

EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

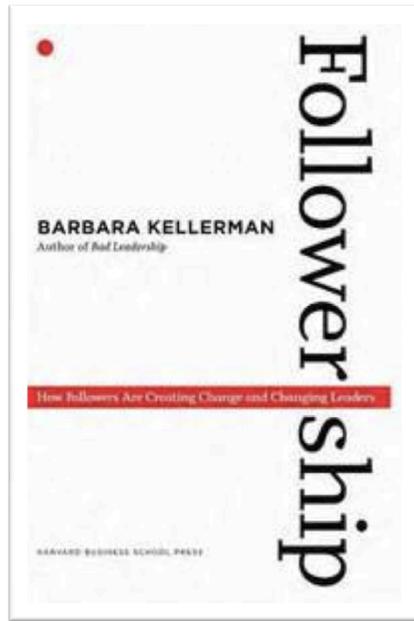
By: Jeremy Rolheiser

Followership:

How Followers Are Creating Change
and Changing Leaders

By: Barbara Kellerman

In Barbara Kellerman's book *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*, she outlined five distinct types of followers. In addition to thoroughly describing the different types of followers, she provided real-life stories, with concrete examples, to strengthen each description. The five follower types are labeled *Isolates*, *Bystanders*, *Participants*, *Activists*, and *Diehards*. Also, Kellerman (2008) offered reasons why followership is becoming an increasingly important issue and why we follow. She stated the qualities that make someone a *good* follower and ways to develop *good* followers.



The following statements are fundamental for understanding Kellerman's definition of *followership*.

1. Followers can be defined by their rank: they are subordinates that have less power, authority, and influence than their superiors.
2. Followers can be defined by their behavior: they go along with what someone else wants and intends.
3. Followership implies a relationship between subordinates and superiors, and a response of subordinate to the superior.
4. Generally, followers are subordinates who have less power and influence than their superiors, and therefore *usually* fall into line.

ABOUT BARBARA

Barbara Kellerman is the James MacGregor Burns Lecturer at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. She was the founding director of the Centre of Public Leadership from 2000 to 2003.

She is the author and editor of multiple books, including *Leadership: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*; *Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, and Why It Matters*; and with Deborah Rhodes, *Women & Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change*. She appears frequently on CBS, NBC, PBS, CNN, and FOX. She has contributed often to the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Harvard Business*



"To fixate on leadership at the expense of followership is to whistle against the wind" (p. 261)

Changing Landscape

Leadership is changing. Thinking of leadership without thinking followership is not merely misleading; it is mistaken (p. 23).

Kellerman noted that leaders are more vulnerable than ever. The Internet has changed the way people communicate and access information. Leaders are closely monitored and their followers quickly discover any misstep. Think of all the leaders "scandals" the public knows about today. Were there this many scandals even 20 years ago? No leader is safe. The gap between leaders and followers is closing.



Why Do We Follow?

Sometimes we follow leaders because we admire them or their cause. But when the admiration and cause are absent, why do we still follow? Why do we follow leaders whom we do not approve?

Individual Interests

Power
Money
Sex
Rank
Prestige

Group Interests

Protection
Friendship
Family
Belonging

"Subordinates who in any serious way challenge their superiors should count on doing some heavy lifting" (p.73)

"Those who have more power, authority, and influence than we do generally are in a position to resist even the most heartfelt of our entreaties and to punish us if we continue to press on." (p. 74)

FACTS

Followers follow other followers

Hierarchy is needed for organizations to operate smoothly (p. 15)

Every leader is a follower, but not every follower is a leader (p. 8)

Followers matter more than leaders

FICTION

Power between leaders and followers is easily shared

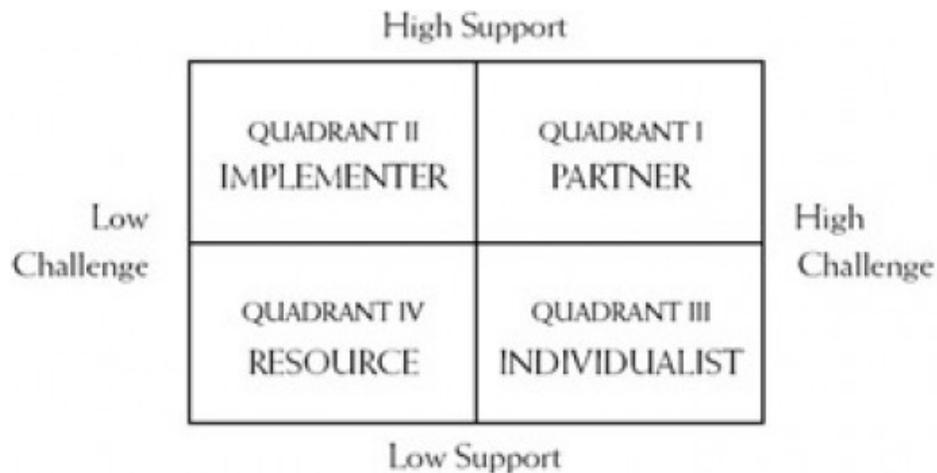
Followers are timid docile sheep (p. 7)

