



Barbara Kellerman  
Author of *Bad Leadership*

# Followership

## HOW FOLLOWERS ARE CREATING CHANGE AND CHANGING LEADERS

Barbara Kellerman wrote this book on the importance of followers on followership. Her book provides a sweeping view of followers, as they relate to their leaders and to each other. Kellerman's perspective on followers and followership is not from the leader-centric approach as her focus is on followers as followers are getting bolder and more strategic.

She includes stories about a range of people and places in different times in history which she then makes distinctions among five different types of followers. Isolates, Bystanders, Participants, Activists, and Diehards who are all grouped together by levels of engagement. Kellerman describes each type of follower by how withdrawn, committed, and engaged they are to their leader and if they support or oppose their leaders.

In her book, Kellerman analyses followership and how people with no apparent power, authority, or influence have an impact on those with more power and authority. With certain changes in technology Kellerman explains how followers are more important now than ever before.

"More than ever, good leaders depend on good followers."

-Joseph S. Nye Jr.

"At long last, followership brilliantly comes to its own-as leadership. Kellerman is noted for her original and arresting studies in leadership: in *Followership*, a book rich with historical examples and real-life situations, she offers bold new ideas about the leader-follower interaction."

-James MacGregor Burns

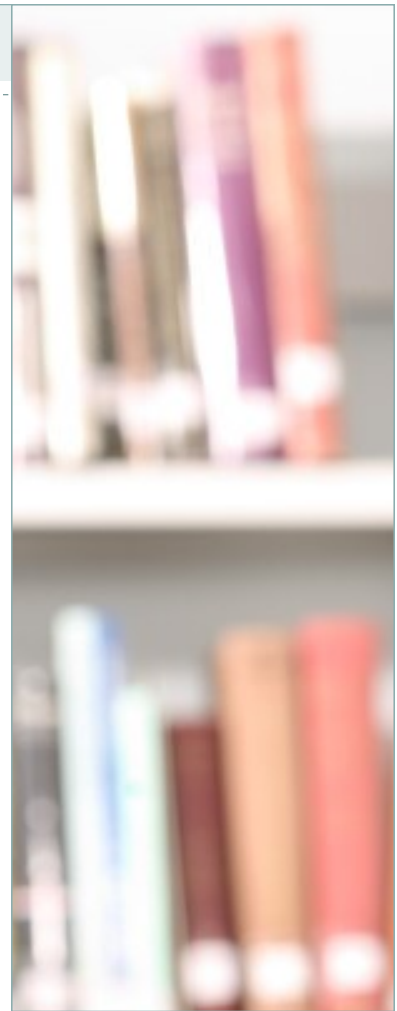
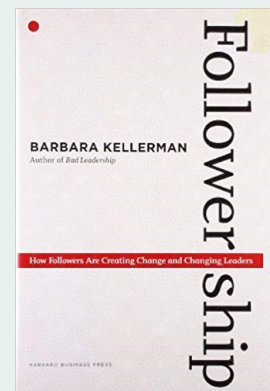
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"Leadership experience? I have  
13 people following me on Twitter!"

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Seeing Followers .....	2
Inside Story .....	3
Being a Follower .....	4
Inside Story .....	5
Future Followers .....	5
About the author .....	6





## SEEING THE FOLLOWERS

In this section, Kellerman discusses how followers formally have been designated in organizational hierarchies in which those at the bottom and in the middle are clearly subordinate to those in higher up positions (p. xx).

Kellerman defines followers as “unleaders” who are without particular power, without positions of authority, and without special influence (p. xx).

She gives a few definitions of the term leadership as there are many differ-

ent definitions that have been used to describe people in leadership positions.

Leadership is described in the book as being a leader in a position of authority who may get what they want and intend by any means necessary (p. xx).

Kellerman does define followership as “followership implies a relationship (rank), between subordinates and superiors, and a response (behavior), of the former to the latter (p. xx).

*“Followers are subordinates who have less power, authority, and influence than do their superiors and who therefore usually, but not invariably, fall into line.” (p. xix)*

### INSIDE STORY HEADLINE

In this section of the book Kellerman discusses times in history where the relationship between leadership and followership has emerged.

Kellerman goes back in time to the mid 1700’s to explain that Americans have always assumed their way of doing things would never be challenged and that they were content living in societies where some people were rich and some poor, some honored and some obscure, some powerful and some weak (p. 4).

At a time in history being a follower was considered necessary and appropriate and was viewed as being obedient.

“Thinking leadership without thinking followership is not merely misleading, it is mistaken.” (p. 23).

In the 21st century times have changed and followers have more of a say than they ever did before (p. 25).

