

*Managing by the Book...**

New Perspectives on Following the Leader**

Jean M. Holcomb***

While the subtext of childhood games that you can't have a leader without followers holds true, the nature of the leader/follower relationship in the workplace is changing. Leaders and followers now share ownership of the workforce relationship. Responsibility for nurturing this relationship rests equally with both categories of workers.

¶1 Old habits die hard. From childhood games of following the leader and Mother-May-I to the law library workplace, the pivotal role played by the leader remained unchallenged for decades. While the deference given to leaders in library environments may never have been as absolute as the primacy granted leaders in the corporate world, the balance of power between leader and follower has now begun to shift in all workplace environments.

¶2 To be successful as a manager, it's no longer enough just to understand law library procedures inside out. Successful managers must know which strategies motivate and support the staff who make the library run on a daily basis. Successful managers must also understand that the expectations followers have about how their leaders should behave directly impact the effectiveness and efficiency of the work unit. While the subtext of the childhood games, that you can't have a leader without followers, holds true, the nature of the leader/follower relationship in the workplace is changing. Leaders must understand the dynamics of "followership" and harness its energy.

¶3 If the workplace paradigm no longer resembles a leader-centric model, what does the new model look like? The new law library workforce model rests on a symbiotic relationship between leader and follower. The roles played by leaders and followers are not static. Leadership styles shift to fit changing situations. Leaders do not always wear the leader hat. Often expertise flows upward in the organization, with the followers possessing the key skills and initiative to move projects forward. Leaders and followers now share the ownership of the work-

* *Editor's Note:* "Managing by the Book" is a regular feature of *Law library Journal*. In each article, author Jean Holcomb highlights a book outside the field of librarianship that has a message about management topics that will resonate with law librarians.

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force relationship, and responsibility for nurturing this relationship rests equally with both categories of workers.

¶4 This interdependent workforce model grew out of a series of mid-twentieth-century social, cultural, and economic shifts.¹ The social and political unrest of the late 1960s and early 1970s brought with it a growing resistance to the status quo. Change from the bottom up, and power-to-the-people-driven movements reshaped institutions and toppled governments. The advent of personal computers, the Internet, and cell phone technology democratized access to information and disrupted traditional balances of power. Leaders, demystified by modern media, no longer held sway without challenge. When many lost respect for figures of authority, the line between leader and follower became blurred, emboldening followers' expectations.²

¶5 For managers, this shift has opened their eyes to what many have come to think of as the CEO compact: "a set of expectations both from and for a leader."³ Examples of behaviors leaders desire from those they supervise include emotional investment in the work to be accomplished, creativity, and a collaborative approach that includes sharing credit.⁴ In addition, leaders expect those they supervise to exhibit a willingness to accept project leadership roles, and to anticipate and minimize risks. Keeping current and being aggressive about personal development are also valued.⁵

¶6 On the other side of the CEO compact, followers expect leaders to provide clear directions, to articulate goals and objectives succinctly, and to offer timely, targeted feedback.⁶ Followers expect their managers to make timely decisions and communicate these decisions, keeping everyone informed in an open manner. Finally, followers expect their managers to support a fair compensation plan.⁷

¶7 We may all be familiar with what both good and bad leadership look and feel like. Our comfort level with recognizing and rewarding good followership may not come as easily. To develop our followership I.Q., it is important to shine a light on the range of followership behaviors and the role these behaviors play in ensuring a collegial and productive workplace.

¶8 For academicians like Barbara Kellerman, who study leadership behaviors, increased expectations for improved understanding of the shift in workplace power from being leader-centric to a symbiotic relationship opened new areas for exami-

1. See Barbara Kellerman, *What Every Leader Needs to Know About Followers*, HARV. BUS. REV., Dec. 2007, at 84, 86.

2. See generally KEN LLOYD, *BE THE BOSS YOUR EMPLOYEES DESERVE* (2002) for a detailed discussion of what followers now expect from their leaders.

3. Larry Bossidy, *What Your Leader Expects from You, and What You Should Expect in Return*, HARV. BUS. REV., Apr. 2007, at 58, 60.

4. *Id.* at 60–61.

5. *Id.* at 61–62.

6. *Id.* at 64.

7. *Id.* at 64–65.

nation. In *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*,⁸ Kellerman focuses on defining just who followers are, how they act, and how an understanding of followership behaviors can help leaders improve.

¶9 The author defines followers by their rank and by their behavior.⁹ Followers possess less power, authority, and influence than their leaders. Followers almost always go along with what someone else wants and intends. Kellerman defines followership as the response by those in a subordinate position to those with whom they have a relationship based on rank or power.¹⁰

¶10 Yet in spite of these definitions, it becomes clear that there are many instances where the lines between who is a follower and who is a leader blur. This happens particularly when the dynamics of individual situations stretch the limits of followers' tolerance of bad leadership behaviors. The book's main message: to underestimate or undervalue the importance of followers is to disempower them at real risk to the viability of the entity to which they belong.

