

“Anything less is to be a follower—anything less is to be a sheep” (6)

# Followership:

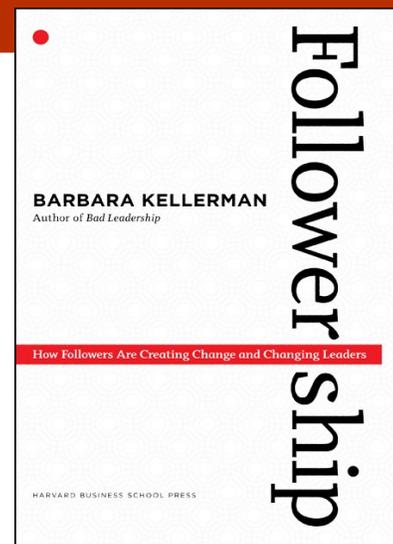
HOW FOLLOWERS ARE CREATING CHANGE AND CHANGING LEADERS

**Barbara Kellerman**

## INSIDE THIS

<b>Introduction</b> “Shooting an Elephant”	
<b>Part 1: Seeing Followers</b>	
Fictions	3
Facts	25
Relationships	49
Types	75
<b>Part 2: Being a Follower</b>	
Bystanders: Nazi Germany	97
Participants Merck	125
Activists Voice of the Faithful	151
Diehards Operation Anaconda	179
<b>Part 3: Future Followers</b>	
Values	213
Transformations	239

Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders, is a compelling book which steps away from the leader-centric view to study how power, authority and influence affect not only leaders but followers as well. Barbara Kellerman focuses on what she refers to as the web of leadership, this includes the leader, the follower and the context. She states that up until recently most of the focus has been on the leadership role, due to the fact that we associate leaders with power, money and success, while underestimating followers by believing in the myth that they simply do not matter. Kellerman dismisses the belief by focusing on the role follower’s play. She shows that this is an important understanding for two reasons. One is due to the fact that the leader-follower relationship is often blurred. Sometimes leaders follow and other times followers lead. The second reason is due to the fact that all of us start out as being followers. We learn from example during childhood and transfer the knowledge later on in life. “We follow leaders before we lead followers.” Kellerman breaks down the book into three parts. Part one explains what followership actually is. She focuses on the facts, the fiction and the relationship between leaders and followers to explain what it means to be a follower today. Part two provides examples throughout history to demonstrate the five types of followers, which range from being completely disengaged to being absolutely committed.



Finally part three looks at the future, where Kellerman claims that followers will have an increasing importance. Kellerman states that the role of followers influences the role of the leader. “Bad leaders, cannot possibly do what they do without bad followership.” This is why she states that we need to look at what it takes to become good followers. If we can teach what it means to be good leaders, it must be possible to teach what it takes to be good followers. This will have a dramatic impact since better followers will lead to better leaders.

## Part One: Seeing Followers

## FICTIONS: Chapter 1

- Followers: are subordinates who have less power, authority, and influence than do their superiors and who therefore usually, but not invariably, fall into line.
- Followership: Implies a relationship (rank), between subordinate and superiors, and a response (behavior), of the former to the latter.

Welcome to Audi of America  
Never Follow



Audi "Never Follow" campaign: "Tapped into a fear rooted deep in the American psyche...The word *never* says it all." (3)

**The negative connotation tied to followership is deeply embedded in our culture. Kellerman shows that our political views of liberty, individualism and democracy demonstrate an opposition to power, reinforcing the refusal to follow. We also see this in our corporate world where entrepreneurialism demonstrates the importance of an individual rather than the group as a whole.**

**Due to increasing leadership education, the term follower has made some improvements in the last three decades as experts begin to realize the importance of followership. The leadership field has put less emphasis on the hierarchy command of control due to the "fact that followers are gaining power and influence while leaders are losing power and influence." (18) This leads to the main focus of the book which states that "those who lack obvious sources of power, authority and influence are not usually helpless. Many can and do find ways of being heard." (20) Followers are able to use their voice to target people above and below them creating an environment for change. Followers are demanding transparency and accountability from their leaders. This has dramatically altered the leadership position by taking away some of the protection they had in the past.**

"Thinking leadership without thinking followership is not merely misleading, it is mistaken." (23)

## FACTS: Chapter 2

Kellerman uses two recent examples where people with less power were able to demand greater equality from those who have authority. These events have altered the leader-follower relationship.

