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# Types of Followers

Leadership Theories

Leadership Styles

Leadership Traits

Just as there are different types of leaders, there are also different types of followers.

R. E. Kelley in his work *"In Praise of Followers"* describes how they are measured along two dimensions: 1) Active vs. Passive and 2) Independent vs. Dependent

According to Kelley, the five (5) are:

1. Sheep
2. "Yes" People
3. Alienated
4. Survivor
5. Effective

A visual representation of these is shown below, along with a brief description of each.

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## Types of Followers

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Most leaders love their stars - those who take initiative and do what needs to be done without being told. But the true test of leadership lies in developing direct reports who need more guidance and hands on supervision.

Gaining a better understanding of those you lead can help you be a more effective leader.

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## Alienated Followers

Although the alienated follower is independent and thinks critically, they are passive. Their passivity distances them from the leader and their team members.

Because they are passive, they do not use their strengths to help the team achieve its goals. They have something of value to offer but choose not to do so.

Of the five types, this type of follower tends to be the most disruptive. They may offer passive resistance when they do not agree with a decision or course of direction, but often will not offer their input.

When dealing with this type of follower, I recommend that you ask for their input. In doing so, the leader conveys that they value the person and what s/he has to say.

## Sheep/Passive

Sheep are passive **AND** dependent. As such, they do not think critically and tend to do as they are told, rarely putting forth an opposing opinion.

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They leave the thinking to their leader.

These attributes serve neither them nor their fellow teammates.

Because they require constant supervision and prodding, this type of follower negatively affects team dynamics and performance.

As the leader, addressing this behavior head on in a positive way could turn things around. This may be the perfect time to give some performance feedback.

## Yes People/Conformist

Yes People are active, but they are dependent **AND** do not think critically. Because they are conformist, they will agree with the leader without question. Their major concern is avoiding conflict.

As such, these types of followers pose a danger to the leader and themselves due to their unwillingness and inability to put forth challenging viewpoints, which could produce a better outcome.

## Survivors

Survivors are chameleonic. They go with the flow, following the path of least resistance.

They are most interested in playing it safe rather than taking a risk. Their greatest fear? The fear of making a mistake.

## **Effective/Dynamic**

Proactive, independent and able to think critically, effective followers are also respectful of the leader's authority.

Effective followers are life-long learners. They practice self-leadership, take responsibility, are committed and seek feedback to continuously improve their performance.

Also known as "dynamic followers" they are very valuable to leaders and the team.

Because of their consistent and high quality contributions, this type of follower is often a trusted advisor to leaders who lead.

## **Want To Know More?**

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So, what kind of follower are you? Assess yourself and ask for feedback from your leader. This might be a great opportunity to become a more effective follower.

## ➤ Leadership Substitutes

- ↳ individual, task, and organizational characteristics that tend to outweigh the need for a leader to initiate or direct employee performance
- ↳ Book example of the *ER Room* at a hospital

## ➤ Leadership Neutralizers

- ↳ factors that may render leader behaviors ineffective
- ↳ Group Norms, ... e.g., *Firestone and MBA managers*

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Characteristic	People-Related Leadership Behaviors	Task-Related Leadership Behaviors
<i>Subordinate Characteristics</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability, experience, training, knowledge</li> <li>• Need for independence</li> <li>• Professional orientation</li> <li>• Indifference toward organizational rewards</li> </ul>	Neutralize Neutralize Substitute, Neutralize Neutralize	Substitute, Neutralize Neutralize Substitute, Neutralize Neutralize
<i>Task Characteristics</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unambiguous and routine tasks</li> <li>• Performance feedback provided by the work itself</li> <li>• Intrinsically satisfying work</li> </ul>	No effect No effect Substitute, Neutralize	Substitute, Neutralize Substitute, Neutralize Neutralize
<i>Organizational Characteristics</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formalization, meaning specific plans, goals, and areas of responsibility</li> <li>• Inflexibility, meaning rigid, unbending rules and procedures</li> <li>• Highly specified staff functions</li> <li>• Cohesive work groups</li> <li>• Organizational rewards beyond a leader's control</li> <li>• Spatial distance between supervisors and subordinates</li> </ul>	No effect No effect No effect Substitute, Neutralize Neutralize Neutralize	Neutralize Neutralize Neutralize Substitute, Neutralize Neutralize Neutralize