

# Courageous Followers

March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012

## [Inside This Issue](#)

- 1 Summary
- 2 Introduction to Leader-Follower Model  
Courage to Assume Responsibility
- 3 Followership Style
- 4 Courage to Serve  
Courage to Challenge
- 5 Guiding Your Challenge
- 6 Courage to Participate in Transition  
Courage to Take Moral Action
- 7 Situations that may require Extensive  
Reflection of Morals
- 8 Leaders: Courage to Listen to  
Followers
- 9 Summary of Key Points  
A Teaching Perspective
- 10 Personal Reflection Questions
- 11 Critical Evaluation of Courageous  
Follower

## Standing up to & for Our Leaders

This book by Ira Chaleff gives its readers a platform from which to encourage the leaderships that surround us each day. Being a follower should not be seen in a negative light, but an extremely positive one. Behind every leader there are many followers who are dedicated to contributing to the same purpose or cause. These followers are courageous as they are pushed and pulled in different directions, yet stay true to their own morals and values.

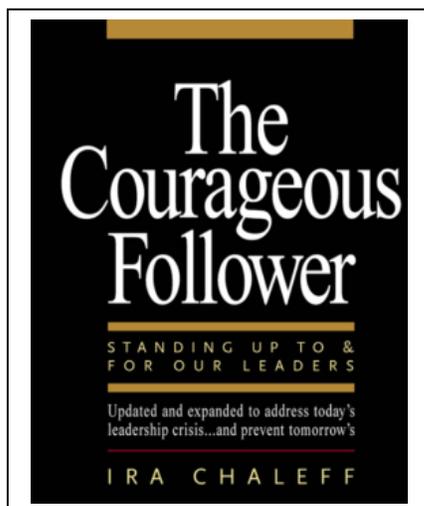
Followers need to create very balanced and trustful relationships with the leaders that surround them. This relationship is a key ingredient to the success of the leader, follower, and organization. They should seek out what kind of follower they are in order to better themselves and their purpose. Courageous followers need to know when to be proactive in different situations, along with refining the skills to know when to step in and assume responsibility in order for the leader to focus their energy on what is a priority for them. Courageous followers empower themselves within their organization. This empowerment allows them to serve both the organization and the leader while staying highly attuned to their own performance. Courageous followers have to be prepared to challenge their leaders when they feel it is required. This has to be done as soon as possible so that unwanted behaviour or actions are immediately ceased. When challenging leaders, followers must know and understand their leaders to the best of their extent. There are times when leaders need help in order to become better at their position; courageous followers play a large role in this transformation. There may be times when the courageous follower truly does not agree with the decisions being made or the direction that the organization is headed. When this is the case, the follower must make a very difficult decision about whether to stay or leave the organization. One must always do what they feel is correct and remember that there is always a choice to stay or find another organization.

Leaders need to listen to the followers that surround them. They must be seen as partners as they too want what is best for the organization. Leaders need to ensure that the work environment is conducive to the best working conditions possible. They need realize that their success is the success of their followers.

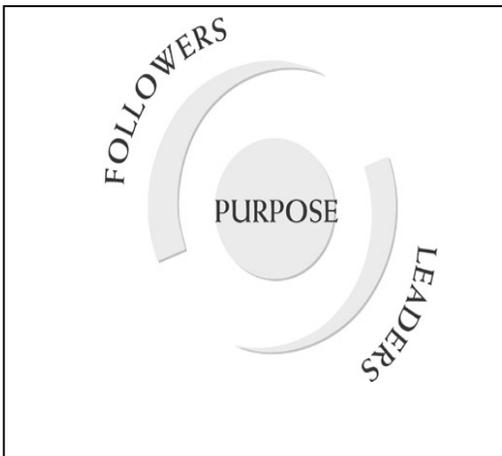
---

*Powerful followers  
support powerful  
leaders*

---



## Introduction to the Leader-Follower Model



The leader-follower model is based on the premise of balance and support of the dynamic leader. This model should help embrace the identity of a follower and speak to the courage, power, integrity, responsibility, and sense of service that we all have. Every one of us is a leader and a follower, depending on the situation. The world could not work if there were only leaders. Think if there were teachers without students! Teachers and students form a learning circle around a body of knowledge or skills. Leaders and followers form this same circle around a common purpose or cause.

