



# Change your leadership style

The second of a two-part article explains that effective leadership depends on developing good followership

FOR centuries, followers have viewed leaders by the titles, roles or positions they held. Around 100 years ago, what leaders “have” – their behaviours and leading styles – was added.

Then, about 60 years ago, what leaders “do” – their actions and interactions with others – became the focus of followers’ “action-oriented” perspectives.

Part I of this article positioned “followership” as a form of self-leadership for followers. It signalled that a leader could improve team effectiveness by making small changes in areas he can control.

To foster “followership” in your team, pay attention to these five important areas:

## Authenticity

Becoming a leader for the first time can feel like stepping into a new pair of shoes. Yes, you feel good, have increased confidence and elevated status.

However, new shoes initially don’t feel like your old shoes, do they? When you use them for the first time, your feet can get a little blistered, sore and uncomfortable.

When you first donned your leadership cloak, was it comfortable or unnatural? Followers want leaders to be themselves, acting naturally and being authentic.

Certainty reassures followers, as they want to see the real leader they have grown to trust. You create uncertainty for followers when you act unnaturally, so how can you expect them to feel comfortable with you as their leader?

## Bridging

Management focuses delivery on yesterday’s promises, whereas leadership focuses on creating different tomorrows. Leaders must create that bridge between certain today’s, and more uncertain, yet brighter, tomorrows.

Followers want to see that gap bridged with a clear and cogent vision. They want to see line of sight from where they currently are, to where in future you need them to be. They look for a vision that aligns the team with organisational aspirations and values.

Visions signal change, though change can be a har-binger of fear. Ensure that the vision builds strong foundations on each side of the bridge, and that the benefits and risks of stepping forward are captivating for followers.

When you lack vision and direction, can you expect followers to help you bridge the divide?

## Communication

Charisma and superb oratory skills were important in the successful election of United States president Barack Obama in 2009. That said, followers are realistic, they don’t need you to talk like a president. They want you to communicate in simple words that they can understand.

They want you to tell them your vision with clarity, they want you to listen to their feedback and concerns and they want to be part of a leader-follower relationship built on a platform of trust.

When all you do is scold and shout, rather than talk, invite and listen, will it be possible to build strong relationships with your followers?

## Distance

“Mr Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” said US president Ronald Reagan, firmly instructing the Russian leader on the steps of the Brandenburg Gate in 1987. His words captured distance, yet concealed the closeness of friendships built earlier while working together to warm the American and Soviet “Cold War” relationship.

Thirty years on, re-setting US-Russia relationships continues. Closeness and distance are again visible over shared lunches in hamburger bars and spy scandals in the media.

Effective leadership requires you to manage and signal distance. In setting direction, giving instructions or pointing pathways to the future, inject distance into the relationship. However, when coaching and helping followers execute the vision, inject closeness.

Followers may get confused when you cannot effectively convey appropriate distance, so make it clear whether your actions are directive or consultative.

## Emotional engagement

American psychologist Daniel Goleman brought emotional intelligence (EQ) to our attention, and research suggests that leadership success is differentiated more by EQ than IQ.

That said, the old dialectics of results versus relationships stress rationality, rather than emotions. Followers have social needs for trusting relationships, built by emotional engagement.

Successful leaders know that emotions stoke the fires of passion that burn within us all, and accept their role in fostering emotional engagement.

Engagement means you shed total reliance on rationality, understand the importance of emotions, and become aware of the emotions in others. In doing this, you enable better management of follower interactions, in more engaging ways.

When you cannot engage followers on emotional levels, can you hope to build the bonds of trusting relationships, so that they can take up your challenge energetically?

Choose to make changes to your leadership approach, develop the right kind of followership within your team, and see how it can work for you.

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