Followers for the Times:

Engaging Employees in a Winning Partnership

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The truth is that when things are going smoothly, many people question whether organizations really need leaders. Familiar strategies and established procedures produce predictable results. The boss can leave town and things will go on as planned. In uncertain times, however, we look to leaders to define the path, create the plan and encourage the heart. These are complex and uncertain times. Global markets, instantaneous communications, the fast pace of change and new technologies make effective leadership essential. In these times the best earn star status and money. Those who want to be among the best have created a thriving market for books and articles on leadership. It is not possible to wander through an airport bookstore without tripping over several books or audiocassettes on the subject.

With established market dominance organizations don’t really need followers whose whole being is engaged in the success of the enterprise. Solid performers who come to work on time will do. In uncertain times, however, when organizations have refocused on the customer to drive quality and the pace of change demands that employees learn new skills daily, the effective follower is an essential asset. So, where are the books on “followership”? There are only three of which we know and one is out of print!

More thought needs to be given to the follower—what good followers might be—what good followers must be—and how to develop good followers. A company that can succeed with followers who simply do what they are told poses leadership challenges that are different from the challenges of leading a team of creative, engaged followers. Conditions that call for proactive followers call for a particular approach to human resources development and leadership.

For example, every one of us has been in a classroom with a teacher who answers her or his own questions and every one of us in those situations has learned to out—wait the teacher. Some of us have also listened to teachers talk about these experiences in the classroom—and few of these are aware that their own behavior created passive students. Asking the question in different ways, waiting as long as it takes, and being clear about expectations for participation can turn passive students into active participants. Leaders face analogous challenges in understanding the impact of their own behavior on the willingness of employees to participate actively and fully in the life of the organization. But even with the right intentions and a clear understanding, leaders are often unable to harness their employee’s latent capacity.
In a recent consulting opportunity with the chair of a science department in a major research university we worked with a leader who wanted to create a "self–managed" work team among his administrative staff. He was tired of establishing work schedules, resolving conflicts and approving routine requests. He had a research agenda on the "front burner". Moreover, there was an existing self–managed team among his lab technicians and he liked the way it worked. In this case, however, he was unable to move his employees. They wanted no part of increased responsibility--preferring security to freedom. Their average age was 26!

This leader knew what he wanted and by all evidence was able to work effectively with employees as partners. Still, he was unable to teach, enable and encourage his employees to accept a more complete partnership. He didn't have a model that he could use to frame the expectations he had of his employees and he didn't have a strategy that would get him to where he wanted to go. The model we will describe offers both.

The Follower As Partner

In many effective organizations, the relationship between a leader and her or his followers is best described as a partnership in which the initiatives of followers are just as important as those of their leaders. Partnership is not essential in all circumstances; but, where market demands are greatest and results are created or improved through the intellectual efforts of employees, followers must be partners. Two elements of organizational culture are important in developing partnership. The first is the drive for performance and the second is a commitment to effective relationships.

A secure position in the market can allow organizations to pay less attention to performance. American higher education has been a good case in point. Government and customer calls for increased accountability have often fallen on deaf ears. However, when the market gets its teeth into poor quality, new competitors begin to take advantage of unguarded opportunities and even stodgy old–line universities begin to increase their attention to performance.

The role of relationships in the effectiveness of organizations is becoming more and more prominent. When cultures require consensus or the need for shared purpose is essential, the quality of relationships is key. Those in which partners each assume that the other listens and seeks to understand are more effective. Where work units are interdependent and resources are limited, people in relationships that support the belief that the one who goes first "won't use up all the hot water" get more done. Moreover, the greater the need for coordination and collaboration the more important strong relationships are to efficient communication. Finally, between leader and follower the stronger the relationship, the more likely that substantive, honest communication will flow both ways.

