

## **Title**

The Romance of the Follower – Part 3

## **Abstract**

*Purpose* – In our first two papers, we provided an overview of the research on followship and then presented a new model that extends our understanding of it. In this paper, we illustrate how our followship model can be used effectively to enhance organizations through coaching, mentoring, organizational change (enterprise-wide reorganizations, mergers and acquisitions), high performer development, executive retention, new hire on-boarding, leader development, and also in designing HR tools for performance management.

*Design/methodology/approach* – This is a capstone article. As such, it summarizes key points made previously, discusses existing HR practices and how they can be improved, incorporates case studies on followship, and illustrates practical applications.

*Findings* – Leaders must learn to model followship, and use it to solve staff performance issues. HR departments should include followship training to enrich development planning and, in the case of enterprise-wide change such as mergers and acquisitions, speed and improve the results. Finally, providing followship training helps prevent executive derailment, improves Gen Y integration, and enhances the opportunities for high performers' career development.

*Originality/value* – This third and final article shows practical applications of ideas followship brings to organizational development. As such, it will be interesting to senior executives, high performance talent managers, executive coaches, and HR departments.

*Keywords* – leadership, followership, followship, career development, organizational development

*Paper type* – Conceptual paper

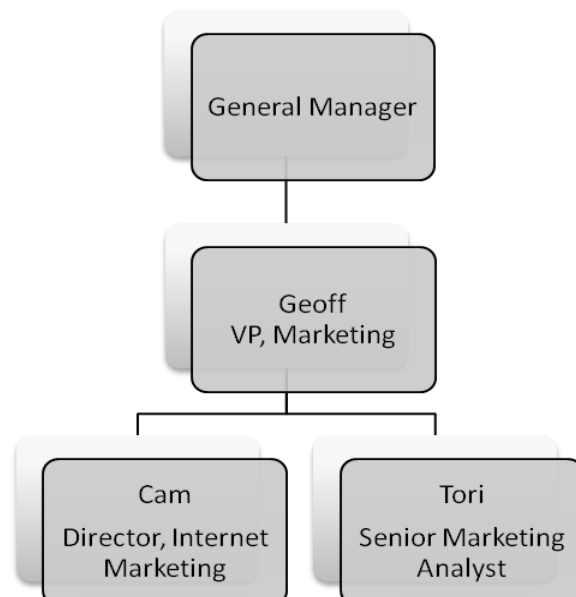
## Content

### 1. A Case Study: Cam's Failed Success

Cam was determined to make a strong first impression with his boss's boss, the General Manager of the Division, at the 9am meeting on Monday. Cam was just two weeks into his new role as Director of Internet Marketing, having accepted this lateral move as a logical next step in his career with Frenzied Deliveries, PLC. At his previous employer Cam assembled the Internet Marketing department from the ground up, so when his current employer's internet marketing was in dire straights, he was asked to step in and turn it around. This was a golden opportunity to earn his next promotion.

Tori was new on the job, too – glad to be promoted but also anxious as the incumbent had been a star performer. Management had identified Tori as high potential, thus selecting her for the job of Senior Analyst, a role that presented growth opportunity and profile.

**Figure 1:**



Friday afternoon, Cam and Tori were with Geoff, the VP of Marketing and their boss, reviewing the presentation for Monday's meeting. It wasn't ready yet: Tori still had internet

usage metrics to graph; Cam needed to summarize the team's analysis and action plans; and Geoff intended to do the introduction and conclusion. They would have to tag team over the weekend to ensure the GM received it Sunday evening, prior to Monday's meeting. Tori said she would get her slides to Cam Saturday morning. Geoff said he'd be on e-mail Sunday morning to review Cam's work.

Sunday morning, Geoff was glad to see the presentation in his inbox although Cam's e-mail stated, "I still have some slides to complete. Please return your draft intro and conclusions to me once you are done and I'll finish mine promptly." Geoff did so, then stayed logged on to track progress and wait for Cam's edits. At 3pm, Geoff noticed he was cc'd, along with Tori, on an e-mail from Cam directly to the General Manager submitting the completed presentation, expressing his gratitude for his new job opportunity, and stating how much he looked forward to next morning's meeting. It was a solid presentation and the General Manager loved it, but Geoff was upset.

