



IN EIGHTH GRADE I Learned How to Follow the Leader

by Fred Gratto

Fred Gratto is assistant director of facilities at the University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. He can be reached at fgratto@ufl.edu.

Many years ago my teacher assigned me to work on a project with three other students in our class. I don't recall how the leader was chosen but I was asked to be one of her helpers. This annoyed me because I thought I was the better leader. I was probably wrong about my leadership skills since this was many years before I understood the relationship between leaders and followers. I pouted quite a bit playing second fiddle and refused to be a team player. After causing trouble for a while, I realized that if I cooperated, things went much better. This helped the leader, which in turn helped each of us because we were all in the project together.

After the assignment I still wanted to be a leader and I had gotten a little bit smarter. I discovered how important it is to follow, something I have been mindful of ever since. A few years later our football coach put his spin on the leader/follower relationship: "Everybody can't be the quarterback. You all have different skills and experience. All of you didn't get here on the same boat but you're all in the same boat now."

A casual trip to any bookstore or library will reveal that there are plenty of books available about leadership. There are very few however, about those who follow leaders. Nonetheless, since there are many more followers than leaders in the world, considering how to improve the performance of these people might be worthy of consideration because followers impact the performance of leaders and the organizations they serve. In fact, I have noticed that two of the best tools in facilities management are good advice and passionate leadership, often from followers.

Anyway, at work, home, or anywhere else, sometimes we are leaders and sometimes we are followers. When our role is to follow, there are several things we can do to help our leader, our organization, team, or any other group we are part of. Perhaps the first thing we can do is to stop and take a fresh look at how important followers are. Albert Einstein knew the importance of followers: "A hundred times everyday I remind myself that my inner and outer lives are based on the labors of other men. I must remind myself in order to give in the same measure as I have received and am still receiving." This great man understood how important followers are to leadership success. Despite the worth and merit of being a follower, sometimes society takes a dim view of having to follow. It seems like everybody would rather lead.

I recently saw a car advertisement on television. Audi's motto is *Never Follow*. Fortunately, this is not the way effective organizations work. In fact, they can't work this way. Somebody has to follow the leader so we need to understand just how important this role is.

When I got my first leadership job many years ago, I thought about supervision of others. Now, I understand that supervision is a contradiction. It is neither super to others nor does it create a vision. Leaders need followers and followers need leaders. One is not superior to the other and

both are needed to carry out a vision, wherever it comes from. Learning about this relationship convinced me that effective leadership is much more collaborative than I believed when I got out of college.

I'm not the only one who didn't understand that followers are critical to effective leadership. In the early part of the previous century, Frederick Taylor's Theory of Scientific Management minimized the input of workers. In 1911, he explicitly and without apology stated: "In the past man has been first. In the future, the system must be first." Taylor believed there was only one right way to do things and that workers were not supposed to think, because that was the job of supervisors. In his vision, human and machine were to work together like clockwork. To organized labor he was a soulless slave driver. To the bosses he was eccentric and a radical. To his admirers he was a misunderstood visionary.

Today, his approach to managing human resources is intellectually out of fashion, and few admit sympathy with its precepts. In contrast to his notion that workers are supposed to just do what they are told and merely follow, effective leaders these days value the opinions of followers. Leaders understand that they are not the only ones who can have a good idea or understand the best way to do something. Nor are they the only ones who have the power to influence work units.