## The Five Dimensions of Courageous Followership

### 1) The Courage to Assume Responsibility

---

*As followers we have far more power than we usually acknowledge*

---

We as followers need to first be able to self examine our own performance; there is no need to wait until this is done for us. We need to be proactive. Seek out those opportunities where we can assume responsibility and grow with them. Here are a few key aspects that will help you assume responsibility:

**Organization** is a key to being a good leader as well as a good follower. We need to address our organizational skills and make sure they are up to par NOW, not later.

**Manage of all aspects of our life** including health and relationships. We must do our jobs, not become our jobs.

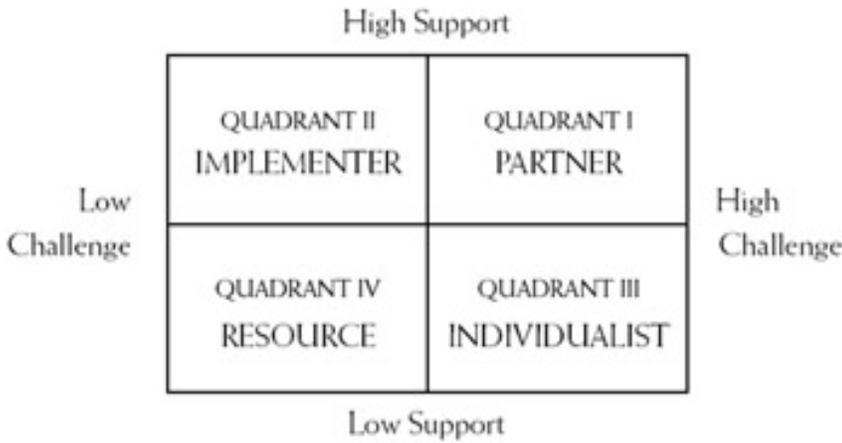
**Be passionate and take a sense of ownership.** When leaders and followers share these goals, they are full partners.

**Take initiative to make the important changes** that will improve the organization.



**As courageous followers, we view ourselves as full participants committed to shared values and a common purpose. We are not spectators; we don't just watch, we act.**

**When a common purpose guides both the leader and follower, control shifts from the leader to the purpose itself; we don't require permission to act in ways that forward the purpose.**



## Followership Style

Author Ira Chaleff developed a two-axis representation that is helpful to followers in terms of understanding their strengths and potential growth needs. The two dimensions displays the support the follower gives a leader and also the degree to which the follower is willing to challenge the behavior or policies of the leader and the organization. It is very useful for followers to understand where they place themselves on this axis. You will be more easily able to identify your foundational tendencies along with your natural position in relation to authority. From this information one can then plan a growth path in order to be a better courageous follower.

### What each quadrant says about you...

<p><b>Quadrant II: high support, low challenge</b></p> <p><b>- THE IMPLEMENTOR</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-leaders love followers from this quadrant</li> <li>-do what is needed to get job done: do not require oversight or explanation</li> <li>-not likely to challenge leader</li> <li>-growth: to be more willing to challenge</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quadrant I : high support, high challenge</b></p> <p><b>- THE PARTNER</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-gives support but willing to question behaviour and policies</li> <li>-true partner</li> <li>-dependable</li> <li>-growth: always room for it</li> </ul>
<p><b>Quadrant IV: low support, low challenge</b></p> <p><b>- THE RESOURCE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-hard workers</li> <li>-extra pair of hands</li> <li>-not likely to make work top priority</li> <li>-growth: raise level of support for leader and organization, more commitment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Quadrant III: low support, high challenge</b></p> <p><b>- THE INDIVIDUALIST</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-not afraid to voice different opinions</li> <li>-give balance to group decisions</li> <li>-too much criticism can become predictable and tiresome</li> <li>-growth: increase support for leaders and common purpose</li> </ul>

---

*Neither we nor our leaders should settle for good ideas until we have energetically searched for great ideas*

---

When in a problem solving situation, integrity can be kept by following the "rule of three options":

- ✓ **Develop at least 3 good options for any situation**
- ✓ **By presenting several workable options, we give leaders genuine choices, not just the choices we want them to make**
- ✓ **If one choice presents ethical problems, we are less tempted to ignore the problems if we have other options.**

---

*Feedback is a great method of self discovery, but there is little value in giving feedback that leaders cannot hear*

---

## 2) The Courage to Serve

As courageous followers we need to be willing to serve both our leaders and the common purpose of our organization. Serving a leader involves knowing when you can speak for the leader as well as knowing when to consult the leader. It takes a lot of courage to closely serve a leader. A skillful leader will help to keep the stress level down for their followers, which in turn will bring the creative energy up. There are many instances where followers may gossip about the weaknesses of their leader, however we must always defend our leader. We have to focus on the strengths of our leaders.

