a partnership that changes as people grow.

The best leaders serve by giving people what they need in the moment—sometimes direction, sometimes encouragement, sometimes freedom.

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ASK:
• “What’s one key insight or "aha moment" you’re taking away from today's session?”

• “Where in your ministry could you apply this right away?”

Think of two people you lead, supervise, or mentor in your ministry setting. Identify their current developmental level and the leadership style that would serve them best right now.

What one action will you take in the next seven days to apply the SLII model in your ministry?

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Remember, in the church, our goal isn’t to get things done—it’s to grow disciples and equip

people for ministry.

When we use the SLII model, we help people mature in both competence and confidence, moving from D1 to D4.

Serve - Develop - Empower

That's the movement of servant leadership. We serve first, we help people grow, and then we release them to serve others.

Leadership in the church is a sacred trust.

When you match your leadership style to someone's real need, you're not just managing—you're shepherding. You're helping them grow into the people God designed them to be.

CLOSING PRAYER
Lord Jesus, you came not to be served but to serve,
and to show us what leadership in your kingdom looks like.

Give me eyes to see where others are growing, ears to listen to what they need, and a heart willing to serve as you served.

Teach me to lead with wisdom, humility, and love, so that your people may flourish and your mission may thrive. Amen.