## **2. Introduction**

Whenever a performance issue arises, it is significantly more effective to have (or build) a framework for the discussion so that there is a common understanding to guide future performance. In the case above, based on a actual situation we encountered, Cam arrived at a key decision point – should he send the presentation to Geoff or to the General Manager? – and made the potentially dangerous choice of bypassing Geoff. Rather than reacting angrily, here is how Geoff could use the followship framework to make this a valuable coaching opportunity:

"Cam, I am glad that the General Manager was impressed by the presentation. You and Tori made significant contributions. However, I also need to provide you with the feedback that I felt undermined. You showed a lack of good followship in a number of ways: first, you

intentionally created a process that by-passed me – something a good follower only does after strong trust is built and explicit approval is granted. Second, you failed to consider my perspective. Perhaps I wanted to use this as an opportunity to profile Tori; perhaps the draft conclusions I sent needed more work based on your slide changes; or perhaps I did want you to send the final note, to give you profile. The decision was mine to make. Finally, you did not have your slides reviewed by the person ultimately responsible for the presentation – me.

Always consider your role as a follower with the same care you put into the rest of your job. You will find that as you advance in your career, greater emphasis is actually put on followship skills; your success will depend on your abilities as a follower just as much as your competence as a leader.”

Geoff now has provided clear, specific, and timely feedback in a way that is actionable by Cam (Ilgen et al., 1979).

### **3. The Followship Model**

To recap the second article in this series briefly (Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 2009b), followship is composed of two core competencies. The first competency, *personal manageability*, relates to behaviours which are effective regardless of the organization or leader. Personal manageability consists of five core areas: communication, attitude, etiquette, full accountability, and decisions. The second competency, *leader support*, is about tailoring followship behaviours to a specific boss, a specific culture, and a specific organization. When any of these circumstances changes, your leader support behaviours must adapt. There are four core skills comprising leader support: leader goals, rapport, culture, and style.

The first article (Hurwitz and Hurwitz, 2009a) provided an overview of research demonstrating that followship is an important factor in personal and organizational success (Chaleff, 1995; Thacker and Wayne, 1995; Wayne and Liden, 1995; MacKenzie et al., 1999; Thompson, 2006). As the case above (Cam's Failed Success) illustrates, followship is also a useful tool for leaders in diagnosing and improving staff performance. In addition, we have discovered that followship is often the *key* insight for solving organizational challenges, a selection of which we discuss below.

#### **4. Organizational Development – A Case Study: Design Then Implement**

Deepa Beta was VP, Organizational Development at CodeStomp, a small high tech firm with a workforce of bright, engaged staff. The culture of the firm encouraged creativity, inquisitiveness, open dialogue, and support for social causes. In their region, CodeStomp was a highly prized employer with many applicants for every job.

In Q2, CodeStomp acquired a downstream partner through a friendly takeover and Deepa was given the mandate to create a go-forward organizational structure by the end of the year. While this would be a stretch goal under normal circumstances, CodeStomp had a poor experience with an earlier, enterprise-wide change: three years prior, CodeStomp was growing rapidly and recognized that their organization needed greater structure. True to their culture, deciding what to change and how to do it was marked by open dialogue and many staff meetings, at the end of which a consensus was reached. However, implementation took a further two years because staff kept cycling back with improvements, suggestions, and redesigns to the original plan. Deepa could not afford a repeat.

##### *The Followship Solution*

Simply put, decisions have two phases, a *before* (solution design) and an *after* (implementation). Before a decision is made, good followers

(1) provide decision support and not just opinions, i.e., when asked to give input, they uncover new information, reorganize existing information to clarify, and add insights or new solutions;

(2) understand whose decision it is and why.

During the solution design phase, it is the leader's role to keep focus on the strategic objectives and bring the right people to the table.

