

# Followership Styles

Approaches to use when in the follower role

Each of us is a follower some of the time. Yet followership is a topic often left out of conversations about leadership. Like leadership styles, you can employ several followership styles depending on the context. The key is intentionally choosing the follower style appropriate for the situation—each has a time and a place. Developing skills around respectful dissent, effective partnering, and effective followership are vital to building a healthy culture.

As a leader, it's critical that you a) know these styles, b) understand when they are (and are not) helpful, and c) educate your team on how they can best contribute.



## 1. Fully Engaged (Partner)

Fully engaged followers actively contribute and view their participation as key to organizational success. This style is ideal for environments that value collaboration and open feedback. However, potential tension arises when leaders struggle to collaborate or share the spotlight.



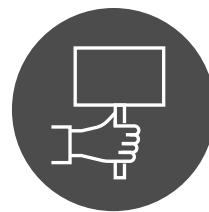
## 4. Lone Wolf (Individualist)

Lone wolves prioritize personal agendas, often disguising their true intentions. This style is suitable for roles needing autonomy or independent work. However, this style can strain team trust and collaboration and complicate team dynamics.



## 2. Opposed and Open (Independent)

The independent thrives in cultures where expressing dissent is valued and encouraged. However, individuals using this style must take care to avoid the label of being burnt out, negative, or argumentative. Likewise, speaking openly may be dangerous in some contexts.



## 5. Opposed and Underground (Subversive)

This style is marked by silent dissent and criticism due to fear of open opposition. It's appropriate when the risks are too high to share dissenting viewpoints. However, it can lead to "meeting after the meeting" scenarios and foster a culture of low engagement and passive resistance.



## 3. Lazy and Disengaged (Apathetic)

These individuals exhibit minimal initiative, acting only when prompted, and often contribute minimal energy. This style can be appropriate when discerning where to place energy and time. However, its passive nature can limit career opportunities and diminish team productivity.



## 6. Whatever You Say (Implementer)

Implementers follow orders without question, which is essential for executing tasks efficiently under ethical leadership. This style is required in any cause, movement, or initiative – leaders need others. Beware: unethical leaders can misuse this obedience, leading to adverse outcomes.

**"Followers and leaders both orbit around the purpose; followers do not orbit around the leader."**

—Ira Chaleff, Author of *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to and for Our Leaders*

### References

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- Kelley, R. E. (1988). *In praise of followers* (pp. 1-8). Harvard Business Review Case Services.

### Learn More

"Leadership and Followership: What Tango Teaches Us About These Roles in Life" - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cswrnc1dggg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cswrnc1dggg)

"The Biggest Myth About Leadership"  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/cutting-edge-leadership/202202/the-biggest-myth-about-leadership>