The challenge for leaders is that in relationships where there are power differences, we tend to assume that the one with more power determines the character of the relationship. As long as this is true, followers must depend on leaders to create relationships that foster open, creative communication. When followers accept shared responsibility for the quality of the relationship with their boss, true partnership is possible. In pursuit of partnership, therefore, bosses may have special power
but followers can have substantial influence in creating effective partnerships. The greatest gains occur in those organizations where leaders take an active role in creating partnerships AND build cultures that foster the independent initiative of followers who, with the same goals in mind, also work to create partnership. In these organizations when, inevitably, the leader missteps, the leader is not the only one who can take action to reestablish balance. Furthermore, in these organizations leaders need not shoulder the entire responsibility for creating culture--even in uncertain times. Thus, leaders who create partnerships with their followers make dependence on leaders less necessary even in the toughest of times.

The leader who works in partnership with followers is one who can accept the initiative of followers and act in ways that encourage followers to continue to take initiative. Either leader or follower can begin change in the organization but consistent culture throughout the organization remains the province of leadership. The most effective cultures are created intentionally--often built on models or visions of the ideal. Our model has emerged as we have worked in six different countries with organizations including a financial services company, a major private university, a federal emergency management training center, NASA's Kennedy Space Center and a variety of other settings. It offers an understanding that will support leaders and followers in choosing an approach to followership that fits the needs of organization. Such an understanding begins with understanding the way followers behave.

The Behavior Of Followers

The behavior of followers differs in two important ways or along two dimensions--the amounts of Performance Initiative and Relationship Initiative. Performance initiative refers to the follower's active efforts to do a good job. A person who demonstrates a great deal of performance initiative finds ways to improve his or her own performance in the organization. These ways might include improving skills, sharing resources with team members and trying new strategies. Relationship initiative refers to the follower's active attempts to improve his or her working relationship with the leader. A person who demonstrates a high degree of relationship initiative behaves as if "you can't succeed if your boss fails." For this follower shared purpose and shared vision are essential and thus he or she assumes an active role in achieving and maintaining both.

Performance Initiative

One important aspect of followership relates to the follower's concern about her or his performance. Does the person find ways to take the initiative to improve his or her own performance in the organization? To assess this dimension of follower initiative, we need to consider: (1) the extent to which the follower thinks of ways to get her or his assigned job done, (2) the extent to which the follower treats himself or herself as a valuable resource, (3) how well the follower works with co-workers, and (4) what view the follower takes toward organizational and environmental change.

Followers differ in the extent to which they take positive initiatives in each of these domains. Effective followers are committed to high performance. They understand that their future depends on the future
of the organization and are not content simply to do what they were asked to do yesterday. At the low end of this scale one still finds satisfactory performers. At the high end one finds experts who lead in their fields and whose contributions strengthen the bottom-line performance of the organization.

Doing the Job

Followers vary in the extent to which they strive to be as good as they can be at what they do. At one end of the continuum are followers who go through the motions, performing the tasks that are assigned to them just well enough to keep their jobs. If an aspect of an assigned task is not mentioned or emphasized by the manager, it is ignored. The definition of acceptable performance lies outside of the follower in the directives and regulations of the organization. Managers are continually challenged to think of a set of standards and rules that will squeeze adequate performance out of these reluctant performers. Performance at work is not important to the self-concept of these followers.

At the other end of this continuum are followers who care deeply about the quality of their performance. They take pride in what they do. They have their own standards, ones that are higher than the minimum prescribed by the organization. Work is an important and integral part of their lives. Creative managers try to find ways to free these followers to allow their enthusiasm and drive to work best for the organization.

Working with Others

Another important dimension of follower performance is working with others. At one extreme is the follower who does not work well with others. Some of these are continually involved in arguments and disputes, irritating everyone in the process. These followers actually interfere with the performance of others in the organization. Other followers at the low end of the scale do not have difficulties with others, but do not really work with others either. These see their performance as solely dependent on what they themselves do. They miss opportunities for synergy and by withholding their cooperation may limit the effectiveness of others.