We, as followers, need to minimize unnecessary pressure from the leader by being productive and supportive. We when are close aides of a leader, our actions may be viewed as an extension of our leader. By staying closely attuned to the leader's values, actions, and goals, we are more able to reflect them in the work that we do while not burdening the leader with details.

### **Empower yourself through your service by:**

- self-reflecting
- consistency
- open dialogue (especially in times of conflict)
- knowing when you don't know
- asking questions

## 3) The Courage to Challenge

Everyone will run into a situation where they will not agree with what is being said or decided upon. As a courageous follower it is our duty to challenge this when it happens. There are two areas that we may need to challenge: behavior of leader or policies. You must be clear that a challenge such as this is not personal. When we enter a job, we enter an agreement to pursue a common purpose and we have to honor that agreement to the best of our abilities. We have to stop and challenge before the agreement disintegrates.

When we approach the situation it must be in a non-threatening way. A simple non-threatening approach is to ask skillful questions. This approach can be quite effective as it invites the leader to examine the situation in terms of what is working and what is not. As followers, we are not offering any feedback, but simply asking questions that aid the leader in their analysis of their current leadership method.

There will be many different situations that require challenge. The following is a table that will have some guiding ideas on how to take on these challenges.

## Guiding your Challenge...

### Prepare Leader for Feedback

- Find ways to ensure leader hears feedback. Minimize defensiveness by conveying respect and value of honesty
- "You know how highly I think of your work, and i hope you won't mind my speaking frankly" (pg. 93)

### Avoiding Knee Jerk Rejection

- This is an automatic rejection of new ideas and feedback. This may be a poor habit you can work around until leader unlearns the habit.
- Even if the leader's automatic rejection mechanism triggers, ask the leader to "still think about it" (pg. 98)

### Overcoming Groupthink (including leader)

- The group can think very highly of themselves and think they are immune from failing.
- "Are we relying solely on self-measurement or are we asking those we serve to evaluate us?" (pg. 100)

## Challenge behaviour as Early as Possible

We must challenge all behavior that is destructive as soon as we see it happening, before it becomes a habit. There are different issues that we have to challenge because if we do not, all of the work that the leaders and followers do will be compromised.

- abusive behavior
- arrogance of leader
- leader who has other agendas
- use of language
- leaders who won't challenge their leaders

---

*If the follower waits too long to challenge the leader's behaviour, both the behaviour and justification for it will harden and the follower may be viewed as a nuisance or threat (pg. 104)*

---

It is not easy,  
but it is worth it.  
Now repeat that  
everyday.

## 4) The Courage to Participate in Transformation

There have been many cases shown to us through the media of a great leader falling after they have engaged in behavior that was extremely inappropriate (or even illegal). The close followers around them would have had to have attempted to confront them about their wrong doings, however they were most likely ignored. Challenging something one time does not give us followers the right to say that we have sufficiently tried. We have to search for approaches that our leaders will respond to and then aid in their transformation. The spark of change will most likely not be a result of something positive rather it will be negative.

*The two diagrams to the right display the process of transforming attitudes and behaviors along with some forces that can either impede or facilitate the process.*

The follower has to participate in the transformation process; the most successful way of doing this is to examine your own role in relationship with the leader. Our role is the only one that we have full power to change.

