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# A Leader Among Followers...

## Creating Dynamic Followers as Prerequisite for Leading

By Laura Rose

*"Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it."  
Dwight D. Esienhower*

### Introduction

We hear that for an effective organization to smoothly evolve and develop there should only be one Indian chief and many Indians; one leader and many followers. And we continuously applaud, train and promote leadership positions.

The reality is that the majority of most organizations are **followers**. Since an effective follower is critical to an organization and its ability to accomplish a mission, should there be some discussion in what makes an effective follower?

### Empowering Dynamic Followers

Are there any redeeming qualities to being an effective follower? What are the valued attributes of a follower? It would stand to reason that without effective followers a leader cannot lead. Is there such a thing as a leader among followers? What would an effective follower do to "lead by example"? Since an effective follower is critical to an organization and its ability to accomplish a mission, should there be some discussion in what makes an effective follower?

Obviously, every great leader requires great followers.  
Obviously there are attributes in making an effective follower.  
Not so obvious is that every great leader is a great follower. We fulfill both roles simultaneously.

The attributes of a great leader is much the same as an effective follower. Therefore, rather than encouraging leaders to mentor followers to "follow me" (as an imitation), leaders may mentor to specific and objective abilities/traits to create dynamic teams and subordinates. This dynamic follower attributes form a foundation from which follower initiative can grow to leader initiative more naturally. Organizations can identify their effective follower competencies to help leaders focus their mentoring efforts. This approach encourages followers to develop fully, based on their personalities, strengths and weaknesses, and situational factors.

## The Importance of Vision

Leadership attributes are the inner or personal qualities. These attributes include a large array of characteristics such as values, character, motives, habits, traits, competencies, motives, style, behaviors, and skills. Leadership is the process of directing the behavior of others toward the accomplishment of some common objectives. The most effective way to do this is to demonstrate how his/her vision is exactly what the stakeholders, clients, and organizational teams already desire. Once the vision is truly shared and in common, the actions will be “inspired” and no additional motivation will be required.

The more influential leader is one who attracts instead of asserts. Since everyone is already in harmony and wants the same thing, teams are inspired from within to accomplish the harmonious and co-creative vision. Leadership and followships will naturally rotate, combine, interchange and interact at the most appropriate times that benefit all.

Therefore, it stands to reason that an effective leader’s most important challenge is to clearly articulate and visualize his vision and why it’s important to him and his organization. The details (the how, when, where) are not as critical. An effective leader understands that the details will constantly change, evolve and develop. But the driving mission or vision, like the lighthouse<sup>1</sup>, needs to stay constant.

The leader constantly, consistently and concisely conveys his/her vision, in various ways that attract the right combinations of collaborators and co-creators. Then he/she immediately focuses on mentoring dynamic teams and subordinates toward his vision.

## Effective Following

Effective followers realize their importance to an organization and its ability to accomplish a mission. Those who are successful in followership positions have a positive self-regard. Those individuals who possess it are good at their jobs. They enjoy their work. It satisfies their basic needs and motives. They feel they’ve made a good choice of careers. Successful followers also welcome a leader who possesses and projects a clear sense of priority and strong advocacy for high expectations.

The relationship an effective follower has with the leader is also an important aspect of interpersonal intelligence.

Some common attributes of an effective follower:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>A Lighthouse stays constant, shines its beacon and attracts the various ships independent of external forces such as the weather or where the ships are departing from.

<sup>2</sup> [The Art of Followership - educators' following of leadership in school administration](#)

[School Administrator, Sept, 2000](#) by [Stephen L. Kleinsmith](#), [Sheri Everts-Rogers](#)

\* Seldom burden your leader with your professional disappointments. You are to bring relief to his or her leadership responsibilities; don't add luggage for him or her to carry.

\* When the leader is getting into a pinch, sometimes taking ownership of the matter will allow the leader the reflection time needed to redirect the discussion. Be sensitive to the leader's reactions when you do this.

\* Be pro-active with your thoughts. Look for an alternative solution when the situation for the leader takes an unexpected and unwelcome turn. With time often being a commodity in short supply in a crisis, your pro-active way of looking ahead may make the winning difference.

