

Leaders: What You Should Know About Your Followers

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The key to successful team leadership is being able to meet the needs of each person in your team. This article shows you how you can do that by responding to the 3 types of follower in every team.

Content:

The one reason why successful leaders need to have a full range of leadership styles is to be able to properly lead the people who are their followers.

Followers do not all have the same needs from their leaders. Depending on a variety of factors, such as age, skills, experience, confidence, and, above all, personality, followers

will look to their leaders to relate to them in ways that are quite different from others in the team.

Generally-speaking, followers fall into 3 categories:

1. **Individualists.** Individualists are those who don't want their leader to be breathing down their necks all the time. They like to do their own thing.

They may be people who by nature like to dominate those around them, or who are conscientious and intelligent enough to motivate themselves, or people who go at their own pace and get work done in their own time and in their own way.

Individualists need various degrees of laissez-faire management. At one end of the spectrum, you may need to agree with them just how much freedom they're allowed. At the other end, you may tell them that you trust them entirely.

Laissez-faire styles of leadership do not, of course, mean that you should leave this type of follower alone. Individualists still want to know that what they are doing is OK and still need the same sorts of recognition from you that you would give to anyone else. It's just that they want you to treat them like grown-ups.

2. **Dependents.** Dependent followers are quite different from individualists.

By nature, they have no desire to work on their own. For them, the leader is the focal point of all they do, if you like, the touchstone against which they judge how they are doing.

Dependents may be people who need a high level of security and authority in their work, the reassurance that, as long as the boss OKs it, then it's OK. They may also be people who like to keep busy all the time and are happiest when they have a steady stream of tasks coming from the boss. They may also be people who like a lot of clarity in their work, who need to know what's going on at all times, and who can only get this information from a knowledgeable boss.

Leaders will find they need to build one-to-one relationships with the dependents in their team. At all times, they will use different levels of directive styles of management, in contrast to the hands-off style they use with individualists. This can range from spelling out clearly what they have to do at one extreme to having regular get-togethers to check on progress at the other. Dependents have a child-like relationship with their leaders in which they expect to be looked after.

3. **Co-operatives.** The third group of followers are co-operatives.

Co-operatives are people who need to be in relationships with others, particularly their team leaders. They may be people who like to be needed, like to be admired, or who like to feel special.

Those who like to be needed will rely on the boss emotionally to feel they are valuable members of the team. They love nothing more than being called on to help out in an emergency. People who want to be admired crave recognition. Much of their work is designed to impress others, especially the boss. Those who like to feel special want to be recognized for their special gifts and special contribution. This recognition is especially valued when it comes from the leader, even if they don't go looking for it.

Leaders need to be aware that co-operatives relate to their leaders in emotional ways. They need regular strokes of recognition, feedback, and approval. But in all other respects they want to be treated as adults. As such, the relationship between leaders and co-operatives is similar to the relationship between adults and teenagers.

We are all different and have different needs. The key to successful team leadership is not just having a variety of styles of leading that we can apply when we want to, but in applying them successfully to meet the individual needs of our team members.

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