Followers have no power

Types of Followers

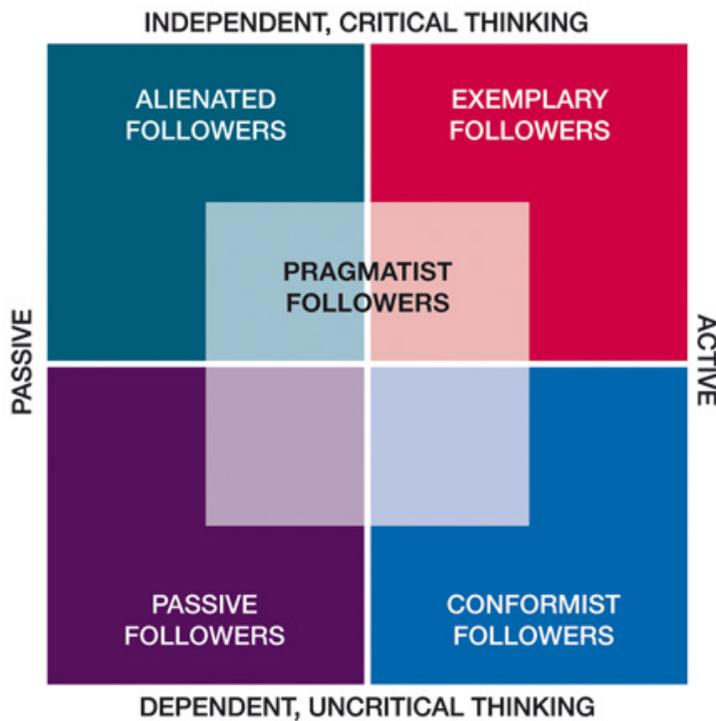
Kellerman was not the first theorist to present information on followers. The main difference between these theorists and Kellerman is; the past theorists used quadrants to represent their ideas while Kellerman represented her ideas in a linear fashion.

Ira Chaleff's Typology



- Partner – Partners like to be treated as equals to the leader. They respect and support the leader, but are ready to challenge them if needed.
- Implementers – Implementers are the workhorses in every organization. They take orders and complete tasks without any real questions.
- Resource – Resources do what is requested of them, but little more. They are obedient and lack courage to challenge their leader.
- Individualist – Individualists are not good followers. They think only of themselves and generally do what they want.

Robert Kelley's Typology



Alienated Followers

They think independently, but do not follow. They appear disengaged and will claim to be "victims"

Passive Followers

They let their leader do their thinking for them. They are not enthusiastic and require steady supervision

Conformist Followers

They often say "yes" when they want to say "no". They are eager to take orders and please others.

Exemplary Followers

They score high across the board. They think and work independently. They are actively engaged in the group

Pragmatist Followers

They live by the motto, "Better safe than sorry". They perform their required tasks and rarely question the leader's decisions.

Barbara Kellerman's Typology

Kellerman defined followers by their level of *engagement* only. On one-end, followers whom feel and do nothing, to the other end in which followers are deeply engaged and involved. (p. 85)



LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Bystanders

Bystanders observe, but do not participate. They make a deliberate decision to stand aside, to disengage from their leaders and from whatever is the group dynamic. This withdrawal is, in effect, a declaration of neutrality, which amounts to tacit support for whoever and whatever is the status quo. (p. 97)

Nazi Germany was full of followers. Kellerman stated that all types (*Isolates, Bystanders, Participants, Activists, & Diehards*) were clearly present, but she focused mainly on the *Bystanders*. She was particularly hard on those individuals and groups, and there were an abundance of them and not all were German, that knew the atrocities the Nazis were performing against the Jews, but stood aside and did nothing.

This is an extreme case of what can happen when people are *Bystanders*, but it can be applied to real life. Kellerman suggested that *Bystanders* are free riders, happy to let others make their decisions for them and do the work. *Bystanders* are a problem.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing” – Edmund Burke

Being a *Bystander*...

