

Leadership Skills

Unit II





Followership

Key Terms

- followership
- readiness
- ability
- willingness
- confidence
- proactive

What You Will Learn to Do

This chapter will help you become a better leader by learning how to be a good follower.

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- ✓ Explain the importance of good followership
- ✓ Describe the readiness factors of followers
- ✓ Explain how to build productive relationships with leaders
- ✓ Describe how to be an effective follower

The Importance of Good Followership

You may have heard this before: “Before you can lead, you have to learn to follow.” Good leaders emerge from the ranks of able followers. As a member of various teams and groups throughout your life, you’ll have many chances to practice good **followership**.

But why do you need a lesson about following? To be a follower, you simply do what you’re told, right? Well, the role of a good follower is more than that. Followership is often taken for granted in studies of leadership. Yet an active follower who shares the leader’s goals and values is an invaluable team member. Followers—the “worker bees” or whatever you call them—are the heart and soul of an effective team.

The Follower Relationship

Throughout your life and career you will be a follower in one role or another. On a sports team, you follow the lead of your captain or coach. On a school project, you help the team leader. In your cadet unit, you follow higher-ranking cadets and your instructor. As a Navy captain, you would follow admirals. And even if you became a Navy admiral yourself, you would still have to follow the directions of our country’s civilian leaders.

The relationship between follower and leader sometimes gets blurry. During a single day, a team member’s role might flip back and forth from leader to follower many times. For example, suppose that your school principal asks the Adopt-a-Road team that you lead to clean up the school parking lot. Wearing your follower hat, you say, “No problem, ma’am. Our team can handle it!” Then later, wearing your “leader hat,” you would assign certain parts of the job to various members of your team to complete the job.

When successful business leaders are asked to list traits they look for in effective leaders and good followers, the traits they choose in both cases are similar. The most commonly named traits are:

Leader: honest, competent, forward-looking, inspiring

Follower: honest, competent, dependable, cooperative.

Why are the two lists so similar? It’s because the roles of leader and follower are closely related. In fact, followership and leadership are sometimes so closely connected that you may not even realize when you are switching roles.

Types of Followers

In your unit, you will find a number of types of followers. Some followers are *independent*. One kind of independent follower plays an active role in the unit by seeking out responsibility, carrying out assigned tasks in a responsible manner, and respectfully offering appropriate suggestions for improvement. Such cadets support the unit’s goals and objectives. These cadets are known as *effective followers*.

Another kind of independent follower will take a negative approach to his or her job as a follower. Such cadets always complain, criticizing every idea or questioning every unit policy. They are known as *alienated followers*.

Key Term

followership—
*displaying the attitudes,
behaviors, and actions
that help a leader
succeed at leading*

The opposite of independent followers are *dependent* followers. They simply go along with anything you ask them do without thought. They are the “yes” people, or the sheep. They wait for you to tell them what to do, then do it.

Between the independent followers and the dependent followers are the *survivors*. These followers are almost invisible: They stay in the background as much as possible, never volunteer, and contribute only to keep out of trouble.

Which kind of team member are you? As a leader, which type of follower would you want serving in your unit?

Qualities of a Good Follower

Good followers usually demonstrate the same qualities as effective leaders. As a good follower, you are *loyal* to the organization and its goals. You believe in your leaders and respect their decisions. You assume that your leaders have the unit's best interests in mind.

A second important quality of an effective follower is to be *smart*. You know your job in the unit and strive to know your superior's job as well. You are prepared to accept greater responsibility when needed to fill a new role in the unit.

Initiative and *common sense* are two more traits that go hand in hand in a good follower. No one has to tell you to carry out your job. As a good follower, you know what has to be done and do it.



Good followers usually demonstrate the same qualities as effective leaders.

