



Followership – leading from the bottom up

by Eric Kaufmann

Good followership means reaching a specific goal while exercising respect for authority, a positive attitude, integrity, and self-discipline. Like good leadership, good followership requires maturity.

Management expert Warren Bennis says, "in a world of growing complexity, leaders are increasingly dependent on their subordinates for good information, whether the leaders want to hear it or not. Followers who tell the truth, and leaders who listen to it, are an unbeatable combination."

By participating actively in the goals of the organization while thinking critically and honestly about the process, followers add executive, tactical and operational value to an organization.

Lets look at five types of followers and the traits of good followership.

Sheep Type Followers are passive and unthinking. They do what they are told and passively comply with orders without thinking about what they're doing, about innovation, or about alternative actions.

Yes People Type Followers are very active, but still unthinking. They mindlessly agree with everything they hear and volunteer for everything they can. Gaining favor and approval is their motivation.

Survivors are committed to staying out of trouble. By sticking to mediocre performance, they avoid standing out in any way. Melting into the background is their goal.

Alienated Followers are critical thinkers but passive. Their keen observations turn into complaints and criticism rather than actions that improve the situation. They have an effect of wearing down the morale around them.

Effective Followers are both critical, independent thinkers and active in expressing and executing their ideas. They seek out responsibility, and work independently to accomplish goals. When they see something that can be improved, they think things through and offer suggestions for improvement.

Here are some traits for cultivating good followership for yourself or your organization.

Positive attitude: Your level of enthusiasm will have a direct effect on the group and the leader's feelings concerning the task. Display an upbeat and energetic attitude when performing and promoting tasks. Goal accomplishment will often rest with the followers', as well as the leaders enthusiasm.

Critical thinking: Take a proactive stance toward organizational problems. Behavior is a function of decisions, not conditions. Assess, analyze and evaluate your task and take the initiative and the responsibility to improve things.

Self-discipline: Develop awareness and understanding of your own emotions and needs as well as your fears and strengths. Discipline harnesses strength and provides stamina. By disciplining yourself, you give your leader time, peace of mind, and efficiency in their work.

Integrity and Honesty: Thoughtful dissent is more valuable than an air of collegiality. You may experience some discomfort when sharing with your leader an honest and critical opinion, but this is offset by the fact that insightful and critical feedback increases a leader's ability to make good decisions.

Followership and leadership transcend ego needs and impulses. As a valued follower, you may put your job on the line by speaking up. But ask yourself this – is your job is worth the personal cost of following a leader who values his or her ego more than the good of the company's vision and people?

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