Followers can also wield influence with other followers and with the leader. Peter Scholtes put it this way: "Almost nothing is accomplished by an individual working alone. Most work is obviously a collective effort. Yet, even workers who seem quite independent depend on others for ideas, stimulations, feedback, moral support, and administrative services. When an individual makes some heroic effort and accomplishes an extraordinary task, often he or she can take the time to do that work only because others have filled in on the less heroic parts of the job. When someone is credited with a success, he or she is individually honored for what was most likely the work of many." Since you're a

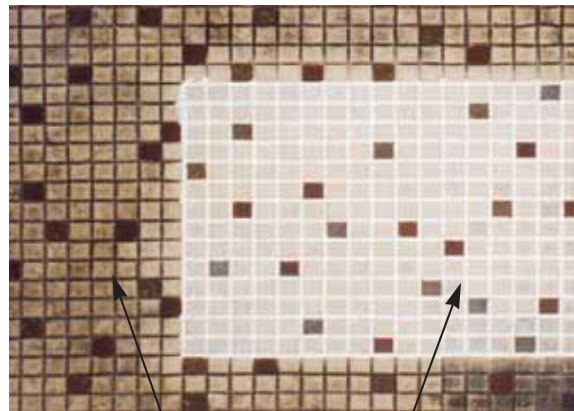
leader, you know this is an accurate statement and you understand that effective leaders place a high value on input and help from followers. You understand this but what you might not have done lately, is consider what you can do to improve your performance as a follower. When I stop to consider my role in physical plant, it occurs to me that there are five things I can do to be a better follower. Some of these may apply to you as well.

Check Your Attitude

Let's face it. None of us like the idea of submitting to someone else. The classic American phrase is "No one is going to

Finally, restrooms you'll love!

ACTUAL DEMONSTRATION SECTION



Before SaniGLAZE

After SaniGLAZE

The proprietary SaniGLAZE "Restorative Bonding" technology re-creates tile and grout surfaces to make them "like new" and moisture proof.



"No more ugly tile and grout!"

Bobbie Abbott - Customer

Highwoods Properties, Orlando, Florida

- Eliminates odors
- Shields against germs & mildew
- Completed overnight
- Easy to keep "sparkling clean"
- Stays "like new" for years
- A fraction of the cost of replacement

Contact us today for a free demonstration or video.

SaniGLAZE

New Tile & Grout Without Replacement

www.saniglaze.com

1.800.874.5554

Let's face it. None of us like the idea of submitting to someone else. The classic American phrase is "No one is going to tell me what to do!"

tell me what to do!" Lots of people might share this sentiment but there are still plenty of people who like following and excel at it. There are even plenty of people who relish the role of second fiddle and prefer it. I like following because I know followers are effective partners with leaders, not docile, conforming, underachievers. There should be no discomfort being a follower. It's not a term of weakness. The sooner we move beyond these images and get comfortable with the idea of powerful followers supporting powerful leaders, the sooner we can fully develop and test models for dynamic, self-responsible, synergistic relationships in our organizations. Followers are the key ingredients that allow leadership to take place and the support that gives leaders strength. Since everyone doesn't see it this way, one thing that might need to be changed is your attitude or my attitude about following.

Here's another way to look at it: all great leaders were once great followers. The world of sports offers many examples of

this fact and so do the organizations where we work. Stated another way, a follower is the only person that can one day become a leader. Pat Williams, senior vice president of the Orlando Magic basketball team has a message for all of us: "Try to forget yourself in the service of others. For when we think too much of ourselves and our own interest, we easily become despondent. But when we work for others, our efforts return to bless us."

Stay in the Loop

We have often heard that knowledge is power. Indeed, knowledge is like a lubricant that makes it easier to do more because we know more. To help ourselves and empower others, we should pass along information as soon as we get it. There's really no reason not to. We have e-mail, cell phones, meetings, and face-to-face contact. When you get information as a follower, let others know what's going on. This helps them and helps the organization. James Champy, said it this way: "Everyone must be in the know. Unless they are, you can forget about getting total mobilization; in fact, everyone not-in-the-know will see nothing in your efforts but a conspiracy. No one is going to go through the ordeal of a total mobilization without knowing why, or what for. The successful manager today isn't the one who is entrusted with secrets, but the manager who wins trust by sharing what he or she knows."

