

# Want Better Leadership? Be A Better Follower!

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Dr. John Humphreys  
Professor of Management

Texas A&M University –  
Commerce

# A Brief Introduction

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Although I've worn many hats during my tenure at the university, and you may know me as an administrator, I am a professor and have been studying and writing about leadership for the past 30 years or so.



# Leadership

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While we often hear complaints regarding individual leader inadequacies, ineffective “leadership” is even a bigger concern. And ineffectual followership contributes to unproductive leadership.



# Are You Saying I'm At Fault?

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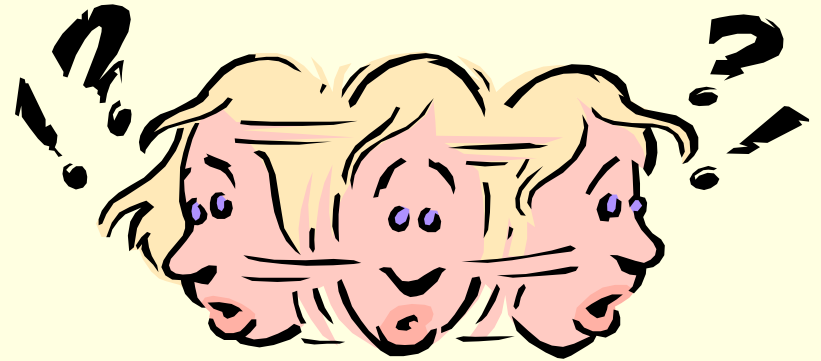


- The short answer is YES – yes I am. LOL
- Whether leader or follower, if there is ineffective or toxic leadership in your department, you play a role in maintaining or dismantling the failed context.

# Leadership and Followership

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Driven by incognizant leaders *and* followers, many organizations/ departments fail to thrive because of a fundamental misunderstanding of the leader-follower relationship.



# Leadership

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In spite of the confusion, however, throughout history the difference between success or failure, whether in a war, a business, a protest movement, a football game, or an educational institution, has been attributed to leadership.

# Leadership

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While there is much truth in this statement, this understanding has led us to too often inappropriately equate singular leaders with leadership to the exclusion of followers and followership.



# This Mythical Viewpoint ...

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Of the individual hero, with superhuman gifts and irrefutable charisma, is unfair to leaders and followers alike.

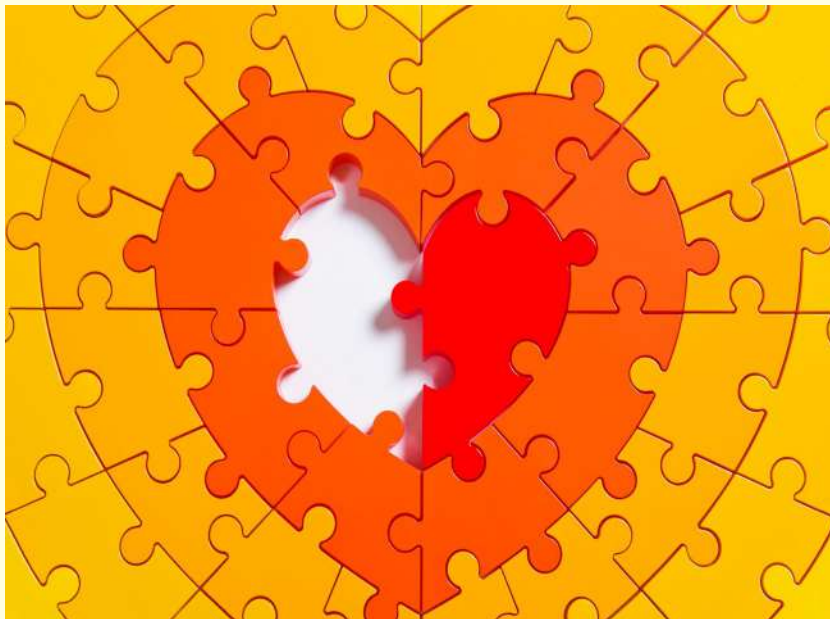
Moreover, even if it were true, we would never be able to find enough of these unicorns to fill organizational ranks.





# A Missing Piece

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- While there are certainly individual leaders that come up short in engendering effective leadership, I also see too many followers that shirk their responsibilities to the productive construction of leadership.

# So What Is Leadership?

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- Leadership is the ability to influence others.
- Thus, in essence, leadership is a relational phenomenon, not solely a positional circumstance.

# Leaders *and* Followers

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This suggests that true leadership **CANNOT** exist without the full inclusion and the cooperation of followers. In other words, one cannot be a great leader without great followers!