¶11 Increasingly, followers think of themselves as free agents, not dependent underlings. They withhold support from bad leaders and throw their weight behind good leaders. Especially among knowledge workers, expertise trumps position and title in determining who is actually leading.¹¹

¶12 Kellerman provides examples ranging from Moses to Freud to explain follower behavior.¹² Followers traditionally have been viewed as motivated by admiration, self-interest, a desire for stability and security, and a desire to avoid conflict.¹³ Subordinates also conform because it's in their self-interest to model their actions on the actions of their fellow followers.¹⁴ The bottom line is, most followers go along because it's easier.¹⁵

¶13 Kellerman divides the world of followers into five categories to help foster an understanding of the different ways followers respond to their superiors: isolates, bystanders, participants, activists, and diehards. Isolates don't care about their leaders or respond to them in any way. By doing nothing, isolates strengthen those leaders who already have power.¹⁶ Bystanders make a conscious decision to stand on the sidelines. Their withdrawal has the practical effect of providing support for the existing leadership situation.¹⁷ Participants care enough to be engaged,

8. BARBARA KELLERMAN, *FOLLOWERSHIP: HOW FOLLOWERS ARE CREATING AND CHANGING LEADERS* (2008). Kellerman holds the position of the James MacGregor Burns Lecturer in Public Leadership at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. *Id.* at 303. See also Kellerman, *supra* note 1, for very abbreviated coverage of this topic.

9. KELLERMAN, *supra* note 8, at xix.

10. *Id.* at xx.

11. Kellerman, *supra* note 1, at 86.

12. KELLERMAN, *supra* note 8, at 54.

13. *Id.* at 49–50.

14. *Id.* at 56.

15. *See id.* at 72.

16. *Id.* at 86.

17. *Id.* at 92.

either for or against the leader, and will invest in making an impact. Even more engaged, activists hold strong feelings and behave accordingly, working on behalf of their leaders or trying to undermine or depose them. Finally, the most invested, diehards, are willing to risk their lives for or against their leaders.¹⁸

¶14 At heart, Kellerman believes that the level of engagement with the leader and the goals of the organization determine the nature of the leader/follower relationship. A leader's capacity to motivate followers rests on an ability to exemplify the values and ideals shared by the group they lead.

¶15 Kellerman does not claim to provide specific tips for leaders to motivate followers to move up her hierarchy of followership engagement. She sees her purpose as descriptive, not prescriptive. Of the four chapters that illustrate how followership categories behave, only one focuses on the story of how followers changed the course of a situation of bad leadership behavior.¹⁹ For readers hoping to find a magic key to unraveling and changing followership behaviors, Kellerman offers a less than Pollyanna-ish perspective.

¶16 She resists listing the traits of good followership, believing it to be a situation-specific condition.²⁰ At the same time, *Followership* acknowledges that the traits and capabilities of good leadership and good followership would strongly resemble each other. Informed, energetic, independent leaders and followers would possess the capacity to cope with complexity, manage change, and exercise good judgment.²¹

¶17 Finally, where does *Followership* leave us in our consideration of the importance of developing a better understanding of the key role played by followers? By reminding us that followers by definition may lack authority, but do not by definition lack power and influence, that followers can be agents of change, that followers who do something are better than followers who do nothing, and that leaders must remember that followers can foster change by circumventing them and joining other followers,²² the author encourages a deeper study of the nuances of followership.

¶18 Other sources of concrete information about the relationship between leaders and followers do outline strategies to enhance the relationship. Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones offer tips in *Leading Clever People*.²³ They believe it's imperative for leaders to create an environment where employees can blossom when their ideas,

18. *Id.*

19. Using Nazi Germany's treatment of Jews, the Merck Company's handling of the Vioxx recall, the activities of Voice of the Faithful members in protesting the way the Catholic Church handled the child sexual abuse scandal, and the American military's planning in Operation Anaconda for an initiative against the Taliban and Al Qaida in Afghanistan, Kellerman illustrates the range of behaviors in her followership categories. *See id.* at 97-209.

20. *Id.* at 236.

21. *Id.*

22. *Id.* at 241.

23. Rob Goffee & Gareth Jones, *Leading Clever People*, HARV. BUS. REV., Mar. 2007, at 72.

knowledge, and skills give them an impact disproportionate to the resources their organizations provide for them, a situation that can be seen in today's law libraries.