**1. The World the Sixties Made:** During this time people were brought together by common beliefs and values. Social and political views were able to come together in a collaborative motion to alter the decisions that were made from above. Activists were able to end the fighting in the Vietnam war, the civil rights movement began, as well as the feminist movement which increased the growing resistance to authority. “Some of these initiatives had leaders...But such leaders as they did have were not people in the positions of authority; in fact, up to then they had been followers.” (27)

**2. The Information Revolution:** Kellerman claims that information is the world’s most powerful resource.

Implications the information revolution will have on leaders and followers: (Harlan Cleveland)

- Nobody anywhere will be in complete charge of anything.
- Diversity will change our conception of who can, and should, lead.
- Claims by disadvantaged majorities around the world will no longer be so easily denied.
- Followers everywhere will “get to the policy answers before their leaders do.”

Kellerman’s reference to the internet explains the importance the information revolution has on the leader-follower relationship. She uses the students-professors relationship in high education institutes. In the past students would not dare approach their teachers unless in special situations. E-mail has dramatically shifted this

relationship as professors are available for students accessibility 24/7.

“Wisdom of Crowds” is another way the internet is increasing the importance of followership. The idea that the many are smarter than the few has produced collective intelligence like Wikipedia.



“The assault” on the university: Student protest the Berkeley campus at the University of California. “During this period some three hundred universities were the scene of student sit-ins, building takeovers, strikes, riots and other forms of rebellious behavior. Student protests weren't new. But what distinguished these efforts from those in the past is that they came from within the university itself and met with amazingly little resistance from either professors or administrators.” (27)

“This is the time of the follower.” Kellerman states that leaders are paying more attention to their subordinates. Some CEO’s of major companies are working on becoming ‘servant leaders’ and trying to be more likeable. The gap between leaders and followers is closing.

## Relationships: Chapter 3

### Why Do Followers Follow?

#### Individual Interests:

- 1) Leaders provide individuals with safety and security (Sense of order).
- 2) Leaders provide individuals with a group community, to which they can belong
- 3) Leaders provide individuals with someone who does the collective work.

#### Group Benefits:

- 1) Leaders provide groups with structure
- 2) Leaders provide groups with a goal
- 3) Leaders provide groups with instruments of goal achievement.

“Followers follow not only because it is in their interest to conform to their leader, but also because it is in their interest to conform to their fellow followers...because they model their behavior on others similar to themselves.” (56)

### How Do Followers Follow? Who Do Followers Follow?

The relationship between leaders and followers is striking because of the range the relationship can take. Kellerman points out that leaders can be ethical and democratic or they can be evil dictators, but either way they will have followers. How can this be? Kellerman claims that it is due to the understanding that power matters. (Much more than authority or influence). She states that early on we learn to associate ourselves with those who have power. (eg. Parents). Throughout our lives we are rewarded by following those who hold more power. (eg. Workplace). However Kellerman is quick to point out the re-occurring theme in this book, not all followers are content to follow.

*We are hardwired to follow because rank order provides us with important benefits.-and only a few can be at the top.” (60)*

## TYPES: Chapter 4

### Present Types of Followers

Kellerman claims that she takes a new approach to explain followership by:

1. The ground she covers. She uses examples from the past and from today.
2. The stories she uses are deeply detailed.
3. Address the complexity of the issue; She traces the relationship between leader and the follower, but also between the follower and other followers.
4. She provides a clear definition of what a follower is. She distinguishes followers as defined by their rank.
5. Kellerman claims that her work is more descriptive than prescriptive. It is not about teaching, but rather coming to an intellectual understanding of what followership is.