Connect the Disconnected

Indoors or outdoors, climate determines whether plants thrive or fail to grow. The climate of any organization can likewise have a major influence because it affects the morale, learning, and productivity of people. A supportive work environment helps people believe in their potential and provides motivation for success, especially if they feel they are respected in all their diversity, including different types of talents and learning styles. Lack of a supportive environment is a debilitating factor.

For example, in Charles Dickens' novel *David Copperfield*, young David returns from a happy visit with friends to find his widowed mother remarried to Edward Murdstone, a harsh and domineering man. Mr. Murdstone and his pesky sister Jane determine to conquer David's spirit through cruel punishment and intimidation. Early in the process, David describes his feelings: "I might have been improved for my whole life, I might have been made a better creature...by a kind word." Copperfield wanted to hear a word of encouragement, understanding, and reassurance that he was still welcome at home. He was certain that any act of appreciation by Murdstone would help him obey and respect the man. But, to his dismay, no kind

WATER ALERT®

LEAK DETECTION SYSTEMS



**AVOID DOWNTIME
AND DAMAGE DUE TO
WATER LEAKS AND SPILLS!**

USED IN:

- Main frame areas
- Server rooms
- Data centers
- Communication / telcom areas
- Air Conditioning units
- Mechanical rooms
- Unattended areas
- And more....

CEILING AND FLOOR SYSTEMS!

**CALL 1-800-533-6392 TODAY FOR FREE CATALOG AND PRICING
OR VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT:**

WWW.WATERALERT.COM

Systems installed in over 18,000 sites across the U.S.!!

Dorlen Products Inc. 6615 W. Layton Ave. Milwaukee, WI. 53220

words were ever offered. This is not unusual because the tragedy of *not* speaking a kind word is as old as time. As you consider followers and your role with them, are you trying to force them to do what you want or are you leading by example and encouragement? Dwight Eisenhower used a piece of string to demonstrate the ability to influence people. "*Pull it and it will follow you any where. Push it and it will go nowhere at all.*"

My observation is that a lot of people in our organization would do better if someone noticed them...if they felt they belonged...if they were pulled along...if their dignity and worth were affirmed once in a while. Aren't these to the soul what food is to the body? Leaders ought to notice people and say something nice once in a while. Followers should too. Follow the leader. Support him or her by saying something nice to your peers, to those you lead, and to the ones who follow you.

