



Getty

Are You a Leader or a Follower?

Published on May 19, 2015 | Featured in: [Leadership & Management](#)



Dr. Travis Bradberry fluencer | Following
Coauthor EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE 2.0 & President a...



4,953



910



2,274

Leadership is the art of persuasion—the act of motivating people to do more than they ever thought possible in pursuit of a greater good.

It has nothing to do with your title.

It has nothing to do with authority or seniority.

You're not a leader just because you have people reporting to you. And you don't suddenly become a leader once you reach a certain pay grade.

A true leader influences others to be their best. Leadership is about social influence, not positional power.

*If your actions inspire others to dream more,
learn more, do more and become more, you
are a leader. —John Quincy Adams*

You don't even need to have people reporting to you to be a leader. A janitor can influence people and lead just as a CEO can.

Likewise, anyone can become a follower, even while holding a leadership position.



do their absolute best, then you're a follower. Even if you happen to have a leadership title, people won't follow you when they see those behaviors present.

A senior executive who creates unnecessary bureaucracy, locks himself in his office, and fails to interact with others in any meaningful way is no more a leader than an antisocial software engineer who refuses to do anything but write code.

Of course, the real question is—are *you* a leader or a follower?

To find out, you need to ask yourself some very important questions. Think carefully as you respond to each one, and you'll soon know for certain.

Do you go above and beyond? Followers do their jobs, and that's it. No matter how good they may be at those jobs, it rarely occurs to them to go beyond their basic functions. Leaders, on the other hand, see their job descriptions as the bare minimum—the foundation upon which they build greatness. Leaders see their real role as adding value, and they add it whenever and wherever they see an opportunity.

Are you confident? Followers see the talents and accomplishments of other people as a threat. Leaders see those same talents and accomplishments as an asset. Leaders want to make things better, and they'll take help anywhere they can find it. Leaders are true team players. They aren't afraid to admit that they need other people to be strong where they're weak.

Are you optimistic? Followers see the limitations inherent in any given situation; leaders see the possibilities. When things go wrong, leaders don't dwell on how bad things are. They're too busy trying to make things better.

Are you open to change? Followers are content to stick with the safety of the status quo. They see change as frightening and troublesome. Leaders are maximizers who see opportunity in change. Because leaders want constant improvement, they're never afraid to ask, "What's next?"

Are you decisive? Followers often hesitate to act, out of fear that they'll do the wrong thing. Leaders aren't afraid to make a call, even when they're not sure if it's the right one. They'd rather make a decision and be wrong than suffer from the paralysis of indecision.

Leaders would rather make a decision and be wrong than suffer from the paralysis of indecision.



circumstances and other people. Leaders, on the other hand, are quick to accept accountability for their actions. They don't worry that admitting fault might make them look bad, because they know that shifting the blame would just make them look worse.

Are you unflappable? Followers often let obstacles and mishaps throw them off course. When something goes wrong, they assume the whole project is doomed. Leaders expect obstacles and love being challenged. They know that even the best-laid plans can run into unexpected problems, so they take problems in stride and stay the course.

Are you humble? Followers are always chasing glory. Leaders are humble. They don't allow any authority they may have to make them feel that they are better than anyone else. As such, they don't hesitate to jump in and do the dirty work when needed, and they won't ask anyone to do anything they wouldn't be willing to do themselves.

Are you passionate? Followers are trapped in the daily grind. They go to work and complete their tasks so that they can go home at the end of the day and resume their *real* lives. Leaders love what they do and see their work as an important part of—not a weak substitute for—real life. Their job isn't just what they do; it's an important part of who they are.

Are you motivated from within? Followers are only motivated by external factors: the next title, the next raise, the next gain in status. Leaders are internally motivated. They don't work for status or possessions. They are motivated to excel because it's who they are. True leaders keep pushing forward even when there's no carrot dangling in front of them.

True leaders keep pushing forward even when there's no carrot dangling in front of them.

Do you focus on titles? Followers care a lot about titles, both their own and those of the people they work with. They're very conscious of who outranks whom, because they lack the skill and motivation to create leadership from within. Leaders, on the other hand, focus on what each individual brings to the table, regardless of what's printed on a business card.

Are you focused on people? Followers focus on what they can achieve individually. Leaders are team players, because they know that greatness is a collective feat. A leader is only as good as what he or she can achieve through other people.

A leader is only as good as what he or she can achieve through other people.



supernumerary nor imitative. They're not afraid to admit when they don't know something, and they're willing to learn from anyone who can teach them, whether that person is a subordinate, a peer, or a superior. Followers are too busy trying to prove they're competent to learn anything from anyone else.

Bringing It All Together

Take another quick look at the questions above. There's not a single one about title, position, or place on the org chart. That's because you can have the title and position without being a leader.

You may have worked for someone who fits that description. And you probably have colleagues who serve in leadership roles without a title.

Leadership and followership are mindsets. They're completely different ways of looking at the world. One is reactive, and the other is proactive. One is pessimistic; the other is optimistic. Where one sees a to-do list, the other sees possibilities.

So don't wait for the title. Leadership isn't something that anyone can give you—you have to earn it and claim it for yourself.

.....

And please, share your thoughts on the topic in the comments section below as I learn just as much from you as you do from me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning co-author of the #1 bestselling book, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, and the cofounder of [TalentSmart](#), the world's leading provider of [emotional intelligence tests](#) and [training](#), serving more than 75% of Fortune 500 companies. His bestselling books have been translated into 25 languages and are available in more than 150 countries. Dr. Bradberry has written for, or been covered by, *Newsweek*, *TIME*, *BusinessWeek*, *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Fast Company, Inc.*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Harvard Business Review*.

If you'd like to learn how to increase your emotional intelligence (EQ), consider taking the online *Emotional Intelligence Appraisal*® test that's included with the [Emotional Intelligence 2.0](#) book. Your test results will pinpoint which of the book's 66 emotional intelligence strategies will increase your EQ the most.