#### 5 Types of Followers:

1. Isolate
2. Bystander
3. Participant
4. Activist
5. Diehard

Kellerman states that followers are different from one another and that they can be divided into 5 groups. This distinction is made on the basis of the level of engagement a follower participates in. Within these types Kellerman states that rank is presumed, meaning they are categorized as subordinates for having less power, authority, and influence than their superiors. Behavior is also displayed in each category as followers can act by doing absolutely nothing to being completely engaged.

# ISOLATES: Type I

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

Example: American Voters who are eligible to vote but never do. This does not include voters who are aware of the political situation but choose not to participate. Isolates are people who see themselves as powerless and therefore, let other people make decisions for them.

Unlike Isolates, the four other types of followers are somehow engaged with the leader, other followers and the community to which they belong to.



*“Ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process.” (17)*

**Individual: Acting alone made the decision to observe rather than participate. Why?**

- ⇒ Hitler’s power dominated public life.
- ⇒ Fear tactics were used to ensure conformity.
- ⇒ Individuals distanced themselves from the reality of the situation.
- ⇒ People denied their moral responsibility.
- ⇒ Traditional context was being replaced by industrialization, modernization and urbanization; changing values and norms.
- ⇒ Individuals followed by example; Bystanders provided a collective identity rather than individual uncertainty.
- ⇒ Powerlessness; whether real or imagined.

## BYSTANDERS: Type 2

### Chapter 5

*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 constitutes the status quo.*

The main problem with bystanders is that they do nothing. This includes situations where doing something is not costly or risky to the individual. They can be associated as being free riders, meaning they let others make the decisions and do the work for them. Some may think that being a bystander is to remain neutral, however Kellerman claims that this can be misleading. She states that bystanders can have a dramatic effect on a situation, especially when they exist in large numbers. She uses Nazi Germany as an example. Hitler was able to reinforce his followers by passing various laws, establishing a secret police and designing a political climate based on fear and influence.

These tactics made it much more difficult for followers to oppose his leadership over time. Because of this Kellerman questions why so many followers decided to take the submissive role of a bystander early on.

Kellerman notes that bystanders during the Nazi era were not limited to individuals within Germany. Individuals internationally stood by and did nothing as well. Kellerman claims that bystander behavior is normal behavior due to the fact that it is usually easier to be less engaged.

#### Key Lessons Learnt Bystander Behavior in Nazi Germany:

1. Individuals have a responsibility for what happens.
2. Once the habit of being a bystander is developed it is difficult to break.
3. To withdraw is to surrender to those who hold more power, influence and authority. (This becomes especially risky when we withdraw to bad leaders.)

*“Followers are us. This does not of course, mean that all of us follow all of the time—sometimes we lead. But all of us follow some of the time.” (93)*

# Participants: Type 3

## Chapter 6

*Participants are in some way engaged. They clearly favor their leader 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 (time, for example) to try to have an impact.*

Leaders want followers who act as **supportive** Participants because they drive the group or the organization.

Kellerman uses the example of the Merck Pharmaceutical company to show how participants can have more influence than their leaders when leadership lacks.



Raymond V. Gilmartin became Merck's chief executive officer in 1995. It was believed that Gilmartin could become a successful leader, however he was not a scientist, therefore had no choice but to leave decisions pertaining to research into the hands of those working under him. This included individuals who were experts, scientists and physicians ("knowledge workers"). This decision backfired when Merck's blockbuster drug Vioxx was pulled off the shelf for causing cardiovascular problems.

"Participants who were researchers wanted badly for Vioxx to be a runaway success. It was they who did what they could to persuade people inside the company and out that the drug was safe." (135) The participants were invested in the drug so strongly that they lost perspective of the organization and only concentrated on their individual desire to push the drug. Because no follower was particularly committed to Gilmartin's leadership they committed themselves to each other and the work they shared. In the end Gilmartin's inexperience cost him his job. This example shows the strength subordinates can have over their leader.