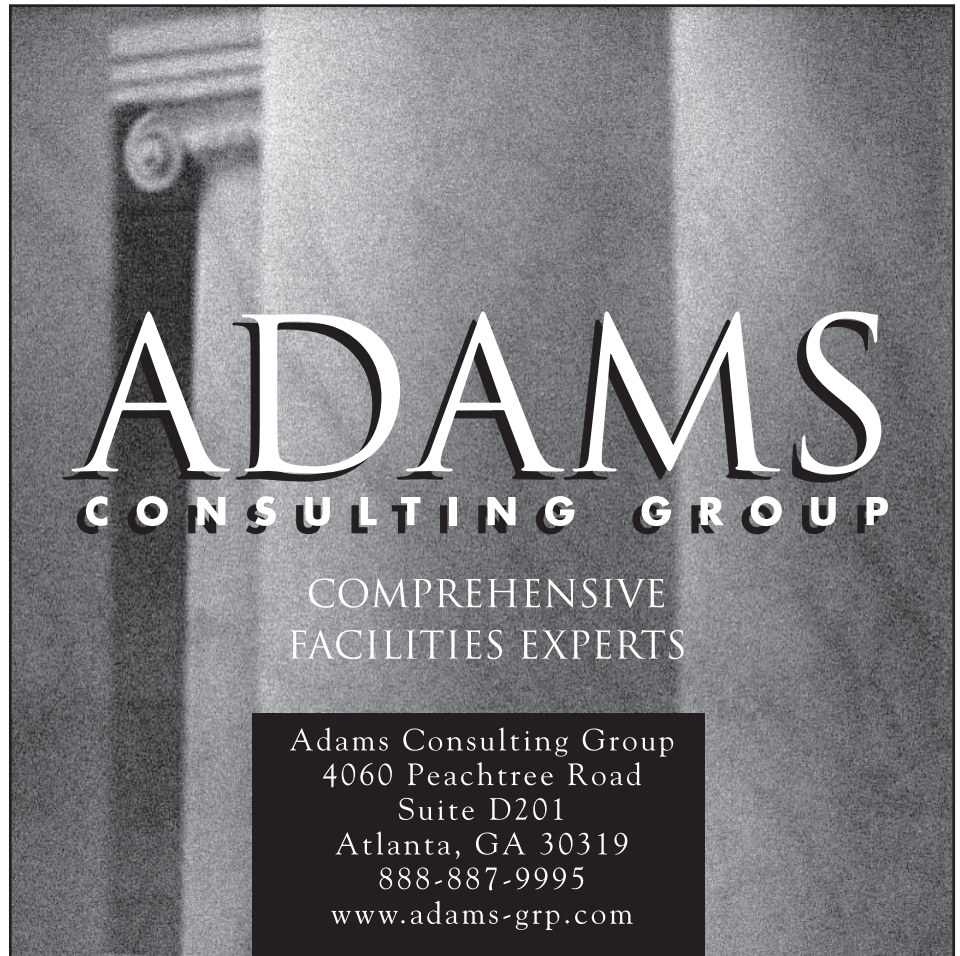
I sent an e-mail to my boss recently, subject: "Why not say something nice?" A few months ago I nominated him for an award. He didn't win but I thought he might appreciate knowing what I said, so I forwarded the nomination form to him. Good deeds like this help people in any organization feel better about the work environment and this helps the leader. Besides, we need to say something nice at every opportunity so people don't wither and die on the vine from neglect. Mark Twain knew the value of praise and being noticed. He said he could live for a month on one good compliment. I've seen examples like this, and you probably have too.

I read a short story recently about an American fighter pilot. He was speaking at a meeting and a man in the crowd recognized him. "You're Charles Plumb. You flew jet fighters in Vietnam. You were on the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*. How in the world do you know all that," asked Plumb. The man replied that he had been on the same ship and was responsible for packing Plumb's parachute." Later that evening Plumb thought about the man who had spoken to him and wondered how many times he had stood in the belly of a ship carefully folding parachutes for men whose lives might depend on them. How many times had he passed by the guy without speaking because he was a fighter pilot and the other man was just a low-ranking sailor? The message is clear to me, as stated by Chalfee: "Whether we lead or follow, we are responsible for our own actions and we share responsibility for the actions of those we can influence."

My observation is that a lot of people in our organization would do better if someone noticed them...if they felt they belonged...if they were pulled along...if their dignity and worth were affirmed once in a while.

Lots of people at work don't get noticed and they notice that they don't get noticed. Here's how my dad said it: "People will sit up and take notice if you sit up and take notice of what makes them sit up and take notice." My observation is that 90 percent of people who fail at work are not actually defeated. They simply quit. They still come to work, but they're not really there. It doesn't have to be this way.

We need to get involved with people so they can follow the leader with us. Beyond using and sharing your abilities at work, there is another thing you can do to make an impact: share yourself. Let me illustrate. There are people in every organization who say and do nice things. They get involved. Then, there are people who expend themselves for others. They crawl into the concerns of others. They enter into the difficulties and absorb some of the affliction in the process. They decrease the burden. Also, there are people who answer



ADAMS
CONSULTING GROUP

COMPREHENSIVE
FACILITIES EXPERTS

Adams Consulting Group
4060 Peachtree Road
Suite D201
Atlanta, GA 30319
888-887-9995
www.adams-grp.com

questions, ask how things are going, or pass along directions from the leader and go back to the office. Then there are people who impart themselves—their concerns, struggles, aspirations. They share part of themselves, nurturing the group down the path toward growth as a team.