Once the decision is made, however, a follower's role changes. Now good followers

(3) should be able to explain the decision to others in a way that builds buy-in;

(4) implement the decision in a way that honours the intent, and;

(5) apply creativity and energy to make it into the best possible decision.

Staff at CodeStomp failed to change behaviours after the decision was made: their creativity stayed focused on solution design rather than on implementation. This pattern of behaviour is fairly common within organizations where the majority of employees are knowledge workers, e.g., IT shops, engineering firms, innovation-rich industries, or hospitals, especially when the decision is outside most employees' area of expertise. Focusing on decision support, the decision support lifecycle, creativity in implementation, and leader-follower roles improves decision making and implementation.

There are a number of targeted interventions Deepa could use to streamline the reorganization and create a fertile ground for change such as publishing materials on the decision making lifecycle and people's roles within it; setting up employee training sessions to help them understand the process; adding decision-making and decision support to the competency dictionary, and; training managers to facilitate the switch from the decision phase to the implementation phase.

## 5. Organizational Development

Here are a few general observations about introducing followship into organizations. First, we have noticed that more senior leaders often have better personal insights into followship than junior managers or line staff. This can be leveraged by having leaders tell their personal followship stories as a way of building buy-in. Second, modelling is critical to shaping behaviour in social situations (Weiss, 1977; Bettenhausen and Murnighan, 1985). Mostly employees see leaders' *leadership* behaviours and emulate them, without realizing that these could be different than their *followship* behaviours. Society, in general, is not attuned to followship or to recognizing that all of us are followers, making it even more difficult for junior staff to understand and emulate positive followship behaviours. Finally, the commonly held belief that leadership is the real problem within organizations conceals the simple fact that good followers can deliver exceptional results with *average* leaders. Indeed, there is even recent evidence that good followers enhance the skills of leaders (Harcourt et al., 2009). Of course the truest competitive advantage is to have both good followers and good leaders.

### *Development Planning*

One practical step to introducing followship is by incorporating it into the development plans and development expectations of staff. For example, Figure 2 illustrates a development plan template created for the software architect role at a large multinational business.

Figure 2:

**SOFTWARE ARCHITECT EVALUATION FRAMEWORK**  
**Self Assessment & Development Plan**

Accountabilities & Key Competencies	Technical Mastery					Regularity of Use			Comments & Development Plans
	Developing	Basic Proficiency	Advanced Proficiency	Mastery	Rarely or Never	Occasional Use	Always Top of Mind		
<b>1. Solution Leadership &amp; Influence</b>									
1.1 Vision: develop strong conceptual solutions that move us forward and are extensible over time									
1.2 Strategic Thinking: develop "big picture" solutions that fit the organization's strategy and <b>leader's goals</b>									
1.3 Creativity: design solutions that are an insightful use of technology and/or resources, and are practical to implement									
1.4 Initiative: identify opportunities to business / I.T. leadership									
1.5 Consulting: work with business and I.T. teams to address complex business issues and problems									
1.6 Collaboration: initiate and develop relationships within and across the business units to attain collaborative solutions									
<b>1.7 Communication: instill confidence and commitment in senior management through appropriate communication and strong interpersonal skills to garner support and sell solutions</b>									
<b>2. Business Acumen</b>									
2.1 Breadth: understand the end-to-end business unit operations, functions, processes and services									
2.2 Business Depth: for specific area of accountability									
2.3 Industry: stay current with business trends and demonstrate ability to interpret them for use within organization									
<b>3. Technical Expertise</b>									
3.1 Breadth: understand the end-to-end system applications and technical environment									
3.2 Technical Depth: for area of specific accountability									
3.3 Industry: stay current with technological trends and demonstrate ability to interpret them from a system development viewpoint within organization									
<b>4. Analysis &amp; Judgment</b>									
4.1 Analytical Expertise: effective use of process design and analytical tools (feasibility studies, business case development, cost/benefit analysis, diagnostic tools, etc.); solid working knowledge of project management methodologies and corporate project governance standards									
<b>4.2 Decisions: provide strong decision support to influence effective and timely decision making by senior executives on major I.T. investments in projects and technology</b>									
4.3 Evaluation: use judgment to work with minimal information and direction and help shape needed deliverables									
<b>5. Leadership</b>									
5.1 Mentorship: assume the role of senior advisor, teacher, mentor and expert to more junior members of the organization regarding tools, technology, solution design and documentation									
<b>5.2 Talent Development: identify succession candidates and implement development plans</b>									
<b>5.3 Engagement: model professionalism, passion, and collaborative behaviours for junior staff</b>									

