

5 Foundational Elements of Followership

Without followership, there is no leadership. Which of these elements should you focus on to inspire others to follow you? **BY TONY O'DRISCOLL**



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The single universal requirement for leaders around the world since the dawn of time is that they have followers. Without followership, there is no leadership. Here are the five foundational elements leaders must establish to cultivate followership:

1. Purposeful Presence: Leaders must convey their aspirations and intentions with authenticity, presence, and resonance to a wide variety of stakeholders inside and outside their sphere of control.

You cannot become an authentic leader by trying to be someone you are not. Instead, you must work to develop your own sense of purpose, values, and identity, and develop trust by openly sharing your vulnerabilities and inviting others who are different than you to compensate for them.

Becoming a purposeful leader requires that you understand and accept who you are at your core and that you reflect your values in both decision and action. Building trust requires that you are credible in what you say, reliable in what you do, ethical in how you navigate issues, and selfless in your orientation toward others.

2. Energized Networks: Leaders must leverage both the formal organizational hierarchy and informal collaborative networks. In increasingly uncertain times, leaders need to engage followership from outside the hierarchical structure to address complex issues that cannot be solved with the resources they formally control.

You cannot energize an informal network of relationships by tapping into the same power bases you lever in a formal hierarchy. Formal hierarchies are powered by position and control. Informal networks are powered by knowledge and relationships.

Becoming a networked leader requires that you fully engage the head, heart, and hands of people to tap into their discretionary effort. This requires making meaning for people so they can clearly connect their own personal aspirations to the endeavor you seek to collectively achieve.

3. Directional Alignment: Leaders must engage and influence a wide variety of stakeholders with

differing agendas and perspectives. This requires listening to understand the various agendas, enabling others to recognize the broader perspective, communicating with clarity to align with that perspective, and negotiating between parties to gain agreement to move forward.

This means you must skillfully employ temporal, situational, peripheral, and self-awareness to create the conditions that allow alignment to emerge. Becoming an influential leader requires that you work tirelessly to find congruence between the differing perspectives and agendas of those you are working with, the changing situational context within which you are operating, and the direction around which you are seeking alignment.

4. Exemplary Action: Leaders must recognize that their ongoing actions and interactions speak far louder than their words. Changed and sustained leadership behavior is the single longest lever to create lasting change within an organization.

You cannot expect people to do what you say they should do. If your deeds as a leader do not align with your words, you lose the trust and confidence of the very people you need to create change.

Becoming an exemplary leader requires that you recognize your actions have a disproportionate influence on people's willingness to change. What you say, what you do, what you measure, and what you prioritize must be congruent in order for others to willingly follow your example.

5. Personal Resilience: Leadership requires having the mental agility and physical energy to remain resilient during times of swift and significant change. Agility is the ability to quickly learn from experience and adjust to perform more effectively the next time around. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from unanticipated shocks and surprises.

Becoming a resilient leader requires that you work to increase your absorptive capacity to withstand shocks that enables you to rebound from unanticipated setbacks with renewed vigor and vitality.

Which of these five elements should you personally focus on to inspire others to follow you? **T**