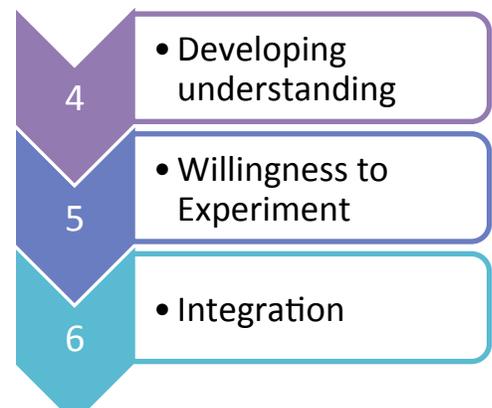
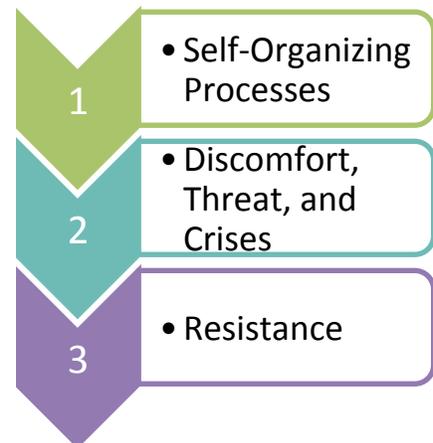
The leader will be very uncomfortable when they are challenged. Followers usually know all of the leader's weaknesses and strengths better than the leader themselves. The transformation process involves seeing all of the iceberg; what is visible on top but also what may be less visible underneath. We, as well as the leader, have to see the whole person. This requires patience from the follower as these things take time, however persistence is key.

There are situations where leaders feel that they need to put on a very tough persona, however that can be quite detrimental to their followers and purpose. This may require you, as a follower, to be a role model for the leader. Modelling vulnerability and empathy can be extremely valuable as these feelings have the most positive impact on staff when they are shown correctly.

---

*Great leadership and  
great followership are  
part of the same system  
(pg. 132)*

---



## 5) The Courage to Take Moral Action

There are different reasons why person would leave an organization; some of those reasons are for growth, group optimization, exhaustion, and principled action.

One should always have a good idea as to where they stand morally within almost all aspects of their lives. This is especially true when it comes to a job situation. You should know what you are willing to accept and when you need to speak up and say you are extremely opposed morally to something. If trust is broken or the appearance of trust is broken then one must be prepared to quit.

**You must always evaluate what will best serve the common good when making your decision.** Perhaps your organization is implementing a policy that you disagree with. The right to refuse and the duty to refuse that policy are indistinguishable. You will face incredible pressure to conform but you must be courageous and voice your opinion. It would be very beneficial to tell the leader how you feel, how passionate you are about the way you feel, and why.

## Situations that may require extensive reflection of morals



### Questions to ask Yourself:

"Are the core values of the organization being respected?"

"Are the risks being taken justified?"

"Is the process of group input respected?" (p.173-174)

---

***Our commitment to the relationship is central but it is not binding if it is destructive***

---

There will be times when threatening to quit will make leaders re-evaluate the enormity of their decision making. **If we are viewed as a loyal follower than the fact that we would consider leaving over the issues strengthens the impact of what we are saying.**

Situations such as these may show the true colours of your leader. If they are reasonable, they will adapt to their surroundings and situations, taking into consideration their followers. If they are unreasonable, they will change their surroundings to better suit their needs which will means you may be part of that change. If the value and purpose of the organization is being served, then support for the leader is warranted, even if the changes may seem too large and too fast. If they are not being served, then it is time to re-think where we stand.

Even though it is very rare, in the utmost worst situations you will find evil within the organization. This evil is fanned by the followers who lose their empathy along with their morals and values. This does not mean they are evil people, as they are in a situation where they are facing extremely powerful leaders. Other peers within the organization might be under the same pressure so the hurtful acts that are done tend to be normalized. An extreme example of this is the Nazi regime in WWII.