¶19 Goffee and Jones view “clever people” as being very different from traditional followers. Consequentially, leaders will have a different relationship with this class of employee.²⁴ They suggest that clever people know their own worth, are organizationally savvy, ignore corporate hierarchy, expect instant access to leadership, have a low boredom threshold, belong to highly developed peer networks, and do not exhibit gratitude.²⁵

¶20 To enable clever people to thrive, leaders must protect them from organizational rain²⁶ and foster a workplace culture that keeps rules and norms simple and universally accepted.²⁷ Smart leaders help clever people experiment. They help clever people reach a balance between innovation, risk tolerance, and project failures and setbacks.²⁸ While it's critical that leaders support creative independence, it's equally important that leaders ensure that their clever people recognize their interdependence—that others within the organization possess vital skills that clever people lack.

¶21 *Discovering Your Authentic Leadership*²⁹ discusses a similar approach to achieving the new symbiotic model of leadership/followership balance. Here the writers suggest that recognizing your core beliefs, convictions, and values lies at the heart of effective leadership and, by analogy, effective followership. “Having a solid base of values and testing them under fire” enables the development of the key principles that guide work and life behaviors.³⁰

¶22 Authentic leaders can't succeed on their own. They need strong support teams to help them by offering advice, affirmation, and perspective.³¹ Authentic leaders know that successful organizations rest on having empowered leaders at all levels, including those who have no supervisees.³²

¶23 Although directed at leaders, the messages in *Courage as a Skill* apply equally to followers.³³ Kathleen Reardon describes courage in the business world as a special kind of calculated risk taking that would work equally well for all categories of followers. Her “courage calculator” consists of six factors: establishing goals, weighing the importance of following them, tipping the balance of power

24. *Id.* at 74.

25. *Id.* at 75.

26. Organizational rain is defined as “the rules and politics associated with any big-budget activity.” *Id.*

27. *Id.* at 77.

28. *Id.* at 78.

29. Bill George et al., *Discovering Your Authentic Leadership*, HARV. BUS. REV., Feb. 2007, at 129.

30. *Id.* at 134–35.

31. *Id.* at 136.

32. *Id.* at 137.

33. Kathleen K. Reardon, *Courage as a Skill*, HARV. BUS. REV., Jan. 2007, at 58.

in your favor, balancing risks against benefits, determining the proper time for action, and establishing contingency plans.³⁴

¶24 Two law librarians, Janis L. Johnston and Fillippa Marullo Anzalone, also write about the leader/follower relationship in terms of its symbiotic nature. In *Managing the Boss*, Johnston outlines the skills necessary for a follower to establish an effective working relationship with their leader.³⁵ She defines a series of principles to accomplish this goal, beginning with the key directive that the responsibility for creating such a relationship rests with the follower.³⁶ Followers should discover their leaders' goals and the pressures they face and create methods to support leader achievement. They should solicit evaluative feedback from their leaders to be sure the support they aim to offer does in fact function as desired. Understanding the preferred work habits of their boss, being alert to the strengths and weakness of the boss, and keeping the boss informed promote an effective relationship.

¶25 Anzalone writes in *Servant Leadership: A New Model for Law Library Leaders* about a leadership concept with ancient roots and modern implications.³⁷ Based on themes of partnership, responsibility, and service, servant leadership as described by this author fits into the symbiotic model. The article identifies ten essential characteristics of the servant leader and offers examples of how each would apply in a law library environment. She details the roles of these skills: "listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and community building."³⁸ Here too in this model, the skills outlined for leaders apply to followers. Shared responsibility across the leadership-followership spectrum provides the fuel to run the organization.³⁹

¶26 Given this background, how can law library leaders take the temperature of their workforce to test the climate of the leader/follower balance? To determine if the vital expectations of both leader and followers are being met, leaders must provide regular opportunities for interaction with those they supervise. Employee self-evaluations, if not already a part of the library's performance review plan, must be implemented. Leaders must be open to soliciting anonymous annual evaluations of their own performance from those they supervise. With practices in place that support open communication and joint ownership of the workplace culture, leaders and followers will benefit from a shared commitment to their relationship, and their organizations will prosper.

34. *Id.* at 60–64.

35. Janis L. Johnston, *Managing the Boss*, 89 LAW LIBR. J. 21 (1997).

36. *Id.* at 23.

37. Filippa Marullo Anzalone, *Servant Leadership: A New Model for Law Library Leaders*, 99 LAW LIBR. J. 793, 793, 2007 LAW LIBR. J. 48, ¶ 2.

38. *Id.* at 797, ¶ 12.

39. *See id.* at 812, ¶ 55.

¶27 Today, organizational success rests not just on the skill of the leader to motivate, but also on the skill of the follower to assess needs and implement solutions appropriately. Libraries that fail to recognize how followership and followers' roles have changed run risks. Libraries that understand the dynamics of followership and harness the energy generated by positive leader/follower relationships will prosper.