

## The Four Secrets to Being a Flawless Follower

By Jessika M. Ferm

In today's economy, being a flawless follower is often more important than being a powerful leader. Clients, prospects, bosses, and team members are looking to partner with each other to accomplish goals and objectives, not to simply rely on leaders to take charge and push their own agendas.

Over the last decade the trend has been to over-focus on developing leadership skills, completely ignoring the importance of effective followership. The effect of this imbalance has produced disastrous results at corporations like Enron, Hewlett Packard, Bear Stearns and other organizations where followers remained passive and adopted an "I'm just doing what I'm told" attitude.

Ballroom dancing is a perfect analogy to illustrate the importance of effective followership. Picture two people dancing the waltz in a ballroom. They are appearing to flawlessly glide around conducting seemingly un-choreographed routines that are pleasing to the eye, not unlike corporate leaders and followers who are well aligned and seem to operate as if in complete sync.

If we scratch the surface a bit, we learn that the two dancers have distinctively different roles and steps that need to happen at the exact same time in order for the smooth-looking effect to take place. One misstep or misalignment can significantly alter or damage the illusion of grace and synergy. The leader needs to clearly communicate the direction he is going, understand how to send crystal clear non-verbal cues, and follow through with the moves he started. The follower must know her own steps, learn to accurately read non-verbal cues from her partner, and understand how to adjust to any

sudden changes in order to maintain the illusion of grace and ease.

To dance advanced routines, both the leader and the follower must practice their moves often and create a sense of agreement about where they are going. While the leader has the important responsibility of setting the direction, the follower has the even more complicated role of adapting and adjusting to make the routine look flawless. As the famous quote goes: "Remember, Ginger Rogers did everything Fred Astaire did, backwards and in high heels."

Followers who make their leaders and teams perform well know the four secrets of being a flawless follower. They must be:

**1. Grounded:** They stand firm and grounded in their own skills, personas, and talents. They use their grounding as a place from which to generate energy and initiative within the leader-follower partnership. In order to be truly grounded, each follower must learn to identify and own their special talents and promote them with confidence and without bravado. They have a heightened sense of self-awareness and are therefore able to take and offer positive and critical feedback.

**2. Connected:** They are able to connect with their leaders through intimacy, presence, active listening, and engagement. They communicate about feelings, emotions, changes, and directions. They have developed their intuitive skills and are able to create close bonds with their leaders that build long-term trust-based relationships.

**3. Open:** They are open to interpreting new and subtle changes in direction and are willing to accept

new ideas, conversations, and adjustments. Because of their openness, leaders tend to seek them out for feedback and opinions and they are often asked to participate and lead important projects and initiatives.

**4. Active:** The role of follower is not passive. Flawless followers are active, engaged, and ready to move at a moment's notice. They communicate their engagement by asking questions, responding to changes and nuances, and constantly looking to stay one step ahead of their leader. By being proactive, they position themselves as key players on their teams and with their managers. They project a sense of engagement that passive followers miss out on.

By designing activities and strategic initiatives around these four secrets, followers can become powerful in their roles and lead their teams and careers in the direction they desire.

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