**REMEMBER: YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE CHIOCE TO STAY OR LEAVE**

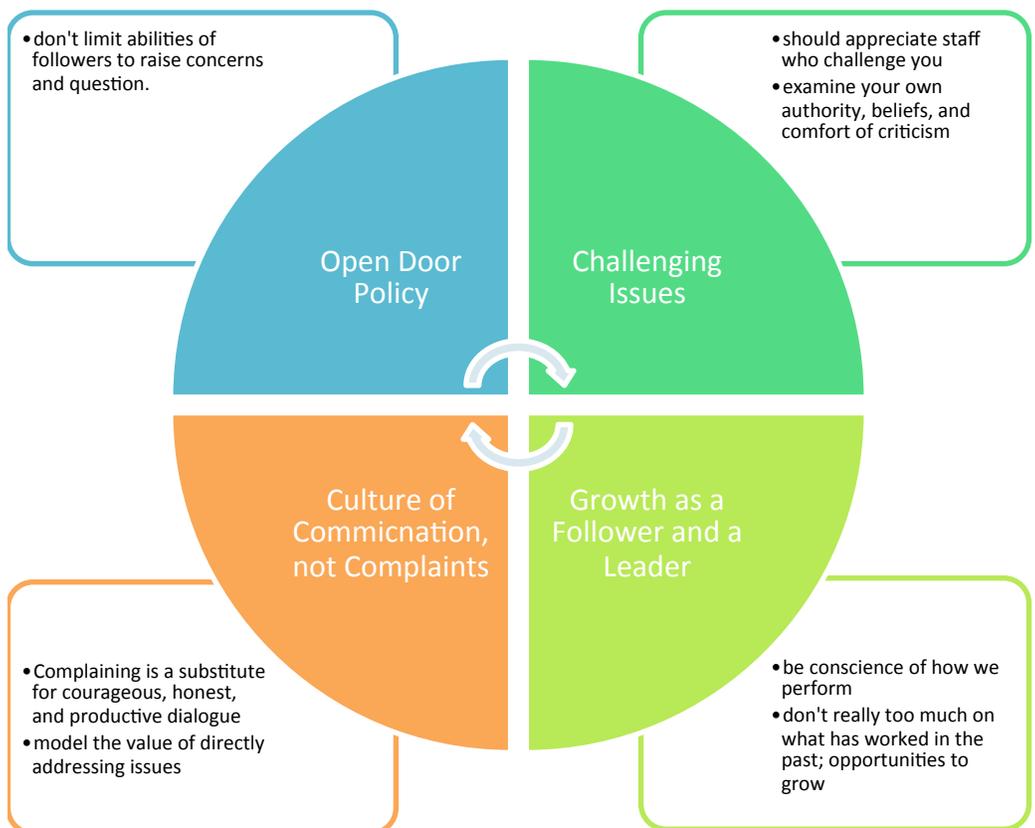
## LEADERS: The Courage to Listen to Followers

Leaders have the responsibility to examine important issues that their followers raise. Leaders, like all of us, want to succeed; however, they may not always go in the right direction. Leaders need to learn how and when to listen otherwise they might not succeed at all.

All leaders would like “Yes” people, but those types of people are not complimentary to courageous followers. Leaders must make a decision of what kind of followers they genuinely want. Courageous followers do not always bring good news; they might be irritating, or cause discomfort. Leaders have to see past these issues and look to the big picture of the common purpose of the organization and what the followers offer.

Some leaders tend to say that they have an “open door” policy, however that is not always the case. They may treat those who walk through the door in ways which severely limit their abilities to raise concerns and questions.

*Courageous followers are partners (pg. 193)*



*Courageous followers are partners (pg. 193)*

*An open door policy is only effective in proportion to the leader's listening skills (p. 196)*

*When staff report their findings, thank them and avoid the impulse to defend yourself (p. 196)*

*You have misspelled the name of your most important client in a letter that is about to get mailed; you NEED your followers to correct you*

*A requisite of good leadership is to override naturally defensive feelings and display interest in the source of the critical feedback.*

## Summary of Key Points

- ✚ Powerful followers support powerful leaders
- ✚ Good relationships are essential for success
- ✚ Know yourself and your follower style
- ✚ Empower yourself as a Courageous Follower; have pride and be consistent
- ✚ Understand and know your leader in order to challenge them appropriately
- ✚ Be persistent
- ✚ Interrupt and challenge behavior that is inappropriate immediately
- ✚ Pre-empt crises by letting the leader know what they have to work on
- ✚ Transformation of a leader takes many steps and paths; requires patience
- ✚ Have the courage to stick to your morals and to voice your opinion
- ✚ You always have the choice to stay with an organization or leave
- ✚ Leaders need to listen to their followers
- ✚ Followers seen as partners with the same goal in mind
- ✚ Understand your motivation for making decisions as a leader



## A Teaching Perspective

There are many great points in Ira Chaleff's book that can be incorporated into a classroom setting. As a teacher, we are both a leader and a follower and this book addresses these relationships.

-Our decisions need to be based on what is in the best interest of the child. This is the purpose in which the leaders and followers circle.

-We need to develop trust within our relationships with our students, their parents, and our administrators. This trust is crucial for our success. Nonetheless it is hard to gain but easy to lose, so we must be conscientious about this.