At the high end of the scale are followers who take advantage of working with others. They may act as coaches, assume the role of leader when it serves the team, act as a mentor for less experienced team members, and share expertise with co-workers. When followers work effectively with others, they are able to balance their personal interests with the interests of others, discovering common purpose and working to achieve common goals. These followers emphasize cooperation over competition and find their own success in the success of the whole group.
Self as a Resource

Some followers pay little attention to their own well-being, neglecting physical, mental, and emotional health. This behavior may yield short-term benefits for the organization, if the follower is effective in important ways. In the long run, however, such neglect is likely to lead to burnout or stagnation. For an organization with a throwaway approach to its employees, this may be acceptable. For the individual follower, however, such an approach obviously is not wise. Followers who will be effective over the long haul recognize that they are their own most valuable resource, and take care to maintain their own physical, mental and emotional health by balancing work and other interests (e.g., family and friends, community activities and relations, physical and nutritional fitness).

Embracing Change

The other dimension of follower initiative that we think is important to consider concerns the follower's orientation to change. Change can be threatening and confusing. The widespread popularity of the book, "Who Moved My Cheese?", underlines the importance of change as a threat to the time-honored and familiar. Even motivated, generally competent employees will resist change when the results of change are uncertain. Those most rooted in the way things are generally have vested interests in maintaining the status quo. These may actually sabotage efforts to change.

At the positive end of this dimension are the followers who look for new and better ways to do things because they are committed to continuous improvement. These followers see change as an opportunity for improvement for themselves and their organizations. Such followers anticipate or look for change. They can be extremely effective as agents for change, by explaining to their co-workers the advantages of doing things differently, showing by example how different doesn't have to mean worse. Followers oriented toward embracing change will anticipate new methods, contribute ideas for ways to make positive changes in the way the organization functions, and will be willing to try out different ways of being effective.

Relationship Initiative

The other absolutely vital, but typically neglected, dimension of follower initiative is the follower's relationship to the leader. Good leaders find it extremely difficult to lead followers who are in an adversarial or indifferent relationship with them. Conversely, even mediocre leaders can look good and do well if their followers are willing to do whatever they can to help. A follower's position on this scale is determined by evaluating the degree to which the follower: (1) understands and identifies with the leader's vision for the organization, (2) actively works to earn the leader's trust, (3) is willing to communicate in a courageous fashion with the leader and (4) works to negotiate differences with the leader?
Identifying with the Leader

Followers vary considerably in the extent to which they understand and sympathize with their leader's perspective. Many followers simply do not. Viewing the leader as someone apart and alien, they do not try to think about how things look from the leader's perspective or what the leader's goals or problems might be. More problematic is the case in which the follower has developed active hostility toward the leader. In these cases, the follower's thoughts about the leader's perspective are strongly affected by animosity and opposition. Followers who are thought to have "problems with authority figures," or who indeed are saddled with inept or unfriendly supervisors, are likely to identify only in a negative way with their leaders. In contrast, some followers have thought more dispassionately about their leaders, understand their aspirations and styles, and have developed sufficient respect for the leader to adopt those aspirations as their own. These followers understand the leader's perspective, do what they can to help the leader succeed, and take pride and satisfaction in the leader's accomplishments. Managers who try to make their own views, goals, aspirations, and concerns understood by their followers can make it much easier for their followers to adopt and identify with their perspective.

Building Trust

Followers can also take the initiative to act in ways that will build their leader's confidence and trust in them. This means that the follower will look for and take advantage of opportunities to demonstrate to the leader that she or he is reliable, discreet, and loyal. Followers who demonstrate these qualities to their leaders are more likely to be asked for their opinions and reactions to new ideas. Their leaders will be more likely to share their plans and doubts, to entrust them with important tasks, and when necessary to give them honest feedback that can be used for performance improvement. Followers who do not seek out such opportunities for building trust, who do not understand or see as important this aspect of their relationship with their leaders, are less likely to be in a position to help their leaders as much as they might.