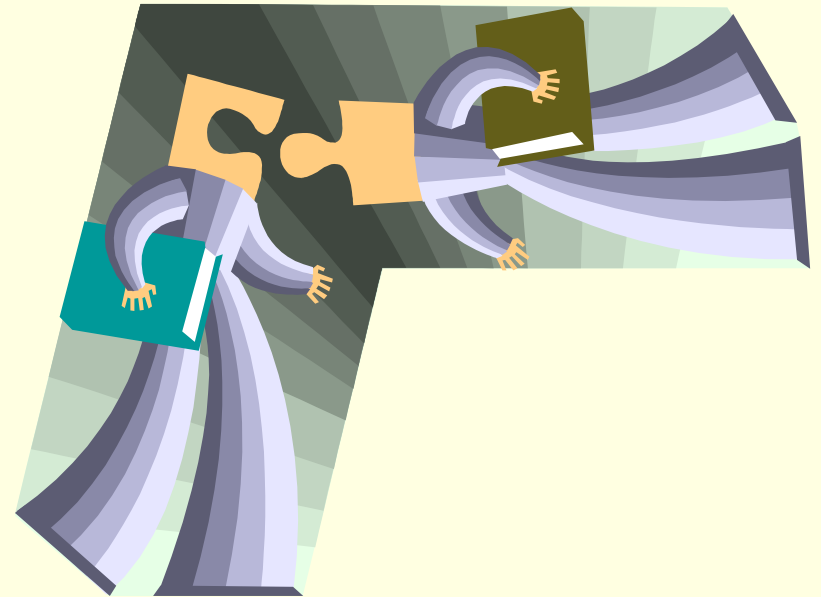
Moreover, it means that followers **MUST** contribute to effective leadership as well, as leaders and followers are two sides of the same coin.

# Furthermore ...

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In most organizations and departments, the roles of leader and follower may be interchangeable depending upon the situation.

In essence, all leaders are also followers and all followers should exercise leadership.



# The Leader-Follower Relationship

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The leader-follower relationship is the social interaction that occurs between leaders and their followers as they fulfill, construct, reinforce, and maintain (and at times alternate) their roles.

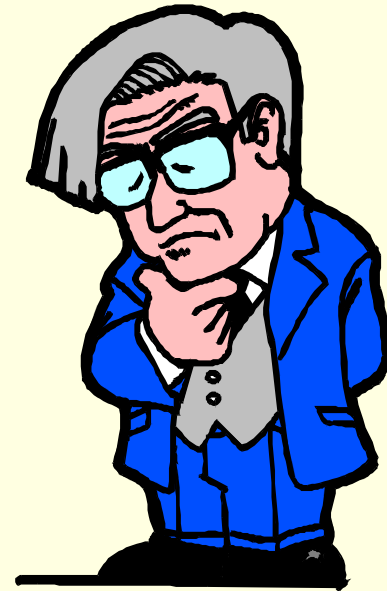


# Transforming Leadership

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Truly transforming leadership  
is NOT about the traits of  
leaders. It /S about:

BEHAVIOR,  
ATTRIBUTION,  
COMMUNICATION,  
AND ...



# The Social Construction of Leader and Follower Identity

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- This perspective is a more dynamic and social view of leadership as an identity construction process of leaders and followers.

# Social Constructionist ...

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Perspectives consider followers to be active participants with leaders in co-constructing leadership, followership, and outcomes (Humphreys et al., 2015).

This viewpoint depicts leadership as “co-constructed, a product of sociohistorical and collective meaning making, and negotiated on an ongoing basis through a complex interplay among leadership actors, be they designated as leaders, managers, and/or followers” (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010: 172).



# Co-Construction

Leader and follower identities are co-constructed through a process of claims and grants of leader and follower identities. Through co-construction, these identities are:

- Individually Internalized
- Relationally Recognized
- Collectively Endorsed



# Leader Identity Construction

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“Because leadership involves multiple individuals engaged in a process of interpersonal and mutual influence that is ultimately embedded within some collective (Hollander, 1978; Parry, 1998), it is necessary to integrate across these three levels to fully capture the process of constructing a leadership identity” (DeRue & Ashford, 2010: 629).



# Leader Legitimacy

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Followers interpret their relationship with a leader from meaningful interaction rather than simply the authority of hierarchical position.

As a result, leader legitimacy is bestowed by followers' construction of a leader's social identity (i.e., followers grant the identity of leader and voluntarily assume follower identities).

# Follower Identity

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The granting of a leader identity to another necessitates the claiming of a follower identity in a leadership context.

Without the claiming of follower identity, co-construction is impossible and can result in fruitless contestation that poisons the leadership environment.



# Regrettably ...

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While outwardly not as obviously detrimental as active contestation or undermining, follower nonparticipation within a given leadership context can result in a less than fully formed leadership identity. This tends to diminish collective endorsement, which can erode leader legitimacy and effectiveness.

# Claiming A Follower Identity ...

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Does NOT suggest that followers' participation, debate, guidance, thoughts, and perspectives are constrained.

Effective followers see themselves as key players in the leadership context.



# Even Constructive Criticism?

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Yes. The role of follower requires you to play an active role in leadership construction. But make sure your perspective is offered in an effective and civil way. Check yourself to make sure your input will enhance the leadership environment rather than simply call attention to yourself.

# No Bystanders

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Indeed, effective followers aren't bystanders. They are full partners WITH their endorsed leaders in the construction of the phenomenon that we call leadership.





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Be a better follower!

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