What do you do? Do you use only your talents or do you share yourself? Do you help the disconnected people in your organization get on board and connect with the team to help the leader? While pointing out the value of relationships, Lander Medlin once mentioned that our culture seems to claim that whoever dies with the most toys wins and asserted

that this reasoning is askew: "It is not the number of toys we have, but the number of meaningful relationships we create. It is not the number of toys we have, but the number of people we touch. It is not the number of toys you have but the impact you have on others."

Become a Champion of Learning

"New" and "Improved" are words that have long been used in advertising to sell products. Business leaders understand that the public's eagerness to buy a new and improved product does not necessarily mean complete dissatisfaction with the former product. It simply means there is a belief that it

can be better. This reasoning applies to facilities organizations at colleges and universities because your responsibilities are legion. You are expected to orchestrate a vision, be adept at policy and governance, be an instructional leader, be skilled in communication and community relations, understand and implement long-range planning, ably manage the organization, have skill in staff evaluation and personnel management, and demonstrate technical knowledge which supports the mission of the organization. None of these critical tasks can be accomplished without knowledgeable and capable followers, ones who are always striving to learn more and contribute more.

There are better ways of doing things. As we learn more we can accomplish more. As we follow and support leaders, we ought to keep learning to enhance our own performance. Just as the pizza guy does, we need to keep delivering over and over again. New skills and abilities help followers get better results, perform at a higher level and keep delivering. Training might be considered a journey without a finish line. Ken Blanchard said it best: "The sign on your bathroom mirror should say, *Getting better all the time.*"

Followers should take their own need for training seriously, because of the positive impact it has on an organization. The process of continual learning is referred to as *personal mastery* by Peter Senge and the importance of it is clear in this statement: "The core leadership strategy is simple: be a model. Commit yourself to your own

M.A.R.C.
(Modular Auxiliary Removable Coil Unit)
Replaces existing coil section. Coil is removable through access panel. Can be used as auxiliary/supplemental heating or cooling or add to heating or cooling to make up air unit.



HEATCRAFT

OUTOKUMPU HEAT TRANSFER

APPLICATIONS FOR
COMFORT HEATING AND COOLING,
REFRIGERATION, & PROCESS

High Pressure Cleanable
Designed for fluid applications up to 300 psig operating pressure. Removable heads on both ends allow for internal tube cleaning without clogging the ends of the coil tubes.



STEAM
Available for both high and low pressure applications. Same or opposite end connections.



Quality Service for 5 Years

DeSaturation
"Two Coils in One"
A combination cooling/reheating coil in one common case that will both dehumidify the air and reheat that same air to the desired leaving air temperature and humidity level in low comfort cooling applications such as hospitals, clean rooms and science or research laboratories. A single supply and return connection is used, saving significant equipment, piping, and labor costs.
Patent pending.



CLEANABLE
Furnished with removable brass or carbon steel threaded plugs on either or both ends.



Specializing in custom built, "MADE TO FIT" Replacement Coils

CONDENSER/HEAT RECLAIM
Fin spacing, circuiting, and fin design can all be varied to assure your performance, air and tube side pressure drop limitations are maintained.



Coil Calc computer selection software available to help with coil selection.


DX (DIRECT EXPANSION)
Unique interlaced circuiting options assure uniform refrigerant distribution over the entire face area of the coil. Wide fin spacing availability reduces the effect of frost buildup on low temperature applications.



Local representatives available to assist with coil selection and field measurement.

FLUID
Large variety of drainable circuiting options makes this a good choice for most general heat transfer applications.





We Accept:  

OUTOKUMPU HEATCRAFT USA LLC
Commercial Products
Tel: 800-225-4328 • Fax: 662-229-4212 • www.heatcraft.com • Email: coils@heatcraft.com

We need to get involved with people so they can follow the leader with us. Beyond using and sharing your abilities at work, there is another thing you can do to make an impact: share yourself.

personal mastery. Talking about personal mastery may open people's minds somewhat, but actions always speak louder than words. There's nothing more powerful you can do to encourage others in their quest for personal mastery than to be serious in your own quest."