## FICTIONS AND FACTS

In this part in the book, Kellerman gives some background knowledge on leadership and followership. She explains how certain times in history has changed the idea and concept of followership. During these changes in history, followers began to lead in a more aggressive way than they did before and with more power, influence, and authority.

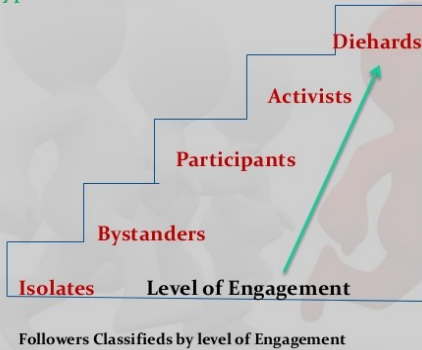
In 2002 Audi came out with a slogan with the tagline “Never Follow” which was a campaign to advertise that Audi cars were better than their competition and to embrace a “never follow” approach and that to be a follower is only second best to the leader (p. 4).

The term *follower* has historically been considered something of an insult and has been shunned by those in the leadership field and the term suggested too much passivity and dependence (p. 6). Kellerman argues the importance of being a follower and that leaders generally have more power, authority, and influence than do followers but leaders and followers are dependent on each other (p. 9). She explains how leaders and followers are inextricably enmeshed and each is defined by and dependent on the other (p. 9).

Kellerman uses the history of Nazi Germany and how Hitler was responsible for the Second World War and how millions died including six million Jews who were massacred by Hitler’s followers who were his willing executioners (p. 9). Hitler’s followers were willing executioners who would die following him and also who did nothing while people and places were destroyed. His orders were obeyed directly and indirectly and with this it is clear that those who obey orders play as important a role in human affairs as those who issue them (p. 14).

The American and French Revolutions were part of the change seen in followers who had less power, authority, and influence but initiated a change and motivated others to create this change. Martin Luther King’s Civil Rights Movement was part of this change in the 1950’s-60’s. Kellerman discusses this time in history where Martin Luther King believed in nonviolence to set the tone for movement which then created the Civil Rights Act and voting rights for African Americans. Martin Luther King was a follower who was not in a position of power or authority initiated a change and who had the followers to create this change in history.

## Types of followers



*Kellerman's Five Types of Followers:  
Isolates, Bystanders, Participants, Activists, Diehards*

## FOLLOWERSHIP STYLES

High Support	
Implementer	Partner
Resource	Individualist
Low Support	

## HOW DO LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS RELATE?

In this section in the book, Kellerman discusses the different types of followers.

There are rewards and benefits of leading such as power, influence, status, and access to money and resources and Kellerman explains that followers also reap benefits and rewards. Followers may follow leaders who they admire and who they aspire to be but they might also follow leaders when neither applies (p. 49). Followers still go along with leaders who they do not admire or aspire to be which Kellerman explains they do for self-interest and the cost of resisting is higher than the cost of going along (p. 49).

### Why we follow-individual benefits

Kellerman explains that followers follow their leaders for individual benefits. It provides us with stability and security and we expect our leaders to provide us with the comfort of community (p. 55). Our needs and wants as individuals are met by playing the part of a follower most of the time and that we consciously or unconsciously determine it in our interest to do so (p. 55).

"Followers follow not only because it is in their interest to conform to their leaders, but also because it is in their interest to conform to their fellow followers" (p. 56).

### Why we follow-group benefits

Kellerman explains that there are group benefits to why groups follow their leaders: 1) leaders provide groups with structure; 2) leaders provide groups with a goal; 3) leaders provide groups with instruments of goal achievement (p. 59).

### Follower-leader relations

"Leaders, in responding to their own motives, appeal to the motives of potential followers. As followers respond, a symbiotic relationship develops that binds leader and follower together (p. 67).

### Contexts and characters

The context is critical in how followers and leaders relate and "the relationship between superior and subordinate is to some degree the same in every group" (p. 67).

## RELATIONSHIPS AND TYPES

Kellerman discusses past and present types of followers and distinguishes characteristics that followers may have. She explains that Harvard Business School Professor Abraham Zaleznik put followers into four types the first being **the Impulsive Subordinate** who are rebellious. They challenge people in positions of authority, they can be constructive, spontaneous, courageous, they have an urge to create and achieve, and they can influence events. The second type is **the Compulsive Subordinate** who seek to control people in positions of authority through "passive means". They have strong guilt feelings that derive from their wish to dominate. The third type of follower is **the Masochistic Subordinates** who want to be in pain by submitting to the control and assertiveness of the authority figure, and who deliberately if unconsciously, perform poorly. The fourth type are **the Withdrawn Subordinates** who care little or not at all about what happens at work and they behave accordingly. They see the world as malevolent and unforgiving and they have a lack of trust, interest and involvement. (p. 77). Kellerman shares Zaleznik's four types of followers because he was a pioneer of leadership and management who pointed out the distinctions and importance of followers.