\* If there is a need (as made obvious by the leader) to provide support to a person or program in the organization, but without your understanding why, give the support first, then ask why. Publicly second guessing the boss gives a negative impression to those around him or her. The boss doesn't need good followers when things are easy. The leader needs good followers when the going gets tough. If you feel the decision was a poor one, then work with the leader behind the scenes to map out a better way.

## Conclusion

While most aspire to be the Indian Chief, without the Indians, there is no leadership, no tribe to lead. Emancipating and elevating the role of followship is the quickest way to success. Therefore, a leader with foresight would focus on creating an environment of effective followers; an environment in which the roles of leaders and followers are interchanged and interactive. Since we naturally fulfill both roles simultaneously and inherently, it would be to our advantage to exploit and make the most of that nature within us.

## Appendix: Comparison between Effective Leadership and Followship

	<b>Quality Leader Attributes</b>	<b>Quality Follower Attributes</b>
	Competent, talented, skillful their job	Competent, talented, skillful at their job
	Demonstrate a strong work ethic. they work by the project rather than by the hour	Demonstrate a strong work ethic. they work by the project rather than by the hour
	Good listening and communication skills	Good listening and communication skills
	Able to provide clear and concise direction	Able to provide clear and concise status
	Able to communication vision and goals	Able to convert vision and goals into detail tasks and action
	Provide clear, reasonable and concise schedules and success/quality criteria	Provide clear, accurate and concise schedule for their detail tasks and report accurate against their success/quality status.
	Open to other people's ideas and willing to follow at the appropriate	Confident to speak ideas, and willing to lead at the appropriate

	times	times. But also open enough to support whatever direction is taken
Set direction	Focus on the future	Passionate about the same future vision
	See change as an opportunity	See change as an opportunity
Demonstrate personal character	Live values, lead by example	Live values, lead by example
	Have and create a positive self-image	Adhere to high expectations of self and possess high positive self-regard.
	Display integrity and learning ability	Display integrity and learning ability
Build Organizational Capability	Build infrastructure	Build infrastructure for their detail tasks and part in the project
	Leverage diversity	Leverage teammates and diversity
	Build teams	Concentrate on the common goal of the organization--that of being a team player.
	Make change happen	Make change happen
	Design human resource systems	Support, utilize and improve the current systems.
Mobilize Individual Commitment	Direct emotions	Project optimism. Possessing a good attitude is an essential aspect of being an enthusiastic optimist. Occasionally, followers are given an assignment for which they question the purpose or with which they disagree. They should think in terms of do's rather than don'ts. Focus on possibilities and solutions rather than on impossibilities and problems.
	Manage attention	Manage their own attention and focus. Influence others in their team as well.
	Share power and authority	Take on leadership role when appropriate, and return to followership role when appropriate
	Build collaborative relationships	Practice interpersonal intelligence. Effective followers also possess and practice characteristics associated with what Howard Gardner of Harvard calls "highly interpersonal intelligence." Many characteristics in this category call for the items already discussed with one major emphasis: listening.

## About the author

Laura has been in the software and testing industry for over 20 years. She's worked with such companies as IBM, Eriksson, Staples, Fidelity Investments and Sogeti in various client advocacy and

project management roles. The techniques she uses in her business coaching and client advocacy work saved these companies both time and money, which resulted in on-time, quality product delivery with higher client satisfaction.

Laura now uses her client focus, project, quality and people management skills in her personal life coaching career. As a personal life coach, she helps people integrate their goals and dreams into their everyday lives. Laura uses creative and practical tools to help her clients realize what really matters to them. They then follow-through with project and time management techniques to create the reality they really want.

Laura authors many articles and workshops on time management and strategic scheduling. She is also the founder of the electronic magazine *the Rose Garden: the Art of Becoming*. Also, check out <http://thelaurarose.blogspot.com/>

Laura offers **one-on-one career and life coaching, small group coaching, seminars and workshops**. You can learn more about her at [www.RoseCoaching.info](http://www.RoseCoaching.info) and contact her at [LauraRose@RoseCoaching.info](mailto:LauraRose@RoseCoaching.info)

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