Personal commitment to learn more and follow better sets a good example that can inspire others to recognize their obligation to help the leader succeed. As champions of learning we can set the tone and expectation level in the organizations we serve. I'm not sure if training is a right or a privilege, but I do know this: organizations that do not provide the right rewards and opportunities end up training their talent for the competition.

Understand and Appreciate Your Important Role

I'm so old that I have to look both ways before I cross a room. Nonetheless, I can still remember the first time I tried to ride a bike. My father helped me get on the seat, steadied the bike until I was ready, and gave it a shove to get me started. Despite being well coached, when the bike started to move my only concern was pedaling so I could keep going. Steering never occurred to me so the bike veered to the left and into the front porch. In my second attempt I focused on steering so that I wouldn't run into something. I concentrated so hard on where I was going that I forgot to pedal. After just a short distance the bike rolled to a harmless stop and I fell over on the lawn. During my third try I learned how to use my feet to pedal and my hands to steer at the same time. It was my earliest lesson about what it means to work together. Another biking incident thirty years later also provided an example that helped me consider the important relationship between leading and following.

My blind cousin, same age as me, accompanied me on a three-day bike trip across Iowa on a bicycle built for two. I steered and we both pedaled. We worked well together and had a great ride because we understood our roles and dependence on each other. Both of us had to pedal but only one could steer. It's like this in any organization. You can get almost everything you want at work if you help other people get what they want. This is because there are certain things that all followers must do and there are certain things that only the leader can do.

The value of a follower is measured by how completely the follower helps the leader do his or her job, just as leaders help followers do their jobs. It must work both ways. Success comes when we learn to work together and understand that it is just as important to follow faithfully as it is to be out front. According to Farrar: "It is a scientific fact that when Canada

geese fly in formation they travel 70 percent faster than when they travel alone." Geese profit when they work together and so do all of us in facilities management. Here's another fact to consider: Geese honk from behind to encourage each other. That's not what we mean when we honk from behind.

A Few Parting Words

Leaders and followers go together like peanut butter and jelly. You know what it takes to be a good follower. A good follower should do the right things. A follower should know what the right things are, everybody else does. Being a good follower starts with having the right attitude. With a good attitude, everything is possible. If you need to check your attitude, consider these words in Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven": "Yes there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run there's still time to change the road you're on." 🏰

Notes

1. Blanchard, K. (1999). *The Heart of a Leader*. Tulsa, OK: Honor Books.
2. Chalfee, I. (1998). *The Courageous Follower*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
3. Champy, J. (1995). *Reengineering Management: the Mandate for Leadership*. New York: HarperCollins Publishing.
4. Einstein, A. (1931). The World as I See it. *Forum and Century* Vol. 84, pp. 193-194.
5. Farrar, S. (2003). *Point Man*. Multnomah Publishers, Inc.
6. Kanigel, R. (1997). *The One Best Way*. New York: The Penguin Group.
7. King, M. (2004). *Leadership with a Human Touch*. Chicago: Lawrence Ragan Communications.
8. Medlin, L. (2004). How are you living your life? *Facilities Manager*. Washington, D.C.: APPA.
9. Scholtes, P. (1998). *Leader's Handbook: Making Things Happen, Getting Things Done*. Hightstown, NJ: McGraw-Hill Publishing.
10. Senge, P. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline*. New York: Doubleday.
11. Williams, P. (2002). *Unsinkable: Getting Out of Life's Pits and Staying Out*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming Revell Publishing.
12. Vander Lugt, H. (2004). Who Packed Your Chute? *Our Daily Bread*. Grand Rapids, MI: RBC Ministries, April.