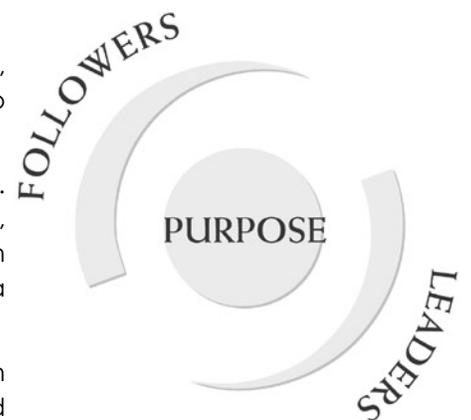
-We have to know ourselves and who we are in terms of a follower and a leader. There are many ways to accomplish this such as taking surveys, reflection, discussion, and having a mentor. These will all give us a more in depth knowledge of ourselves. The iceberg metaphor is very accurate in that there is a lot about us which is visible, but a lot more that is not.

-Do not pretend like you know it all. We are teachers and lifelong learners which implies that our knowledge is ever growing. Do not be afraid to ask questions and seek out answers.

-Be confident and courageous in yourself as a teacher, leader, and a follower.

-Challenge behavior which you deem inappropriate as soon as possible. This includes your students, their parents, and your leaders. You decide how people will treat you.

*Continued on next page...*



-Modeling behaviour that you want to see in you students or administration is a very courageous way of letting them know that vulnerability and empathy, among other emotions, are ok to display.

-You have to make a stand for what you believe in. This can be very hard for a teacher as there are many external factors will that will put pressure on you to join the status quo. If the good of the student is not the central focus then you may need to take more extreme actions.

-If there are cracks forming in the relationships you have with students or leaders, or if you see cracks within student relationships encourage honest and productive conversations.

-Have a methodology in which you deal with problems that arise. This will be based on your own set of values and morals.



## Personal Reflection Questions

- What is your own concept of a follower? What is the difference between a follower and a courageous follower?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses as a leader or a follower?
- How well do you know your leaders or followers?
- What assumptions underlie our beliefs?
- What can you do to improve your leadership or followership skills?
- When making decisions, what are in the interests of the leader and what are your interests?
- What strategies do you imply when faced with a difficult situation?
- How can we create an environment where the leader and the followers can flourish?
- Do you truly listen to what others have to say?
- What is your own philosophy on leadership? On followership?
- Do you always use the common purpose as your source of inspiration?

---

***The most capable leaders will fail if they do not have complete support of their courageous followers***

---

## Critical Evaluation of Courageous Followers

Ira Chaleff shows his knowledge of both followership and leadership throughout this book. He uses his personal experience and other real life examples in order to engage the reader. His writing is very straight forward and to the point which makes for an easy read.

From the very beginning of the book, Chaleff discusses the followers as a positive position and not a negative position like our society has deemed. This is an excellent way to preface what the entire book examines. Chaleff uses a great analogy in order to really establish how important leaders are to every organization. His analogy states that if there were only teachers, there would not be any students.

Chaleff gives the reader a great insight into the mind of a leader. We learn about the inner workings of a leader along with how they view common situations. It also gives the reader great insight into how their particular leader operates as Chaleff describes various leadership styles. It gives the reader advice for how to approach their leader and how to get the results they want from them.

The book also gives insight into how and what a follower should do in order to further their common goal. There are certain things that followers must do in order to be an asset to their organization. They must be patient, consistent, organized, insistent, reflective, and stand their moral ground. These are all great qualities to have, but not everyone comes by these qualities naturally. Chaleff could have given advice on how to work on these attributes in order to be a successful follower, as he does not mention it in this book.

He discusses how close of a relationship one needs with their leader as essentially a prerequisite to being a courageous followership. However, he does not give any indication on what it takes to achieve that relationship. There is no criteria set for what these relationships look like; the reader is left to assume that they must have this type of relationship with their leader initially, although this is not realistically the case.

Overall, this book is insightful for both the follower and the leader. There was room for a bit more information in terms of how the follower can attain relationships, attributes, and advancement within an organization, however he does give adequate advice for situations one may encounter. There are times when you lead and times when you follow which is why this book is great for everyone.



**Courageous leaders and followers working together sow seeds; when circumstances do not let them reap the harvest themselves, they leave the soil enriched by their integrity and commitment for the next planting (pg. 220)**