

Volume 12

What I'm hearing

"People just don't know how to follow anymore. If I were going to teach something today, it would be how to be a good follower." These words were spoken by a friend several years ago and have been ringing in my ears ever since.

What it means

We have a word for what leaders do: "leadership." For followers, there are many labels: "associates," "partners," "worker bees," "cast members," "employees," "people," "teammates" ... take your pick. Leaving such labels alone, I would offer a word for what all of these people do: "**followership**." In a world where leaders change regularly and flatter organizations ask leaders to manage a dozen or more people, being able to follow well is critical.

Leadership development too often falls solely on the leader, with no emphasis on bringing the people they lead into the discussion. A good example is performance evaluations. There's training for leaders on how to write them, but where's the training for followers on how to manage themselves in the process? After more than a decade, I'm still searching ...

What is "followership?" In his book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*, Jim Collins offers five levels of leadership: (1) Highly Capable Individual; (2) Contributing Team Member; (3) Competent Manager; (4) Effective Leader; and (5) Level-5 Executive. I would offer five levels of **followership**: (1) Minimizer; (2) Doer; (3) Attractor; (4) Improver; and (5) Influencer. For descriptions, read my blog posting at:

<http://www.thetrugroup.com/2011/04/the-5-levels-of-followership>

What you should do

As a leader, to have committed and focused followers, you need to do three things:

1. Make their roles and goals crystal-clear.
2. Provide the tools they need to be successful.
3. Allow them space to do and learn more, supporting them in success or failure.

Here are two techniques:

Ongoing 1-on-1s: Turn ownership over to your people and provide time to hear their priorities and share yours. Are you are both on the same page? Finish by asking what they need and follow up on any commitments you make. (*Addresses #1 and #3*)

New Team Members: Be purposeful about setting them up to succeed. Share things like your preferred communication method(s); when it 's okay to interrupt you; how they'll know whether you're stressed, irritated or open to debate; what irritates you; how much trust they'll have from the get-go and how they can earn — or lose — more trust. (*Addresses #2*)

The funny thing about great **followership** is that, when it's done well, it looks like great **leadership**.

Need more ideas on cultivating followership on your team? Watch my video on youtube called *Turning Followership into Leadership* or subscribe to my blog at www.thetrugroup.com.

Need a partner in effectively forming a team that will have a huge impact on your business? Contact me. scott@thetrugroup.com

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