Under the *Accountabilities and Key Competencies* rubric, we have highlighted a number of items specific to fellowship (all bold descriptions are fellowship related). For example, in ‘1.2 Strategic Thinking’, the original description read, “develop ‘big picture’ solutions that fit the organization's strategy.” We added, “develop ‘big picture’ solutions that fit the

organization's strategy and **leader's goals.**” Other items, ‘4.2 Decisions’, for example, were entirely new categories. In practice, this revised version was easier to implement and was more closely related to future promotion and compensation decisions. As such, it improved staff morale, employee development, and management success. Bringing the followship lens to similar HR initiatives is a valuable tool even when followship is not explicitly mentioned.

## **6. Personal Development**

Good followers, by winning the trust of their leader, leader's peers and those higher up in the organization, accomplish more because they are given additional latitude and opportunities (Yukl, 1999; Thompson, 2006). As a result, good followers experience more autonomy rather than less, have more successful careers (Thacker and Wayne, 1995; Wayne and Liden, 1995; Farmer and Maslyn, 1999), and tend to be more satisfied in their jobs (Ng et al., 2005). It is vital, then, to assist individuals in developing their followship skills. Here are some examples.

### *Gen Y*

Gen Y want to be involved more in decision making, want to understand the rationale for what they are doing, give respect for competency not position, want to be viewed positively by senior management, want more hands-on guidance and support, want more autonomy, have a greater need for immediate reward, and have a greater need for sense-making than previous generations (Busch et al., 2008; Martin, 2005; Patalano, 2008). Because Gen Y expect their place of work to be accommodating and responsive to their needs, it can be a shock to discover that their boss is not their parent, their organization is not their school, and that they must accommodate work demands rather than the converse. Indeed, it is understandable that Gen Y have difficulty appreciating and valuing followship when all their lives they have been sold the leadership message. It is important, therefore, to pay special attention to helping Gen Y understand how work works... and why. We have found it effective to add a learning module on followship during new hire orientation. The module

includes specific behavioural examples and explains, explicitly, why followship is relevant. As well, because Gen Y desire frequent feedback, it is important to ensure that managers can model followship and are trained to mentor, support, and encourage appropriate behaviours.

### *Executive Derailment in On-Boarding*

The Bank of America (BoA) has a comprehensive program for executive on-boarding (Conger and Fishel, 2007). With the program in place, BoA had a termination rate for new executives during 2001-2006 of 12% compared to up to 40% elsewhere (Watkins, 2003). Their on-boarding program is run in three phases: the first 100 days concentrates on building key relationships, learning the business, understanding the culture, and getting established in the role. Notice that these are primarily *leader support* (rapport and culture) activities. The second phase, from 100 to 365 days, focuses on refinement of these understandings and incorporating them more fully into every day actions and reactions. The third and final phase involves 360° feedback including a thorough progress review relative to previously identified opportunities for performance improvements.

During phase 2, an HR partner interviews various stakeholders, obtains feedback, and presents it to new executive. The one person purposely not interviewed, because the executive is expected to figure it out for herself, is their boss. Tellingly, Conger and Fishel note that this hidden expectation, "... is a critical characteristic of those who go on to be strong leaders in the Bank of America culture." In other words, the one test BoA continues to use to assess future executive potential is of the executive's followship skills, namely, how well they execute the leader support skills of goals and style. As we shall see from the next section, a lack of followship is critical to executive derailment. It is unsurprising, therefore, that BoA is concerned about followship, albeit their test is fairly crude. What BoA fails to recognize is that followship can be taught if the skills are made explicit.