*"When inexperienced leaders lead expert followers, the former must closely monitor the latter. For knowledge workers are decision makers." (148)*

# Activists: Type 4 Chapter 7

Page 7

*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 leader or to undermine and even unseat them. Activists main goal is to promote change.*

**Activists are stronger today than they were in the past for two reasons:**

1. Cultural constraints against taking on people in leadership positions have become weakened.
2. New technologies: easier to access and circulate information, making it effortless to communicate and connect.

**Voice of Faithful 1992-2002:** A large number of sexual abuse cases of minors by priesthood were discovered and revealed to the public by the Boston Globe. Growing public pressure and inadequate responses by the church, lead to followers acting as Activists. A small number of Catholics decided to get involved in the issue. They formed a group called Voice of the Faithful. They got engaged by protesting which increased awareness and made the issue a national scandal.

**Goals of the Organization:**

1. To change the Boston Archdiocese's handling of cases of priestly abuse
2. To force out the man many considered responsible: Cardinal Law
3. Continue to play part of watchdog

*"Activists to whom this change can be credited were followers-but only at first. At some point... they became something else altogether. They became leaders." (176)*

# Diehard: Type 5 Chapter 8

*Diehard 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 determines what you do.*

**Operation Anaconda** was the case study Kellerman used to explain Diehard followers. This military operation was designed to hit the enemy hard enough to kill or capture as many al Qaeda as possible. However major problems arose making the operation unsuccessful. Diehards in this situation submitted to their superiors. "Almost always orders are obeyed, even bad ones, no matter the consequences." (206)



Kellerman uses the American Military as an example of Diehard followers. The military is set up to form strong hierarchal lines with rigid command of control authority: Predicated on two key assumptions:

1. Subordinates will follow orders issued by their superiors.
2. Everyone from top to bottom is willing to be wounded or even killed in battle (if necessary). During times of peace this assumption can be questioned. For instance Kellerman claims that before 9/11 Americans enlisted in the military did not envision themselves fighting for their lives in Iraq.

# Part 3: Future of Followers

## **Values: Chapter 9**

**How do we distinguish between good and bad followers?**

- To do nothing– to be in no way involved– is to be a bad follower.
- To support a leader who is good– effective and ethical– is to be a good follower.
- To support a leader who is bad– ineffective and/or unethical is to be a bad follower
- To oppose a leader who is bad– ineffective and/or unethical is to be a good follower.

## **Transformations: Chapter 10**

Kellerman's Key Points of Followership:

- Followers constitute a group that, although amorphous, nevertheless have members with interests in common.
- While followers by definition lack authority, at least in relation to their superiors, they do not by definition lack power and influence.
- Followers can be agents of change.
- Followers ought to support good leadership and thwart bad leadership.
- Followers who do something are nearly always preferred to followers who do nothing.
- Followers can create change by circumventing their leaders and joining other followers instead.

Kellerman's closing point is that leaders should be aware of followers own right to stand up and make change. She warns leaders "that their followers can create changes they may not anticipate, be aware of, or indeed even understand." (241) The process of change is not an easy one, however Kellerman explains that traditional approaches to the leader-follower relationship are being transformed.

- Subordinates are being targeted and getting more attention.
- Greater understanding that the leader and follower role is often interchangeable.
- Less emphasis on the chain of command, as more leaders look within for support and change. (Horizontal leadership)
- Increasing desire for subordinates to establish strong relationships with other subordinates, changing the nature of leadership

"The shift away from leaders and towards followers with a growing demand– is by and large a positive development. It is also a major development. It signals that to fixate on leadership at the expense of followership is to whis-



Barbara Kellerman's book on followership provides extensive detail on the fact that the gap between a leader and a follower is narrowing. Kellerman claims that leadership is not one dimensional and that followers are starting to play an increasing role in influencing leaders. Throughout the book Kellerman uses examples in the past where followers are able to come together to make a stand. By categorizing followership through the level of engagement we see that following is not simply a submissive role. Kellerman claims that the rigid definitions to explain followers and leaders are dismissive. Individuals are able to act as leader and followers simultaneously. The past of ignoring the impact of followers is over. This book provides an intellectual understanding of what followership entails, and offers an understanding that change can also come from those outside the position of power, authority and influence.