- Once the habit of standing idly by is developed, it is incredibly hard to break.
- To withdraw is to agree with those that have more power and influence.
- Powerful leaders exert strong pressure on their group to conform and the group puts strong pressure on its members to conform. Humans want to be accepted. **To be a bystander is human nature**

ISOLATES

Kellerman did not provide very much information regarding *Isolates*.

Isolates are completely detached. They do not care about their leaders, or know anything about them, or respond to them in anyway. Their alienation is, nevertheless, of consequence. By default – by knowing nothing and – Isolates strengthen further leaders who already have the upper hand.

(p. 86).

Kellerman compared *Isolates* to non-voters in government elections. She noted that the vast majority of non-voters' reasons for not voting are:

“My vote wouldn't make a difference”

“I am not interested in politics”

Furthermore, Kellerman stated that *Isolates* are not just in politics, but in the workplace too. They are the workers that have no relationship with managers or superiors. They appear unenthusiastic, uncommitted, and unaware. Often *Isolates* are the silent ones at work, and because they are silent, they are ignored.

“Isolates have a problem. Isolates are a problem” (p. 91)

Participants

Participants are in some way engaged. They clearly favor their leaders and the groups and organizations of which they are members – or they are clearly opposed. In either case, they care enough to put their money where their mouths are – that is to invest some of what they have to try to have an impact. (p. 125).

Merck, a pharmaceutical company, knowingly sold an arthritis drug, Vioxx, that caused heart damage and often led to heart attacks. There were two kinds of *Participants* in this story. There were the drug's developers that *refused* to tell people about that drug's side-effects and there were those that were *compelled* to tell people. Merck's employees tried desperately to silence the *Participants*, but they could not keep them silent forever. Some of the *Participants* lost their jobs, but they were willing to go the distance.

“Participants are the everyday energy that makes for a good group or organization, which in turn enables leaders to do what they want and intend. The opposite is true as well. “ (p. 125)

Being a *Participant*...

Leaders want followers who are *Participants*

Participants are the fuel that drives the engine (p. 125)

Activists

Activists feel strongly about their leaders and they act accordingly. They are eager, energetic, and engaged. Because they are heavily invested in people and process, they work hard either on behalf of their leaders or to undermine and even unseat them. (p. 151).

Taking on the Catholic Church is not done lightly, but that is what a group, Voice of the Faithful (VOTF), did in Boston in 2002. VOTF started as a small group of *Activists* that were extremely upset about the rampant sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests. More specifically they wanted the church to admit it did not handle the situation diligently. VOTF gained momentum, members, and slowly the original *Activists* turned into leaders. They gained so much momentum even the Pope got involved. Finally, near the end of 2002 the church admitted to its errors. VOTF members never stopped being faithful Catholics, but they wanted, needed, to see some authentic change in the way the church handled delicate matters.

Being an *Activist*...

is never easy

takes a certain amount of risk; especially when taking on those who are much more powerful

means you care a great deal

requires the investment of a great deal of time and energy

Diehards

Diehards are as their name implies – prepared to die if necessary for their cause, whether an individual, or an idea, or both. Diehards are deeply devoted to their leaders; or, in contrast, they are ready to remove them from positions of power, authority, and influence by any means necessary. In either case, Diehards are defined by their dedication, including their willingness to risk life and limb. Being a Diehard is all-consuming. It is who you are. It is what you do. (p. 179)

Nothing describes *Diehards* like the army. Kellerman discussed the American Army's operation *Anaconda* in Afghanistan in 2002. The operation was poorly planned, but still the soldiers engaged fully. The soldiers involved in *Anaconda* were not unique. There were countless people before, and there will be countless people after, that will join the army. One thing remains clear about these countless brave people; their willingness die. People know full well the risks involved with going to war, but still they sign up. This willingness requires complete faith in the cause, complete engagement in the cause, and complete trust in your fellow followers that they feel the same way. There is no room for doubt in a *Diehard*.

Being A *Diehard*...

