



Good Followers Make Better Leaders



Quick Tip:

Do your job! Good followers execute their tasks at the highest level.

“He who cannot be a good follower, cannot be a good leader.” Aristotle

Good followers focus on creating success for the team. Important behaviors include executing tasks at the highest level, commitment to the leader and the organization, courage and tact to provide sound advice, and contributing to a positive team environment.

I have had many opportunities to be both a follower and a leader. In fact, one of the best parts of my career has been the experience of going back and forth between these roles as I moved across organizations within companies and in working independently. It has given me rich and stimulating work, allowed me to learn new things and to hone both followership and leadership skills. Each time I moved from a leader role to an individual contributor, my followership skills advanced another level. Being a great follower makes you an indispensable part of a team and sets you up for leadership opportunities. How do you become a great follower?

You are not the boss

Whether you have chosen to be an individual contributor or you have been passed over for a promotion and find yourself there, remember that you are not the boss.

This requires both humility and a commitment to your leader and your organization. Good followers actively engage in developing organization goals by giving their best ideas to the team while realizing that their recommendations may or may not be used. Once a decision is made, they support that decision and are committed to executing the goals of the organization.

A great follower takes this a step further by becoming a champion of the organization's mission and goals and finding ways to make their leader successful. A great follower should have their leader's back.

However, this doesn't mean blind obedience.

Have personal guardrails

Individual contributors have an obligation to act in an ethical way. Good followers have strong personal ethics and the courage to stand up to others when needed. If they believe their leader or others in the organization are acting in an unethical or illegal manner, they raise visibility through appropriate channels.

A great follower takes this a step further by caring enough about the success of the team and organization to speak truth, when needed. This requires humility, courage and tact to express unpopular opinions in an appropriate way to help the organization perform at its best.

Be a great team player

Meeting your personal commitments is the first step. Good followers do their job

and execute their tasks at the highest level. In addition, they offer support to others and are adaptable to the team's needs so they can meet organization goals.

A great follower takes this a step further by finding ways to help the team work together better. This includes listening to others, finding ways to contribute to a positive work environment, sharing credit and promoting the accomplishments of team members.

Walk in your leader's shoes

Your leader has a difficult job and after you have been in a leadership role, you can better understand. Considering what you can do to make your leader's job easier is an important first step. A good follower respects their leader's time by bringing well formed ideas to their discussions. This includes clearly sharing accomplishments, the status of their work and specific areas where they need help. This allows their leader to provide the needed support in an efficient way.

A great follower takes this a step further by honing their executive presentation skills. By considering the most critical information needed to solve a problem and presenting ideas clearly and succinctly, they support their leader in decision-making and in preparing more senior executive presentations. Finally, they make it a habit to ask their leader how they can help. This potentially results in new opportunities to learn and take on higher level tasks.

At one point in my career, I moved into a senior financial analyst position after working in both accounting and internal audit leadership roles. By practicing good followership, I helped the team perform at a higher level and took on portions of my manager's role, so he could work on other business projects. When the division was reorganized, my manager moved into a more senior role and the General Manager selected me to manage financial and legal requirements to discontinue part of their product line. It was a great experience that I would have never had if I hadn't exhibited the traits of a great follower.

Additional Resources:

Being a good follower is being faithful to people that make decisions and challenging teammates to be their best. Watch this video with Clive Barrow: **How Followership Leads to Leadership**, TedX, December 2020.



If you are a Christian business leader, my blog **Follow Me**, shares some words from scripture and personal insights about the importance of good followership.

"Followers are essential to the success of any team or organization, which is why studying the concept of followership can be transformative to a person's leadership abilities. " Read **Followership: What it is and Why it's Essential for Leaders to Understand** by Cherie Suonvieri.

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About Annette

Annette is a business transformation coach focused on aligning your business to your values, improving leadership and increasing operational effectiveness. Her Transformation Tips newsletter shares business advice, resources and best practices.



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