Courageous Communication

Part of building trust includes being honest, even when that is not the easiest thing to do. This aspect of relationship initiative is important enough to consider in its own right. Some followers fear (often with good reason) being the bearer of bad news, and are likely to refrain from speaking unpleasant truths. This can range from the classic notion of the "yes man" to simply refraining from speaking one's mind when that might be uncomfortable for the speaker and listeners. But followers who take the initiative in their relationships with their leaders are willing to speak the truth even when others may not enjoy hearing the truth in order to serve the goals of the organization. A follower who exhibits courageous communication takes risks in order to be honest. Because leaders can suffer from being surrounded by people who are supportive to a fault, a follower who is willing to be honest when others shy away from voicing their real opinions and evaluations can be invaluable.
Negotiating Differences

Another aspect of relationship initiative concerns the follower's approach to differences that arise between leaders and followers. A follower who is oriented toward improving her or his relationship with the leader is in a position to negotiate or mediate these differences. In the case of a difference of opinion between a leader and follower, the follower may engage in open or hidden opposition to the leader's decisions, hiding his or her differences of opinion and quickly agreeing with the leader regardless of true personal opinion. Alternatively, the follower who is concerned about the leader–follower relationship will air these differences in order to have a real discussion that may persuade either party or lead to a compromise that is satisfactory to everyone. In the case of disagreements between a follower's leader and other co–workers, the follower can stir the pot for fun or step out of the way. Alternatively a follower can take advantage of an understanding of the points of view of both parties to try to help resolve the disagreements in a way that leads to creative solutions acceptable to the leader as well as the other followers.

Follower Styles

The performance initiative and relationship initiative dimensions are each complex. Moreover, each follower has an individual behavior pattern—a follower style—that is the result of a unique combination of the elements of these dimensions. Understanding individual patterns can help a manager think about how to develop optimal follower styles. Furthermore, managers can assess their own leadership and followership characteristics when considering how they function in their organizations with an eye toward self–improvement.

By thinking of the two dimensions of performance and relationship initiative together, we can define four different follower styles by looking at the four combinations of high and low performance initiative and high and low relationship initiative (see Figure 12.1). We have used the terms Contributor, Politician, Subordinate, and Partner to describe the follower styles represented by these four combinations. These terms are useful for thinking about different follower styles, but we want to emphasize two things. First, although these terms may have acquired positive or negative connotations, we use them in a less evaluative way. There is no "one best style" that will work for every person in every organizational setting. Each style can work well in certain organizational settings or with certain personal characteristics of followers, and each can create problems when that style conflicts with the follower's personal characteristics or with the nature of the organization in which he or she works. In addition, because organizations are often complex and multi–faceted, the desirability of particular follower styles may vary from one part of the organization to another. However, we do believe that in general the most effective organizations, particularly in times of rapid change and challenge, will be those that are characterized by a partnership between leaders and followers.

Before discussing the different follower styles, however, it is worth thinking about how these styles arise. The easiest way to think about personal styles is to assume that they reflect the personality of the individual. This is often the case, but there are other powerful influences on follower style. Chief among them is the nature or style of the leader. Some leaders demand or encourage a particular follower style, discouraging or preventing other approaches. In these cases, followers may exhibit that style whether or not it suits them personally. Similarly, organizations have structures and develop cultures and sub–cultures that promote some styles and inhibit others. From a manager's point of
view, the personal, leadership, and organizational influences on follower style need to be evaluated. From the follower’s point of view, careful consideration should be given to what the leader and the organization desires or will allow. In some cases, it will be difficult, risky, or impossible for a follower to adopt a different style even if he or she wants to change. Conversely, if a follower’s style is a reflection of long-standing and stable personal characteristics, the leader and the organization will have a difficult (but not necessarily impossible) task if a change in follower style is desired.

FIGURE 12-1 Follower Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Initiative</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Politician</th>
<th>Partner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>Contributor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance Initiative</td>
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The Contributor: High Performance Initiative, Low Relationship Initiative

A follower who exhibits this style shows many, if not all, of the positive characteristics associated with performance initiative: a focus on doing the job very well, working effectively with co-workers in the organization, embracing change, and taking care of personal resources for long-term health. The Contributor’s follower style is admirable, and the person is probably known and respected for dedication to work of high quality. Clearly this is a follower style that would be valued highly by many organizations.