Followers Have Power

Individual followers can play different, yet crucial roles in helping their team achieve its goals or mission. As a member of a group or team, you probably possess certain skills or knowledge that no one else does. To the degree that the team needs your knowledge and skills, you as a follower can affect team performance and exert considerable power. Your skill may even be the power of your personality. A popular follower, as an individual, can change the behavior of a group. It's up to the team leader to decide how to use each follower's individual strengths for the team's overall good.

The Readiness Factors of Followers

In Act 5, Scene 2, of Shakespeare's "Hamlet," the prince remarks, "the readiness is all." Hamlet was right. Understanding the **readiness** of followers is a key element of leadership.

Team members are naturally at different levels of readiness as they face each task or mission. The effective leader's job is to help followers or team members gain the knowledge and skills they need to perform at the highest level they can.

Three factors determine readiness: *ability, willingness, and confidence.*

Key Term

readiness—
how prepared a team member is to carry out a particular task or tasks

Readiness Levels

Readiness levels are the combinations of ability and willingness that a person brings to team tasks. Follower readiness breaks down into four levels. Each level represents a different combination of follower ability and willingness, and confidence.

Low Readiness

Readiness Level 1: Unable and unwilling—The team member lacks ability, commitment, and motivation. This level may also apply to a team member who is both unable and insecure, lacking the confidence to perform a task to standard.

Moderate Readiness

Readiness Level 2: Unable but willing—The team member lacks ability, but is motivated and makes an effort to complete the task. The person may also be unable but confident, as long as you are there to provide guidance.

Readiness Level 3: Able but unwilling—The team member is able to perform the task, but is unwilling to use that ability. Or the team member is able but insecure—showing ability but acting insecure about doing the job.

High Readiness

Readiness Level 4: Able and willing—The team member has the ability and commitment to perform the job. The team member is confident about completing the task.

Ability, willingness, and confidence chart the course to your readiness as a follower.



Key Terms

ability—
the knowledge, experience, and skill a team member or a team brings to a task

willingness—
the degree to which a team member or a team shows confidence, commitment, and motivation to accomplish a task

confidence—
faith or belief that a person will act in a right, proper, or effective way; self-assurance

Ability of Followers

Ability is partly based on the experience a team member has gained from doing previous tasks. If you are a team leader and need to assess the ability levels of your followers or team members, first consider the task you will be assigning and its desired outcome. Then decide which followers are best suited to handle that task by their knowledge, skill, and experience.

Willingness of Followers

Willingness consists of the ability to do the work, a sense of duty in doing it, and a desire to do it. A team member who isn't comfortable with a task and isn't confident that his or her performance will meet the standard might show unwillingness.

Ability and willingness affect each other. A change in either factor will affect the way the two factors operate together.

Confidence of Followers

As team members' competence and abilities change, so will their attitudes, levels of enthusiasm, and commitment. As they learn more and become more competent, their **confidence** level will increase.

Confidence levels can shift and change. As a leader, you must be aware of your followers' changing levels of confidence and competence. Followers usually become increasingly confident as work proceeds, but this isn't always true. Sometimes repeated false starts or failures shake an individual's, or a team's, confidence. In any case, never label a team member. Be aware of your team members' confidence levels and intervene if they start to slip.

Building Effective Relationships With Leaders

People often think that a good leader-follower relationship is a matter of luck. Many followers say they have a “good” leader or a “bad” leader, and assume they can’t do anything to change the situation. This is a mistake. The leader alone does not determine the quality of the relationship between leader and follower.

Effective followers know how to strengthen their relationship with their leaders. They also know how to enhance the support they provide to their leaders and to the team.

As a follower, how can you strengthen the leader-follower relationship? Here are some suggestions.

Always Help the Leader Succeed

Part of the leader’s job is to help his or her followers succeed. But it works both ways: Followers also need to help their leaders succeed. That doesn’t mean you should be an “apple polisher” or play politics. You just need to remember that you and your leader are part of the same team with the same goals. If the team succeeds, everyone benefits. If the team fails, the blame should fall on the followers as well as the leader.

