



CHALLENGE



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A Herff Jones IMPACT Resource for Students

Being a Good Follower

Spring is election time in many schools, a time when student leaders everywhere gear up for their campaigns for student body, class, and club office. But the officers of an organization are not the only ones who have an important role to play. You don't have to have a title to be a key part of an organization.

Leaders contribute on average no more than 20% to the success of an organization—it's up to the members who follow the leadership to ensure that the remaining 80% gets done.

Leadership depends on the relationship between leaders and followers. If no one is following, is anyone leading? As an active, committed group member, anyone can be part of the leadership process and contribute toward the achievement of group goals.

The following definition of a follower, which draws on the thoughts of R. Kelley, author of *The Power of Following* (Doubleday, New York, 1992) and a major contributor to the literature on the role of the follower, sums up the impor-

ance of being a good follower:

A follower is one who pursues a course of action in common with a leader to achieve an organizational goal. Effective followers make an active decision to contribute towards the achievement of the goal and demonstrate enthusiasm, intelligence, self-reliance and the ability to work with

others in pursuit of the goal. Effective followers recognize the authority of the leader and limitations this imposes on their own

actions, consider all issues on their merits, make their own decisions, hold their own values, speak their minds, and hold themselves accountable for the consequences of their actions.

Member Responsibilities

As a vital part of the organization, each member has an obligation to take an active and informed part in the proceed-

ings of the organization. A good member:

- Is familiar with the purpose and goals of the organization
- Is willing to serve
- Volunteers to handle tasks and willingly accepts assignments
- Carries his or her fair share of the work needed to help accomplish goals
- Follows through with responsibilities
- Attends and actively participates in all organization meetings and activities
- Shows respect for other members by being on time and bringing necessary equipment to meetings
- Knows the purpose of meetings and helps keep the ideas on track to get things done
- Accepts that ideas offered to the group become the group's property; doesn't fight over who gets credit for the idea
- Tries to get other members to express their ideas for the benefit of all, even if it means less time for presenting personal ideas
- Understands that disagreements often arise over the best way to proceed, but keeps disagreements friendly



and works toward the ultimate good of the group

- Voices differences of opinion, but supports the group's decision
- Appreciates the ideas and contributions of others
- Earns the right to give constructive criticism freely by accepting it honestly
- Communicates effectively with the leader and other group members
- Is dependable
- Listens thoughtfully and critically to others
- Works to understand other group members' points of view
- Offers suggestions
- Focuses on the work at hand; isn't easily distracted
- Is enthusiastic and has a positive attitude
- Exhibits loyalty to the group
- Represents the organization in a positive manner, projecting a good image to the school and community.

Every organization depends on its members to work together to achieve its goals. If you've decided not to run for office this year, concentrate on being the best follower you can be, and watch your organization soar!

Are You a Good Follower?

Everyone is a follower at one time or another. When you find yourself in the role of follower, how effective are you? Take this quiz to find out.

For each of the following, give yourself:

- 4 points if you can answer "always" or "usually"
- 2 points if you can answer "sometimes"
- 1 point if you answer "seldom"
- 0 points if you answer "never."

- ___ Do you attend all meetings and activities of the organization?
- ___ Do you arrive on time to meetings and other events?
- ___ Do you take on your fair share of the work involved in achieving group goals?
- ___ Do you participate actively in meetings?
- ___ Do you limit side conversations and distracting behavior at meetings?
- ___ Do you cooperate with others to achieve the desired goal?
- ___ Are you willing to accept others' ideas?
- ___ Do you work for the good of the group, even if your personal preferences would choose another way?
- ___ Are you willing to give the leader and others credit and public recognition?
- ___ Are you flexible in how you approach situations?
- ___ Can others count on you to do your part?
- ___ Can you provide constructive feedback without being negative?
- ___ Do you communicate openly and honestly?
- ___ Do you take initiative and volunteer for projects/tasks?
- ___ Do you provide feedback to officers and other group members on how they are doing?
- ___ Do you follow through with responsibilities?
- ___ Do you work to understand others' points of view?
- ___ Do you accept constructive criticism with a positive attitude?
- ___ Are you dedicated to the group's goals?
- ___ Are you loyal to the group?

How did you score?

64–80: Your ability to pitch in and help the group achieve its goals is fantastic. Any group would be lucky to have you as a member.

56–63: You can usually be counted on to help the group with its work and are often a positive contributor to the group's efforts.

40–55: You have good intentions, but sometimes are less than a positive contributor to the group's efforts.

0–39: Your follower skills need some work! Concentrate on making positive contributions, and keep your ego in check.