However, the Contributor style does not include positive initiatives toward improving the relationship with the boss. Followers with this style rarely seek to understand the perspective of the leader or to promote the leader’s vision. Their interactions with the leader are not characterized by courageous communication, initiatives designed to build interpersonal trust (beyond being trusted to do the work well), or a mature approach to negotiating differences that arise with the leader. Although such followers are thorough and creative in obtaining the resources, information, and skills that are needed to do the job, they are not interested in the interpersonal dynamics of the "higher ups" in the workplace. There are ways in which followers with this style could do more to help their leaders, and in turn their organizations, to be more effective. Indeed, the respect they earn through performance initiative could make them very effective if they took relationship initiatives, but they do not.

The Contributor style may suit some individuals very well. An energetic focus on doing the work very well, and the satisfactions gained from succeeding at that, can be enough for many people, and realistically there may be little time or energy left for relationship initiatives. In addition, some people simply lack the skills or the interest that is required for successful relationship initiatives. The Contributor style may also arise as a complementary counterpart to a leader who has everything under control, and has no need for assistance through relationship initiative, or who has other people to serve that function. At the organizational level, the Contributor style may also be what is needed and rewarded by the organization in general or by the organizational unit in which the person works. The most pressing organizational need may be for people who put all of their energy into their own tasks,
or there may be a division of labor such that enough other people are paying attention to relationship initiative to free Contributors to do nothing but produce.

However, the Contributor style may arise from less fortunate circumstances. At the individual level, the person may truly lack some important interpersonal skills that prevent relationship initiatives (and in that case, the 'working with others' aspect of performance initiative may also be problematic). The person may have failed previously in (clumsy) attempts to establish a relationship with a leader, and may have been soured on that whole dimension. At worst, persons with a Contributor style may actively oppose the leader. A person who works very well with co--workers and very badly with anyone in authority can be a real problem. In such a case, getting the person to take positive relationship initiatives would be a real coup, but simply getting them to give up active opposition would also be a victory.

The Contributor follower style may also arise because the leader discourages or rejects any positive relationship initiatives. For example, a follower may be capable of and willing to take relationship initiatives, but a leader who has a traditional view of leader--follower relations and responsibilities (i.e., I lead, you follow, end of story) may find such initiatives to be inappropriate. Or the leader may have marginal competence or self--confidence, and may see persons attempting to take relationship initiatives as threats or rivals. In such cases, the problem lies with a leader who prevents followers from doing all that they could do to help the organization. Similarly, the structures of organizational units, or entire organizations, can act to prevent relationship initiative. If followers have little or no contact with their superiors, if the organizational structure is rigidly hierarchical with orders flowing only from the top down, or if the organizational culture does not recognize relationship initiatives as appropriate follower behavior, then the organization may be throwing away it's own interpersonal assets.

Universities are often home to a wide range of contributors, professionals with external audiences who are rewarded for their personal achievement. In many cases university faculty fit this model. Many faculty members have little interest in the affairs of the administration and see little reason why they should work to understand the perspective of their "leaders". It is even likely that some faculty members do not acknowledge the members of the administrative team as their leaders in the first place. The Contributor style also typifies "backroom" software designers of the "mainframe era." As the backroom has become transparent and the customer has access to technical specialists, the role of the professional who can remain apart from the business of the organization has changed. More and more traditional contributors are being asked to relate their work and goals to the values and performance goals of the organization as a whole. This transformation poses a significant challenge for leaders in universities, research labs, and the computer and software industry as a whole.