Understand the Leader’s World

Effective team members must know the leader’s and the organization’s objectives so they can share that vision. Loyalty and support are a two-way street. Just as a leader can help followers attain their personal goals, a follower can help a leader achieve the team’s goals. Knowing his or her leaders’ values, preferences, and personality can help a follower understand the leader’s actions and decisions. Such understanding gives followers insight into how to strengthen relationships with their leaders.



The leader’s job is to help his or her followers succeed. The followers’ job is to help their leader succeed.

Educate Your Leader

Remember that leaders don't always have all the answers. Followers can make a great contribution to a team's success by recognizing—and trying to help overcome—a leader's human shortcomings.

A new leader, in particular, almost always needs team members' help. Such a leader may have a great deal of knowledge and experience, but may not be familiar with the operations or needs of the team to which he or she has been assigned. It's up to followers to orient and educate a new leader about team members' expertise and experience. This process is especially important if the leader comes from a different field or area of specialty.

Keep Your Leader Informed

Nobody likes unpleasant surprises. As a follower, never put your leader in the embarrassing situation of having someone else know more about the team's business than he or she does. Brief your leader often on all business related to the team's goals and mission.

Adapt to Your Leader's Style

It's the follower's responsibility to adapt to the leader's style, not vice versa. Followers need to be flexible. They need to adapt to the leader's decision-making style, problem-solving strategies, methods of communication, and styles of interaction. If your leader does not set clear expectations, ask for clarification. If you are the leader, clarify your expectations about followers' roles and responsibilities.

Be an Effective Follower

Besides working to build a supportive relationship with your leader, you can take these additional actions to be an effective follower:

Be honest. Followers need to be honest and dependable. If a follower does not have integrity, it doesn't matter how many other great qualities or talents he or she might have. No one wants to work with someone who isn't trustworthy. After integrity, leaders value dependability. They value team members who have reliable work habits, accomplish assigned tasks at the right time in the right order, and do what they promise.

Don't gripe. Part of a follower's job is to make the team work well. Ideally, the leader helps a team work well, but sometimes the team must perform despite its leader. Poor leadership is an enormous burden. But complaining about policies and poor leadership is never productive. A follower who gripes only further undermines the leader's authority and the team's ability to function.

Key Term

proactive—
taking the initiative
and assuming part
of the responsibility
to make things happen

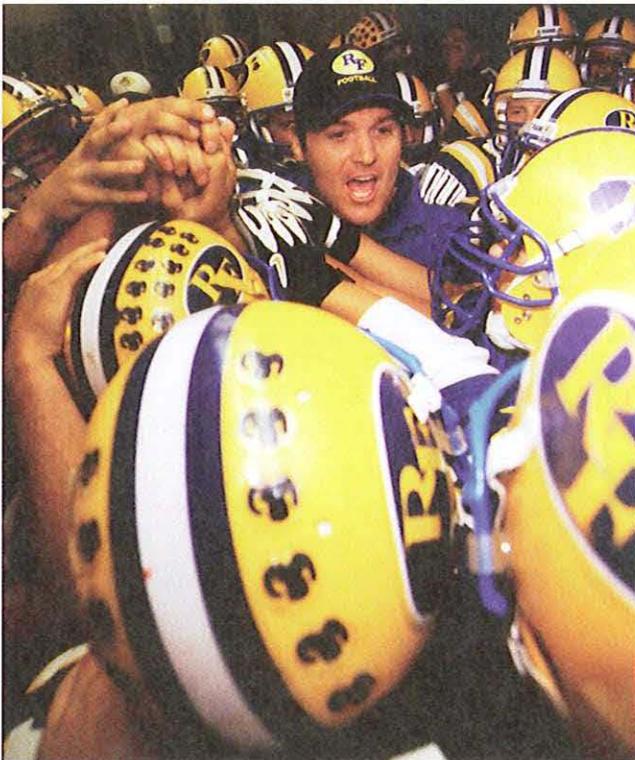
Be proactive. Being proactive includes building a good relationship with your leader. A proactive follower considers policies and suggests to the leader ways to improve team success. A follower must buy into the task of making the team better.