Kellerman discusses another perspective on followers with Robert Kelley's five followership styles. Kelly wrote a book titled *The Power of Followership* in 1992 which was motivated by the interest in followers. The first type of follower that Kelly describes is that of the **Alienated Followers** who think freely and critically, they do not participate in the groups and organization of which they are members. The second type of followers are **the Exemplary Followers** who perform well in every aspect, they exercise independent and critical thinking separate from the leader or group. The third type of followers are **the Conformist Followers** who are content to take orders to defer to their leaders. The fourth type of followers are **the Passive Followers** who let their leaders do the thinking for them and they require constant supervision. The fifth type of follows are **the Pragmatist Followers** who hug the middle of the road meaning they question their leader's decisions but not too often or not too critically. (p. 81, 82). Kelley believed that followers were actively engaged in helping their organizations succeed while at the same time independent operators (p. 82).

Kellerman also discussed Ira Chaleff's followership styles in her book. Chaleff wrote a book titled *The Courageous Follower* in 1995 which distinguished followers into four categories with the first being **the Implementers** who are dependable, supportive, and considerate. **Partners** are goal-orientated risk takers. **Individualists** are independent, self-assured, and forthright and are **Resources** are available to their leaders but not committed to them (p. 83, 84).

Kellerman uses these types of followers from Zaleznik, Kelley, and Chaleff to come up with her own types of followers model based on their level of engagement.

## INSIDE STORY HEADLINE

In this part of the book, Kellerman discusses the different types of followers which are in some way engaged, they are engaged with their leaders, with other followers, and with the group or organization they are embedded to (p. 90).



Bystanders are free riders, who are content to let others make the group's decisions and do the groups work (p. 97)



Participants are those who while generally supportive of their leader and of the organization of which they are members, nevertheless go their own way (p. 126).

## BEING A FOLLOWER

Kellerman's point of view for this section is that we are followers and that we may not follow all of the time but that sometimes we lead, but all of us follow some of the time, it's the human condition (p. 93).

"Nothing appears more surprising to those who consider human affairs with a philosophical eye than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few, and the implicit submission with which men resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers" -David Hume (p. 96).

Kellerman makes her bias clear that she is against followers who stand by and do nothing when lives are at risk (p. 97). She explains that it is individual respon-

sibility for what happens, we are our brother's keeper and once the habit of standing by and doing nothing is developed that it is difficult to break (p. 123).

Kellerman explains that leaders want followers who are participants and assuming they are in support rather than opposition, participants are the fuel that drives the engine (p. 125).

Participants provide the energy that makes for a good group or organization which in turn enables leaders to do what they want and need (p. 125).

Kellerman explains that followers matter even when they do nothing and followers matter when they are part of the process.

## BYSTANDERS AND PARTICIPANTS

"Bystanders observe but do not participate. They make deliberate decision to stand aside, to disengage from their leaders and from whatever is the group dynamic. This withdrawal is, in effect, a declaration of neutrality that amounts to tacit support for whoever and whatever constitutes the status quo" (p. 92).

"Participants are in some way engaged. They clearly favor their leaders and the groups and organizations of which they are members—or they are clearly opposed. In either case, they care enough to put their money where their mouths are—that is, to invest some of what they have (time for example) to try to have an impact" (p. 92).

Kellerman discusses parts in history which connect times in the past to her five types of followers. She connects **Bystanders** to Nazi Germany and Hitler and how Hitler had followers who stood by and did nothing as millions of people were killed. She connects **Participants** to *Merck* a pharmaceutical company that created an arthritis drug which caused heart attacks in people. She connects **Activists** to the Voice of the Faithful (VOTF) which was a movement that started in 2002 to bring to life allegations of clerical abuse of children. Kellerman connects **Diehards** Afghanistan which has history in war dating back to 1979.

Kellerman explains in detail how these times in history connect to her five types of followers.