The Politician: Low Performance Initiative, High Relationship Initiative

We refer to a person who shows a follower style that is low in performance initiative but high in relationship initiative as having a Politician style. We hasten to say that although we think this is a good descriptive term, it does suffer from the current highly negative reaction to politicians in government. In public organizations where a mix of career employees and those appointed by the elected leaders clash, the appointed followers often exhibit the Politician style. But the Politician style has its strong as well as its weak points. Followers such as these are unusually sensitive to interpersonal dynamics and
are valuable for their ability to contribute when interpersonal difficulties have arisen or might arise. They understand better than most the perspective of the leader, her vision and goals, his problems and concerns, and act to support the leader, taking satisfaction in her or his success. They are willing to give honest feedback, even when many others lack the courage to do so, providing the leader with invaluable if unpleasant real information. They act in a manner that engenders trust, allowing the leader to discuss plans and concerns openly. They can provide valuable assistance to the leader because they are willing and able to give insights into group relationships, and they can be invaluable in the role of mediator and negotiator when differences with the leader arise.

Followers with a Politician style may be naturally inclined toward interpersonal relationships, and particularly oriented toward and good at understanding and connecting with people in authority. In personality terms, people who are high in dependency, for example, might be likely to adopt a Politician follower style. The prospects, difficulties, and intrigues of leadership may be particularly engaging, while the potential rewards to be gained from a performance initiative focus are not. However, a Politician style can also arise from necessity rather than from personal inclinations. For example, if the leader is sorely in need of people who can understand and translate his approach to others, a follower may need to devote a considerable amount of time and energy to relationship initiatives in order to help the leader succeed. Similarly, the organization or the follower's organizational unit may need followers to oil the relationship machine, and may arrange reward systems and structures to encourage followers to be oriented toward relationship initiatives. In all of these cases, a follower's desire, or at least willingness, to devote a considerable amount of energy and time to relationship initiatives, even at the expense of performance initiatives, may be adaptive and useful for the person and the organization.

But as with the Contributor style, Politician styles can have a less benevolent source and a less salutary effect for the organization. This is a follower style that can be chosen as a way to cover fundamental deficiencies in performance. A person interested in personal gain and power, or in being attached to power, might see this approach as an easy or quick way to advancement and success. Such a person would rather play the system than do his or her job, adopting an attachment to people in positions of authority as a route to success. Alternatively, certain kinds of leaders may demand this sort of focus from their followers. When the leader's success is clearly the main item on the agenda, and when the care and feeding of the leader's ego is a full–time job, a follower may show the politician style through necessity. Organizations may unwittingly create this style by promoting people up to their level of incompetence, leaving them in jobs they cannot perform in any way other than to play politics within the system to survive. Any of these more negative causes behind the Politician style can be quite damaging to the organization and to the people who depend on the followers in question to perform their duties.

The Subordinate: Low Performance Initiative, Low Relationship Initiative

We fear that this is what most people think of when they hear the term 'follower.' But we hope that by now it is apparent that this is a limited view of followership. The subordinate is the stereotypical follower who does what he or she is told. A follower with a Subordinate style may be quite competent at his or her assigned tasks, and may rise in a seniority driven organization, but demonstrates neither a sensitivity to relationships with leaders nor a commitment to high performance.
As with the other follower styles, a Subordinate style may arise from personality characteristics; some people prefer to be given direction, and feel most comfortable when others take the responsibility for decisions about direction and procedure. In many cases, this may be a habit that has been acquired over the course of a lifetime. But it is also easy to see how leaders and organizations often demand such a style. Leaders who expect to give orders and have them followed or who are threatened by anything other than acquiescence to their decisions will have followers who behave as Subordinates. Similarly, if the organization requires and rewards nothing more than straightforward performance of a well defined job, the Subordinate style will likely predominate. In these cases, many of the people who show a Subordinate style are probably capable of more, and are probably unhappy in or unfulfilled by their work. In fact, studies of intergenerational differences in the workforce suggest that workers in Generation X and later may not stay with organizations that require nothing more than subordinate behavior.

