

# Mentorship Modules

## Mentor Module 4: Discussing Leadership Theories

Adapted from W. Wagner et al.'s [Exploring Leadership For College Students Who Want to Make a Difference](#)

Conceptions about the nature of leadership and who is engaged in the leadership process have changed over time. Review the list below to better understand the evolving approaches of leadership.

Approach	Major Assumptions
Great Man	Leadership development is based on Darwinist principles. Leaders are born, not made. Leaders have natural abilities of power and influence.
Trait	A leader has superior or endowed qualities. Certain individuals possess a natural ability to lead. Leaders have traits that differentiate them from followers.
Behavioral	There is one best way to lead. Leaders who express high concern for both people and production will be the most effective.
Situational/ Contingency	Leaders act differently, depending on the situation. The situation determines who will emerge as a leader. Different leadership behaviors are required for different situations.
Influence	Leadership is an influence or social exchange process. Leadership is the process of influencing others, regardless of position.

### Discuss

What would be your critique of each approach? Is there an approach that is more appealing to you? Why? Is there one that you do not like? What do you think could be some of the historical and cultural reasons for the shift in approaches and theories over time?

### Discover

Together, provide specific examples of leaders who leadership can be described based on each approach (Great Man, Trait, and so on). What is it about these leaders that reflect each approach? Now, consider one of your own “personal best” leadership experience – an experience in which you were most effective. What theory or approach best describes how you led in that situation?

### Develop

The above approaches are ways that others defined leadership. Reflect on the people in your life, both personally and professionally, that you would call “leaders.” As you interact with them, consider which of the approaches align with your view of them.