### *Executive Derailment When the CEO Changes*

Executive derailment is common when a new CEO is appointed (Coyne and Coyne, 2007). In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins (2001) suggests that senior managers choose and keep people who ‘get on the bus’. Why, then, do smart people, most of whom are more than competent at their jobs and have been ‘on the bus’ with the previous CEO, fail to hop on when so much is at stake? In our interviews with CEOs a common thread emerges: while executives are uniformly good at personal manageability, some are less skilled at leader support. Because of this, when the culture or boss changes, even senior staff may be unable to let go of behaviours that used to work for them.

Hogan and Hogan (2001) attribute executive derailment to the presence of undesirable qualities rather than the lack of desirable ones. Furthermore, a number of studies have identified the inability to adapt to the boss as a core reason for derailment (Van Velsor and Leslie, 1995; McCartney and Campbell, 2006), including among women executives (Morrison et al., 1987). Such behaviours are situational, i.e., leader support is a primary cause of derailment whereas failed on-boarding appears to be due to a lack of either competency. One CEO told us of his experience as the VP HR working first for a leader who was a devotee of *Execution* (Bossidy et al., 2002), and next for a CEO enamoured by *Surfing the Edge of Chaos* (Pascale et al., 2000). He survived these extremely different approaches by adapting to his CEOs’ different styles and agendas. When he became CEO (shortly before we interviewed him), he had let go of a few of his peers even though they were capable people because they could not adapt to his approach. With coaching, we believe many experienced executives *can* adapt, and can get on the bus, but it requires carefully disentangling which behaviours are really good followship and which need changing.

### *High Potential Employees*

Derailment also happens at lower levels of the organization. Despite programs to assist them, about 25% of high potential employees (HPEs) fail to move up the ranks (McCall and

Lombardo, 1983). Programs for HPEs often concentrate on leadership skills, business skills, and personal development (Kur and Bunning, 2002), but not followship. However, the skill to adapt to different bosses, cultures, and environments has been identified as a root cause of stalled careers amongst HPEs and, further, that the need for adaptability increases in importance as one moves up the organizational hierarchy (McCartney and Campbell, 2006). HPE careers stall because their leaders do not see them as effective followers. Because of this, they lose out on promotional and developmental opportunities, and may even get frustrated with the company and leave. This is a huge drain on the talent pool of organizations which some basic followship training could meliorate.

## **7. Conclusion**

In 1985, James Meindl, Sanford Ehrlich, and Janet Dukerich wrote a seminal article on leadership called “The Romance of Leadership.” The point of their article was that people unduly attribute success to the actions of leaders. When given three pieces of information on recent changes to an organization - a new leader, new followers, and different business conditions - participants in the study chose to ascribe changed business outcomes to the influence of the leader. While leadership is important, this bias has kept us from paying sufficient attention to followers.

We do agree that leadership is important; we would just add that there is a need for a more balanced approach to organizational development. Everyone is a follower: it is a role that has a major impact on careers and on businesses. Perhaps, then, it would be useful to focus some energy on followship and begin the process of creating an equivalent ‘romance of the follower’.

## **References**

Bettenhausen, K. and Murnighan, J. K. (1985), "The emergence of norms in competitive decision-making groups", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 350-372.

Bossidy, L., Charan, R., and Burck, C. (2002), *Execution: the discipline of getting things done*, Crown Business, New York, NY.

Busch, P., Venkitachalam, K., and Richards, D. (2008), "Generational differences in soft knowledge situations: Status, need for recognition, workplace commitment and idealism", *Knowledge & Process Management*, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 45-58.

Chaleff, I. (1995), *The courageous follower: Standing up to and for our leaders*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, CA.

Collins, J. (2001), *Good to great*, HarperCollins, New York, NY.

Conger, J. A. and Fishel, B. (2007), "Accelerating leadership performance at the top: Lessons from the Bank of America's executive on-boarding process", *Human Resources Management Review*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 442-454.

Coyne, K. P. and Coyne, E. J. (2007), "Surviving Your New CEO", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 85, No. 5, pp. 62-69.