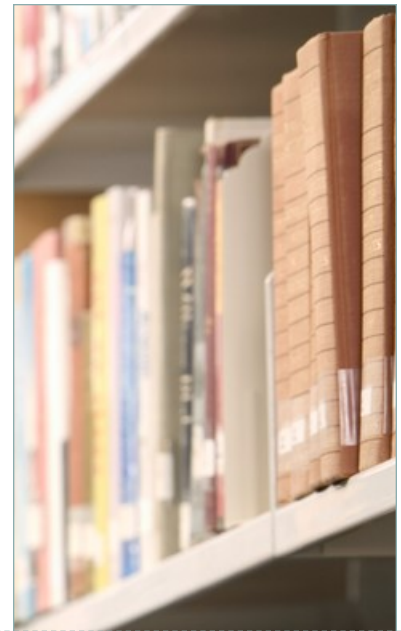
### Isolates, Bystanders, Participants, Activists, and Diehards



## ACTIVISTS AND DIEHARDS

“Activists feel strongly about their leaders and they act accordingly. They are eager, energetic, and engaged. Because they are heavily invested in people and process, they work hard either on behalf of their leaders or to undermine and even unseat them” (p. 92).

“Diehards are as their name implies—prepared to die if necessary for their cause, whether an individual, or an idea, or both. Diehards are deeply devoted to their leaders; or, in contrast, they are ready to remove them from positions of power, authority, and influence by any means necessary. Diehards are defined by their dedication, including their willingness to risk life and limb. Being a diehard is all-consuming. It is who you are. It determines what you do” (p. 92).



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*“The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings.”*  
*-Shakespeare*

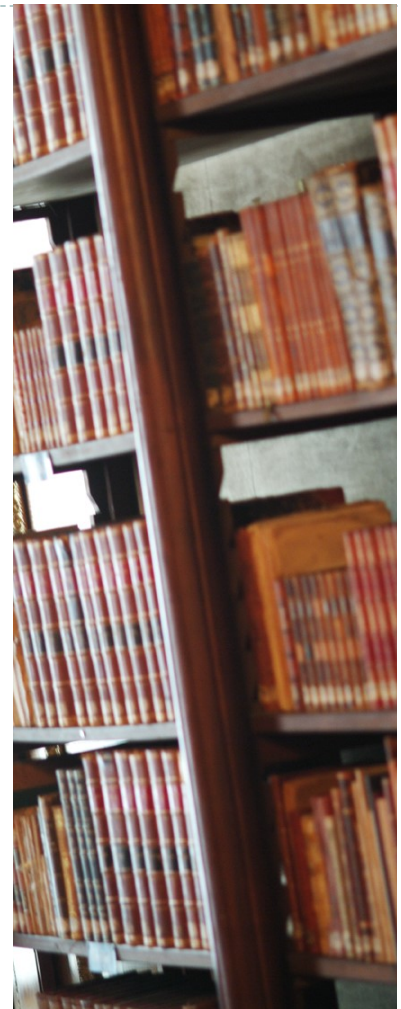
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## FUTURE FOLLOWERS

Good followers are the antithesis of bad followers and good followers support good leaders who are effective and ethical (p. 234).

Like good leaders, good followers should be informed, energetic, and independent and should have the capacity to cope with complexity, manage change, and exercise good judgement (p. 236).

The shift away from leaders and toward followers with growing demands and higher expectations is by and large a positive development and it is also a major development (p. 261).



#### About the author

Barbara Kellerman is the author of *Followership: How Followers are Creating Change and Changing Leaders*. She is also the author of *Bad Leadership* and has written numerous books on leadership, followership and the dynamics in creating change in organizations.

Barbara is the James MacGregor Burns Lecturer in Public Leadership at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. Beyond books, Barbara has written for *Harvard Business Review*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and many other publications.



## CRITICAL EVALUATION

Critical evaluation: Barbara Kellerman has done a great job writing about followership and the need to have a better understanding of the importance of followers and followership. Her book does not focus on leader as she explained the focus has always been on the leaders and followership and followers have been neglected from past research. She makes it clear to not forget about the leader but the need to broaden the research on followers and followership. She believes in the importance of being a follower and that fol-

lowers are just as important as the leader, they have always been strong forces, and in the 21st century they are becoming, will be and are more important than they have ever been before. Followers can be and now are agents of change.

#### Other Leadership Books by Barbara Kellerman

*The End of Leadership* (2012)

*Leadership: Essential Selections on Power, Authority, and Influence* (2010)

*Women & Leadership: The State of Play and Strategies for Change*, coeditor with Deborah Rhode (2007)

*Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why It Matters* (2004)

*Reinventing Leadership: Making the Connection Between Politics and Business* (1999)

*The President as World Leader*, coauthored with Ryan Barilleaux (1991)

*Leadership and Negotiation in the Middle East*, coauthored with Jeffrey Z. Rubin (1988)

*Political Leadership: A Source Book*, editor (1986)

*Women Leaders in American Politics*, coauthored with James David Barber (1986)

*The Political Presidency: Practice of Leadership* (1984).

*Leadership: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, editor (1984)

Barbara Kellerman's newest book  
*The End of Leadership* (2012)

The  
**END**  
of  
LEADERSHIP

BARBARA KELLERMAN