



To Be A Great Leader, Learn How To Be A Great Follower: The Four Rules Of Following

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Everyone wants to be a leader. You get to make the key decisions. You will get the most credit when things go well. You will also get the blame when things go wrong. Yet few people understand that to be a good leader, you first need to be a great follower. As Aristotle said, "He who cannot be a good follower, cannot be a good leader."

Being a good follower isn't about being one of hundreds of lemmings that execute instructions with blind loyalty. Today's followers are more evolved. They judiciously choose who they follow and make followership part of their education. In an increasingly democratized workplace, where social media commands growing influence, followers are more empowered than ever.

Robert Kelley, the author of *The Power of Followership*, uses research to show that leadership affects an organization's success or failure by only 20 percent. So followers can influence their organization's effectiveness by as much as 80 percent; it's not an overstatement to say that good followers matter as much as good leaders. What makes a great follower? Here are four ways to separate yourself from the pack and prepare yourself for future leadership.

You're not following, you're a leader-in-training. The best followers don't see themselves as another cog in the corporate machinery. They know what they're doing. They know what their peers are doing. They even know what their leaders are doing. They know because they want to know. They want to know because leaders are supposed to know more than everyone else. That's right, leaders. Not followers. The best followers aren't really followers. They see themselves as future leaders. And they have already started their own personal leadership journey. They happen to be self-leaders who follow.

Put your team first. The best followers are also the best team-players. They know one truth: they are only as good as the team. And guess what? Their bosses know that about them and thank their lucky stars for them. When you make personal sacrifices for the good of the team, you're broadcasting the message, "I care about 'us' more than 'me'." That sort of selflessness hardly ever goes unnoticed and unappreciated. Team players are the "glue" that keeps the team

together. Their leaders count on them. Their peers confide in them. Everyone else likes them. How this helps you as a future leader? Guess who else puts the team first? That's right, a good leader.

Believe in yourself and your leader. The best followers have confidence in their abilities and the abilities of their leaders. They don't need to be told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. They just get things done. They also know, and expect, that their leaders will get things done too. It's a mutual trust that keeps the work engine humming along nicely. As a good follower, you have the courage and confidence to respectfully discuss with your leader if you believe you're not going in the right direction. You trust that your leader would appreciate the spirit of your input and engagement. To be a successful leader in the future, you will need competent and confident followers. Legendary adman David Ogilvy once said, "If each of us hires people who are bigger than we are, we shall become a company of giants."

What you follow, not who. This may be a surprise. The best followers don't just follow a leader; they follow the leader's mission or vision. The leader is but an embodiment of that purpose. Apple's employees may have worshiped the iconic Steve Jobs, but it's his vision and Apple's mission based on innovation and design that makes them true devotees and followers. Followers become die-hard advocates when their personal passion and purpose are aligned with those of their leader. As a leader, you will be able to see yourself as no more than a follower and advocate of a mission, one that is much bigger than you. Such a perspective will allow you the humility to see past yourself and focus on your vision and execution.

There's nothing wrong with being a great follower. Especially when you're following with leadership intent. What you learn as a follower can prepare you to be a greater leader than you could ever have imagined.

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