On the other hand, the Subordinate style can be appropriate in some cases. It may suit the follower, the leader, or the organization. The subordinate is the only kind of valued follower in hierarchical organizations that operate only with orders from the top and obedience from the bottom or in production--line organizations where tasks are clearly defined and where deviation from prescribed methods or processes can create chaos. Similarly, when the job is one that may be waiting for the day when automation becomes possible and cost--effective, humans are serving where machines may soon arrive, and the job is designed so that initiative is not part of the picture. This style may also be inappropriate because improvements to the processes will come most often from the followers who are encouraged to show initiative and creativity for improvement, but unfortunately, for most cases, it is the most likely style. It is also the likely style of a somewhat or completely disaffected follower who is not interested in giving anything extra, or whose job is not one of his or her primary concerns. Or it can be the style of a follower who has discovered that the leader or the organization is not really interested in his or her ideas and initiatives.

The Partner: High Performance Initiative, High Relationship Initiative

Analyses of high--performance teams have revealed that the distinction between leader and follower is often more apparent than real, with team members slipping into and out of the role of leader so as to maximize team effectiveness. In these cases, the follower style is one of a Partner. The follower with a Partner style is committed to high performance and an effective relationship with the leader. Organizations that anticipate and keep pace with change in the global environment are characterized by leaders who encourage partnership and followers who seek to be partners. In these organizations Partners develop the kind of understanding that enables them to make contributions that anticipate market opportunities and customer needs.

Followers with a Partner style are often leaders--in--waiting. But they can also be people who do not particularly desire to have the lead or head position, but instead are concerned with doing whatever they can do to make their organization effective and successful. Clearly, organizations that are characterized by the Partner follower style are getting the most from their employees.
Developing Partners

It is true that each of the follower styles can be appropriate at some point in an organization's life. Furthermore, within each larger organization there will undoubtedly be subcultures where different follower styles are favored appropriately. Nevertheless, over the long run and particularly in times of change in strongly competitive markets, organizations need followers who are partners. Creating the right conditions for effective followership requires a clear understanding of practical steps that invite followers to partnership. The first of these is knowing what to look for in followers. The model we have described offers this picture. The next steps can be taken independently but leaders will be most effective when they take each of the steps below.

Model partnership

The good news and the bad for every leader is that she or he is also a follower. Thus, every leader can understand what good leadership looks like to a follower. When you focus on followership, however, you gain insight into your own behavior as a follower---and you are able to assess whether or not you would like your organization full of folks who behave the way you do as a follower. Anyone who has ever sat at the boardroom table with a boss who has criticized his boss's position on a pending decision and watched her boss smile and agree in spite of real disagreement, knows what behavior is really valued in the organization. On the other hand, those leaders who engage their followers in planning how to present their case "in loyal opposition" teach partnership by example.

Hire potential partners

Lyle Spencer, former Vice President for Research of Hay--McBer Company, the leading source for research on competence in the workplace is fond of saying that, "You can teach a turkey to climb a tree but it's easier to hire a squirrel." We agree that there are folks whose personal preferences and innate competence favors partnership. This is not to say that leaders do not play a part in determining the expression of that competence. Turn arounds at Sears and American Airlines depended, in part, on creating new roles for current employees enabling them to use competencies that they already possessed. On the other hand, many organizations have created positions for people who are content to let others take responsibility for performance and relationships in the workplace.

With a clear picture of follower competence, i.e., the skills for and inclinations towards partnership, leaders can select employees who will move faster towards partnership than current employees may be able to move. This strategy does have a bit of the "be careful what you wish for" problem inherent in its results, however. To hire people who want to be partners you must decide that you are going to make room for partnership and develop the leadership strategies that support partnership. It is more possible to promise partnership to current employees who are sure that they want to be partners than it is to survive the failure to deliver on your promises. Fifty percent failure rates of reengineering projects across the country and the long list of TQM dropouts underscore this truth.
Assess leaders for their ability to foster partnership

GE, Sears, Merck and Levi–Strauss have all made leadership development and assessment a cornerstone of their human asset management strategies. In each company CEO’s have led the identification of leadership values and competencies that will enable employees to give their best to the organization. One of these goes so far as to say that there are two things a leader must do--get bottom line results and support the leadership values of the corporation. Success goes to those who do both. Those who can do neither “are history.” The more interesting responses, however, are the responses to leaders who are strong in one area but not the other. If a leader doesn't get bottom--line results but supports corporate values, coaches will work with him or her. If a leader meets bottom--line goals but does not support corporate values, however, they will be looking for other employment.