Make sound decisions. Once you have taken a proactive approach to followership and are confident in your role, you will need to make sound decisions. Your decisions will affect those around you. Sound decisions will improve your leader's confidence in you. Step up and use your expertise.

Be enthusiastic. Enthusiasm is contagious energy. An enthusiastic follower can have a great influence over the team, its leader, and its overall performance.

Suppose your leader gives you a task. You may like the task or you may think it's boring or even useless. As far as the team's welfare goes, that's not important. No matter how you feel about a task, approach it with a positive attitude. Your enthusiasm will have a ripple effect on the group's or the leader's feelings concerning the task. Be upbeat and energetic when performing tasks. Success rests with the followers' enthusiasm as well as the leader's.

Be versatile and flexible. Hitting your head repeatedly against a brick wall isn't the most efficient way to get to the other side. When a problem comes up, take a few minutes to assess the issue and to reevaluate your approach. Use your brain rather than your skull. A second look will almost always reveal a better way around the wall.



An enthusiastic follower helps the team and the leader.

Courtesy of Mike Brinson/
Getty Images

Conclusion

Whenever you're in the role of a follower, learn as much as you can about effective leadership by watching good leaders in action. Use your experience and success as a follower to help you become an effective leader. Remember that the differences between a good leader and a good follower are quite small. This is because good leaders and good followers share a goal—to be part of an excellent team.

Review Questions

- 1 What is followership?
- 2 What is the importance of follower readiness?
- 3 How can you assess follower ability?
- 4 Why do followers need to be willing?
- 5 What happens to follower confidence over time?

Leadership

What You Will Learn to Do

Understand the principles of leadership and how you can become a successful leader

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- ✓ Discuss the two orientations to leadership behavior
- ✓ Define the four leadership styles
- ✓ Identify the primary factors of the leadership situation
- ✓ List the six traits of an effective leader
- ✓ Describe the personal qualities of an effective leader
- ✓ Explain the leadership opportunities in NJROTC

Key Terms

- situational leadership
- relationship behavior
- empathetic
- task behavior

The Two Orientations to Leadership Behavior

Becoming a successful leader requires training and practice, but you can begin to acquire and practice leadership skills right now—at school and in your community. Suppose, for example, a volunteer team forms at your school to help rebuild houses devastated by tornadoes. The group elects you as its leader. Now what? You need to think about the tasks ahead and the people who have volunteered to do them. It's not an easy job, but it's one you can do if you understand how leaders do their jobs effectively.

This lesson provides some advice that will help. The guidelines are based on years of research about leadership. Leaders in business, in the armed forces, and in virtually every other walk of life use them successfully.

An important concept to understand is the difference between *leadership* and *management*. Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people to accomplish the mission. Management is supervising the use of resources to achieve team objectives. In essence, you lead *people*, and you manage *things*. While both skills are important, this lesson will concentrate on leadership.

How does a leader get people to come together to accomplish a mission? You'll find no single answer to this question. A leader must tailor his or her approach to the task and the people available to do it. The leader must base the approach on the environment and on the readiness of the team and its individual members. *Readiness* is the degree to which a follower demonstrates the ability and willingness to accomplish a task. In other words, the leader must base his or her approach on the situation in which the leader and team find themselves. This is called **situational leadership**.

Situational leadership is flexible. It is based on the abilities, knowledge, skills, and motivational level of the team or group the leader is influencing. To be effective, a leader using this leadership style must know his or her people and how they respond to working in groups.

Another part of understanding situational leadership is knowing your orientation: Are you oriented toward *people* or oriented toward a *task*? This is important because the two orientations are connected. A leader who is people oriented focuses on interaction with his or her people. A leader oriented toward task focuses on the job to be done.

