

# SmartBlog on Leadership

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## [Followership: The other side of leadership](#)

By [Joel Garfinkle](#) on September 15th, 2014

More than 50,000 books are published per year on leadership — **how to be an effective leader**, how to grow into being a leader if you're not one, what qualities constitute a good leader. And it's not just books — there are websites, magazines, blogs, training seminars, not to mention graduate degrees from major universities.

The market for **leadership development** seems unlimited. Why? Because nearly everyone sees him or herself as a leader, or at least a potential one. Leadership seems to be the holy grail for which all business people should be striving. But what if there is another side to this coin? What if leadership is not always where your focus should be?

Here's the nugget: **You can't be a leader unless you have willing followers.** So you must follow first. You must learn to be a good follower. You need to see life from the trenches, understand the mindset of those you may one day lead. Here are four key factors in developing your followership skills:

- Embrace the role
- Have a servant mentality
- Make your boss look good
- Support the leader's vision

1. **Embrace the role.** If leadership is your long-term goal, following other leaders provides you with a safe environment to learn from them and to **develop your own leadership tactics** without carrying the weight of total responsibility for the results. Then when your time comes to lead, you'll have the tools you need so you can set an example from which others can learn. Don't miss this opportunity by going after the leadership role too quickly.

2. **Have a servant mentality.** Few people become wildly successful by themselves. They serve others, teach others and give from the heart. If you aspire to leadership, think about where you are, where you want to go, then come from a mindset where you put others first. Study leadership principles, then practice and teach as many others as you can. The more **success you can create for others**, the more you will enjoy for yourself.

3. **Make your boss look good.** Every leader looks for followers who can get the job done and done well. That won't happen with half-hearted commitment. If you are a good follower, you're out there giving it your best every day. You know that everything you do reflects back onto your leader and your entire team. Good followers give their best effort toward completing the work that's assigned to them, knowing it reflects not only their efforts, but the efforts of the leader and the entire team.

4. **Support the leader's vision.** Make certain you understand where your leader is headed. If you don't already know, ask questions. **Talk with your leader in big-picture terms**. Be a vocal champion for the vision to your team members and others in your sphere

of influence. When you actively promote your leader's dreams, your **leader will promote you.**

The door to leadership is wide open. But before you walk through it, you need the time and space to prepare. If you **want to be a great leader,** begin by asking, "How can I be a better follower? How can I make my boss more successful?" Act on the answers to those questions, and you will be ready when the door opens.

*Joel Garfinkle is recognized as one of the top 50 leadership coaches in the U.S. As an **executive coach,** he has worked with many of the world's leading companies, including Google, Amazon, Starbucks, Deloitte, Cisco Systems, and The Ritz-Carlton. He is the author of seven books, including **"Getting Ahead: Three Steps to Take Your Career to the Next Level."** More than 10,000 people subscribe to his Fulfillment@Work newsletter. **If you sign up,** you'll receive the free e-book "41 Proven Strategies to Get Promoted Now!"*