Teach partnership

Partnering requires the development of skills like active listening that need to be nurtured. The first step to developing partners is to be able to describe what you expect of employees. Some employees, however, who may be active problem solvers as parents or community leaders may not be able to imagine themselves in the roles you suggest as you describe partnership. If you have hired people with the potential to be partners and offer them leaders who know how to work with partners, simple skill development workshops should be enough. In employee development workshops at Cornell University we have worked with Contributors and Subordinates who want to be partners with leaders who don't understand partnership--and we have been able to help these followers create partnerships with their bosses. Teaching partnership skills is essential in organizations that want to develop partners--and potentially very powerful in every organization.

The success of the MASCO Corporation, a conglomerate that owns dozens of familiar brands in the home products industry, is based on its ability to recognize strength in the leadership teams of the companies it acquires. But MASCO leaders also recognize that leaders who have succeeded in command and control environments need to learn new skills in order to be successful in the future. The on--site MBA program MASCO has created in partnership with Eastern Michigan University brings leaders at various stages in their careers together for learning. The learning environment requires that senior managers become "learning partners" with their juniors. In more than one case, the lessons learned in this environment have been transformational. Strong leaders unaccustomed to listening to their juniors have developed team leadership skills that have enabled them to turn subordinates into Partners.

Leaders at Gold Paints, a winner of the New York State award for "Small Business of the Year", wanted to turn materials ordering over to shopfloor employees in order to create a "just--in--time" production process. Most of these employees did not have business management experience or basic accounting knowledge. In order to prepare employees for success Gold Paints created a year long course in basic business management skills before making the transition to new production processes. The results included improvements in efficiency, reductions in cost and a cadre of shopfloor employees whose taste of responsibility and success turned them into Partners who sought further opportunities to improve business results.
Reward partnership and take the pain out of taking initiative

There is a saying that "no good deed goes unpunished." Simply put, if we punish employees for telling us the truth--. they won't.

Build Systems that engage partners

Learning systems that give employees access to the tools to do their work are one example. Dell Computers has created an employee driven, expert knowledge "warehouse" that employees can access to get information they need to do their jobs. The system "learns" in response to employee questions and feedback. Dell's research shows that user--driven learning by inquiry does a better job of building employees understanding of the "big picture" than leader--driven briefings and workshops. Ramsoft, a computer services company, makes learning tools available to employees on a "24/7" basis. In Ramsoft's highly competitive labor market, this strategy helps keep highly motivated Partners in the company.

Collaborative business process redesign, GE's Workout model, TQM problem solving teams and community development workshops all offer systemic means for engaging employees as partners. Employees will only be successful in these processes, however, if steps 1--5 above are taken as well. Those organizations that invest in expensive organizational development strategies without developing partners find little value in--group problem solving. When an organization is full of folks who behave as Subordinates, Contributors or Politicians, employees do not have the understanding, skill or sense of shared responsibility to be partners. The power of involvement strategies can only be realized in organizations that have taken the time to develop followers as partners.

Epilogue

It is counter intuitive but true that larger, complex organizations often offer employees the greatest freedom--especially if they are what Karl Weick has called "loosely coupled" organizations. In these situations, individual followers can create partnerships that significantly increase the probability of their own success--. even when the organization as a whole "hasn't got a clue." The best will recognize this opportunity and grab it. So, one the best strategies for change might be to leak some copies of this article to an employee association. Remember--true partners act in the best interest of the organization-- and their boss. You can't lose!
References


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