Farmer, S. M. and Maslyn, J. M. (1999). Why are styles of upward influence neglected? Making the case for a configurational approach to influences. *Journal of Management*, 25, 653-682.

Harcourt, J. L., Ang, T. Z., Sweetman, G., Johnstone, R. A., and Manica, A. (2009), "Social feedback and the emergence of leaders and followers", *Current Biology*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 248-252.

Hurwitz, M. and Hurwitz, S. (2009a), "The romance of the follower – part 1", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, in press.

Hurwitz, M. and Hurwitz, S. (2009b), "The romance of the follower – part 2", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, in press.

Ilgen, D. R., Fisher, C. D. and Taylor, M. S. (1979), "Consequences of individual feedback on behavior in organizations", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 64, No. 4, pp. 349-371.

Kur, E. and Bunning, R. (2002), "Assuring corporate leadership for the future", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 21, No. 10, pp. 761-779.

MacKenzie, S. B., Podsakoff, P. M., and Paine, J. B. (1999), "Do citizenship behaviors matter more for managers than for salespeople?", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 396-410.

Martin, C. (2005). "From high maintenance to high productivity: what managers need to know about generation Y", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 39-44.

McCall, M. and Lombardo, M. (1983), "Off the track: why and how successful executives get derailed", Technical report, Center for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, NC.

McCartney, W. M. and Campbell, C. R. (2006), "Leadership, management, and derailment: a model of individual success and failure", *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, Vol, 27, No. 3, pp. 190-202.

Meindl, J.R., Ehrlich, S.B., and Dukerich, J.M. (1985), "The romance of leadership", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 78-102.

Morrison, A., White, R., and Van Velsor, E. (1987), *Breaking the glass ceiling: can women make it to the top of America's largest corporations?*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.

Ng, T. W. H., Eby, L. T., Sorensen, K. L., and Feldman, D. C. (2005), "Predictors of objective and subjective career success: a meta-analysis", *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 58, No. 2, pp. 367-408.

Pascale, R. T., Millimann, M., and Gioja, L. (2000), *Surfing the edge of chaos: the laws of nature and the new laws of business*, Three Rivers Press, New York, NY.

Patalano, C. (2008), *A study of the relationship between generational group identification and organizational commitment: Generation X vs. Generation Y*, H. Wayne Huizenga School of Business & Entrepreneurship, Nova Southeastern University, Dissertation in partial fulfillment of Doctor of Business Administration.

Thacker, R. A. and Wayne, S. J. (1995), "An examination of the relationship between upward influence tactics and assessments of promotability:", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 739-756.

Thompson, J. A. (2006), "Proactive personality and job performance: a social capital perspective", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 90, No. 5, pp. 1011-1017.

Van Velsom, E. and Leslie, J. B. (1995), "Why executives derail: perspectives across time and cultures", *Academy of Management Executive*, Vo. 9, No. 4, pp. 62-72.

Watkins, M. (2003), *The first 90 days*, Harvard Business School Publishing, Boston, MA.

Wayne, S. J. and Liden, R. C. (1995), "Effects of impression management on performance ratings: a longitudinal study", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp. 232-260.

Weiss, H. M. (1977), "Subordinate imitation of supervisor behavior: The role of modeling in organizational socialization", *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 89-105.

Yukl, G. (1999), "An evaluation of conceptual weaknesses in transformation and charismatic leadership theories", *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 285-305.

## **Author Details**

**Marc Hurwitz**

700 Hollyview Pl

Waterloo, ON N2V 2N1

Canada

519-497-1553

[marc@flipskills.com](mailto:marc@flipskills.com)

Biography: Marc Hurwitz is a PhD candidate in Psychology, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada and is a Senior Partner in FLIPskills.

**Samantha Hurwitz**

700 Hollyview Pl.

Waterloo, ON N2V 2N1

Canada

519-591-1557

[Samantha@flipskills.com](mailto:Samantha@flipskills.com)

Samantha Hurwitz is Assistant Vice President of IT, Manulife Financial, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada and is a Senior Partner in FLIPskills.