

Leadership & Followership- 2 Sides of the Same Coin

by Jennifer Myers

I remember attending a talk by a well-respected lecturer from a local University, and he spoke about 'What is follower-ship'? Everyone in attendance sort of looked at each other – a bit confused. He went on to explain that nearly everyone who is a leader is also a follower in some way, shape or form, either in their business circles or at home. I thought, 'Ok – I get it. So, now what?'

Here's the interesting bit that perked my ears up: there are 4 types of followers, and every leader needs to be able to not only identify which types their team members are but also what type of follower they are themselves. Here we go:

The Sheep

- not generally a critical thinker
- relatively passive
- tends to have a low sense of responsibility
- motivated by interests OUTSIDE the organisation

The "Yes" Person

- not generally a critical thinker
- ACTIVE
- tends to drive the boss' agenda
- will do anything to curry the favour of whoever is in charge

The Alienated

- IS generally a critical thinker
- vocal but passive
- will not participate in implementing changes

- will generally be very happy to tell the leader what they think is wrong or what they think should be done about it, but will rarely pitch in and help implement a solution

The Effective

- IS generally a critical thinker
- vocal and active
- not afraid to speak up and suggest areas for improvement or possible solutions
- not afraid to head up a committee to implement positive change, as they are always looking for better ways to do things

Do you recognise yourself and your team members in this list? I do. One key point that the speaker shared is that, as a leader, you must not only know which type of follower your team members are, but how to best **utilise** them.

For instance, if you have a new project that you are implementing, the speaker suggested consulting with the 'Alienated' first, so that you can get an unvarnished opinion of your plan (they'll gladly play Devil's Advocate). **By the way, this is a great way to attempt to bring an Alienated person back into the fold, as it were. People become Alienated when they don't feel heard.*

(Lesson: if a team member brings you an idea, LISTEN and provide FEEDBACK so that they feel heard, even if the idea cannot be implemented!)

The speaker then suggested you need to onboard your 'Yes' people and 'Sheep' in order to carry out a plan effectively. The interesting bit was to include the 'Effectives' last. His reasoning behind this was because Effectives can slow down the progress of a project by constantly coming up with tweaks to the plan and different ways to execute.

The conclusions I drew from this talk?

This concept of followership not only works for understanding your team members, but ***it also works for identifying how to deal with your clients and prospects.***

Here are a few examples:

- If you are presenting a solution to a 'YES' person, they may quickly go along with your solution because they want to please you but may not have staying power or loyalty
- If your client is an EFFECTIVE, they may want to be able to collaborate with you on a solution that best fits their needs

- An ALIENATED person may have a negative view of your solution and you will then need to anticipate all the objections they may come up with as to why your solution won't work
- You will find you may easily get frustrated when attempting to work with a SHEEP, as they may tend to externalise their problems and not want to take responsibility and solve them with your help

I hope my thoughts about that session have gotten you thinking! I know I'll think twice about what type of a 'follower' I am and how that impacts the people around me!