Orientation Toward People

Another name for orientation toward people is **relationship behavior**. Relationship behavior includes, for example, listening, praising, collaborating, and counseling. A leader who practices such behaviors can greatly improve followers' performance. If you reach a barrier in the way of team progress, relationship behaviors can help overcome the obstacle.

And that makes sense, doesn't it? People respond better if they feel their leader is supportive and **empathetic**. A leader who simply issues orders and then criticizes team members' performance will have a hard time gaining their cooperation. Leaders should bear in mind the old expression, "You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar."

Key Term

situational leadership—
a leadership model based on the concept that there is no single best way to influence and lead people

Key Terms

relationship behavior—
a leader's engagement in supportive, two-way communication with his or her team members

empathetic—
having the ability to understand; being aware of, and sensitive to, the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others

Orientation Toward Task

Task behavior focuses on the practical aspects of the team’s job or mission. Task behaviors include directing team members on what to do, how to do it, and when to do it.

In his book *Leadership in Organizations*, Gary Yukl suggests that task behavior has limitations when used alone, because its effects on team-member satisfaction and productivity are difficult to predict. That’s why, as noted above, task behavior and relationship behavior must go hand in hand.

When it comes to task behavior, a leader should survey the needs and abilities of his or her followers and then choose a leadership style accordingly. If as leader of the tornado-relief volunteers, you knew that Maria was a self-starter and needed little motivation, you could probably just make sure she understood her task and then get out of her way. You’d allow her to work independently. On the other hand, if you knew that Randy, another team member, seemed uncertain about how to accomplish his task, you would step in and use task behavior to give Randy instructions, training, and guidance.

Key Term

task behavior—
the leader’s involvement
in defining the duties
and responsibilities of
an individual or a group

Four Leadership Styles

Task behavior and relationship behavior are distinct, but complementary, leadership behaviors. Considered together, they help define four main leadership styles. These four styles make up what’s known as the *leadership grid*.

Table 2.1 THE LEADERSHIP GRID	
<p>Participating</p> <hr/> <p>Style 3</p> <p>High Relationship Orientation Low Task Orientation</p>	<p>Selling</p> <hr/> <p>Style 2</p> <p>High Task Orientation High Relationship Orientation</p>
<p>Delegating</p> <hr/> <p>Style 4</p> <p>Low Relationship Orientation Low Task Orientation</p>	<p>Telling</p> <hr/> <p>Style 1</p> <p>High Task Orientation Low Relationship Orientation</p>

Telling (Style 1)

In the telling leadership style, the leader provides specific instructions and closely supervises team members as they perform their tasks. The telling leader has a high task orientation and a low relationship orientation.

Typical telling behaviors include:

- directing others what to do
- supervising them closely
- following up to ensure they complete their tasks.

Selling (Style 2)

Leading by selling means the leader closely supervises task completion and following up, while also providing explanations and opportunities for clarification from team members. The selling leader has a high task orientation and a high relationship orientation.

Typical selling behaviors include:

- supervising closely
- following up
- explaining relationships between tasks and team goals
- encouraging questions
- supporting progress.

Participating (Style 3)

In the participating style, the leader helps and supports team members' efforts toward completing the task by sharing ideas and responsibility for decision making with his or her team members. Participating leaders have a high relationship orientation but a low task orientation.

Participating behaviors include:

- asking team members for ideas
- listening
- encouraging others to try out their ideas
- allowing others to structure their tasks
- sharing control and accountability.

Delegating (Style 4)

In the delegating style, the leader turns over to team members responsibility for decision-making, problem solving, and implementation. Delegating leaders have both a low relationship orientation and a low task orientation.

Delegating behaviors include:

- setting task boundaries
- letting others make their own decisions
- allowing members to chart their own courses of action
- giving group members the freedom they need to do the job well
- providing help when asked
- monitoring progress.