Is all consuming

is rare

There are only so many
Diehards society can
handle

Requires complete trust

Bad & Good Followership

- To do nothing – to be in no way involved – is to be a bad follower
- To support a leader who is *good* – is to be a good follower
- To oppose a leader who is *good* – is to be a bad follower
- To support a leader who is *bad* – is to be a bad follower
- To oppose a leader who is *bad* – is to be a good follower

Bad – someone who is unethical and/or ineffective

Good – someone who is ethical and/or effective

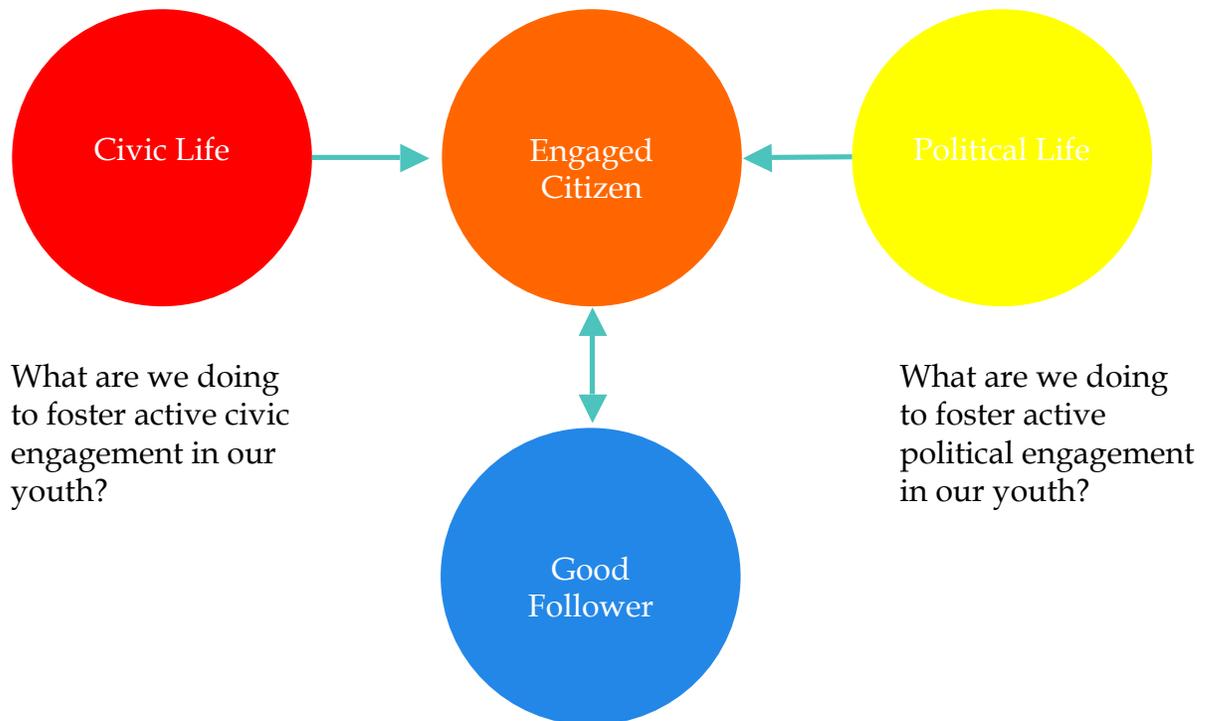
How to Be a Good Follower

- Be aware of being a follower
- Be informed
- Be engaged
- Be independent
- Be a watchdog
- Be prepared to analyze
- Be prepared to judge
- Be open to allies
- Be prepared to be different
- Be prepared to take a stand

- Be prepared to defend yourself
- Be loyal to the group
- Know the importance of timing
- Know that bad leaders are more difficult to uproot as time goes on
- Use cooperation and collaboration
- Know your options
- Know the risk
- Know your moral compass

Developing Good Followers

There is work that could be done, and should be done



Brief Analysis of *Followership* by Barbara Kellerman

Kellerman wrote a fantastic book that everyone should read, follower or leader. The way she uses current and historical events to reinforce her ideas makes for an easy and enjoyable read. The stories she chose to discuss also add a high amount of authenticity and relevance to her claims. Kellerman is not saying leaders do not matter. Instead, she is shifting the focus from the 1% (the leaders) to the 99% (the followers).

Applications to Human Resource Leadership

The word *engage* is used extensively in HRL and Followership. What are school leaders doing to engage their subordinates? How engaged are teachers with government and school division mandates? How many teachers constantly say, “yes” to the continuously growing set of demands, but want to scream, “NO”? And how does this effect teacher burnout? As future **leaders** of education, and its policies, we must pay close attention to our **followers**. We want everyone to be a *good* follower.



Discussion

1. In what ways are leaders sharing power with their subordinates? Is it authentic?
2. Where do you see yourself in terms of engagement and what type of follower are you?
3. What can be done to develop good followers?

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“It is always better to do something rather than nothing” (p. 216)

Kellerman, B. (2008). *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*. Harvard Business Press. Boston, MA.