

Introduction to Followership

CAP Officer Basic Course

Introduction

Leadership and the role of a leader have been researched and studied for decades. In contrast, followership and its relevance are still evolving and have been clearly understudied. For example, a recent internet book search resulted with 351,550 books on leadership and only 2,633 books on followership. This simple online research indicates the lack of research and emphasis on followership when compared to leadership, which is ironic considering that they are both intertwined.

Very few professional development programs focus on developing effective followers. Instead, civilian executive programs/seminars and professional military education focus on the development of leaders without sometimes ever discussing followership. Ironically, someone who is a leader one minute could be a follower the next minute.

As a member of the Civil Air Patrol, you have many opportunities to practice followership. This lesson will help you understand what is desired in an effective follower with the ultimate goal of developing you into a future leader of the Civil Air Patrol and your community.

1. Describe followership development.

Before we can begin to understand how to develop as an effective follower we must understand what followership is. Robert Kelley, a prominent social scientist in followership studies begins the construction of his definition by saying that followers are the "people who act with intelligence, independence, courage, and a strong sense of ethics" (Kelley 1992). The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2009) defines followership as: "the capacity or willingness to follow a leader". The Civil Air Patrol's Professional Development website defines followership as reaching a specific goal while exercising respect for authority, a positive attitude, integrity, and self-discipline.

When you joined Civil Air Patrol, you agreed to be professional, act morally and responsibly, complete your tasks to the best of your ability, and have a willingness to serve your community. These are not easy to do if you do not understand the basics of followership. How good of a follower you become will largely determine your personal growth while you serve in the Civil Air Patrol.

Developing followership is not an easy task. It requires self-discipline with skills that are probably more fundamental to organizational success than the development of leaders. It is the willingness to learn from others. Hence, without effective followership, a leader can fail to achieve the organizational goals.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING AS FOLLOWERSHIP

All members come to CAP with knowledge and experiences that can be used. You will find many professional development opportunities within Civil Air Patrol that will help you expand the knowledge you already bring from your profession, previous military service and other life.

These opportunities will expand your knowledge in all three missions of CAP. In ES alone there are 26 qualifications, many with levels of expertise. There are also over 26 duty specialties from which to select, each with three levels of proficiency. One could easily find more than one way to satisfy your curiosity and customize your experience. Each certification makes you more valuable follower and prepares you to be a better leader. You should embrace every opportunity offered to improve your leadership and followership skills.

EXPERIENCE IN FOLLOWERSHIP

Knowledge without experience is like reading about golf and then trying to get on the professional tour. The best leaders have some idea of what the jobs entail and can connect those tasks with the mission. This requires the experience of being a follower.

To gain experience as a follower, start out with what you do well, and offer to do that for someone else. Then volunteer to assist someone in a related area and learn that job. Then move on to other areas. Think about these examples of experience progression: you are the squadron's administration officer. Volunteer to be the assistant encampment admin officer. It is likely you will get immediately promoted to admin officer. But the two are related. During the encampment you will see how supply gets requests, has them approved, acquires the materials, gets them paid for and delivered. Then next year is the encampment supply officer. Eventually, you could qualify to be the encampment commander.

The same is true for ES. Let's say you have your Basic Radio Operators license. You could start out by being the driver for a ground team and acting as a relay to mission base. The next time you could be the operator at mission base and in a few more missions the Communications Director. These examples reflect a number of competencies and components that are looked for in a good follower.

2. Describe competencies and attributes of followers.

Followers have desired characteristics just like leaders do. Effective followership is an essential building block to effective leadership. As previously mentioned, there are thousands of references where you can find helpful information on effective leadership practices. There are far fewer resources that provide guidance on becoming effective followers. Through years of research, the following characteristics and behaviors have been identified as those commonly sought in effective followers:

- Maintain a positive attitude, even in the most challenging times - not all events/situations in the Civil Air Patrol will go smoothly therefore, remain flexible and offer assistance and solutions to a difficult circumstance instead of adding frustrations.
- Work effectively as a team member - The Civil Air Patrol is a team and we must learn to work together regardless of differences.
- Exhibit loyalty to your leader and organization - Loyalty to your Commander and the organization is crucial to the success of any organization. This is not an un-questioning loyalty. We also expect you to use your head to be safe, follow core values and the regulations.
- Volunteer to handle tasks - Offering a hand or two to others in the organization will assist a great deal regardless of how insignificant you may think your assistance is. It also broadens your scope of knowledge, changes acquaintances into comrades and makes lighter work for everyone.
- Willingly accept assignments - Be willing to accept tasks regardless of how challenging they may seem. Concurrently, do not be afraid to ask for help from others. Be willing to accept assignments regardless of how insignificant they seem. While coordinating the AV for the wing's SLS may not seem very important it contributes to the professionalism, effectiveness and enjoyment in numerous ways.
- Offer suggestions - This is different from complaining. It is identifying a weak spot and suggesting a way to improve. Civil Air Patrol is a dynamic organization that is always seeking ways to improve its practices. The trick I recommend is to start out with a descriptive sentence that starts with "I". I found it hard to... I was thinking the way to make it easier is ... Remember; use your chain of command and the processes in place to make suggestions.
- Respectfully voice differences of opinions - Voicing opinions are welcomed but always keep in mind; it's not what you say it's how you say it. Starting sentences with

"I" is one way to respectfully voice an opinion. Another way might be to ask a question. Questions like, "I don't understand why we ..." or "Why don't we ..." assumes that there must be a good reason and the word "we" shows that you are part of the team and want to be part of the solution. Questions that start out "Could we ..." defers to the leader's experience and knowledge and "we" has the same effect as noted above.

- Support group decisions - Decisions made will not always be the most popular or what you would prefer. In many case, particularly at this point in your CAP career you will not have all the facts and the big picture. You have to trust that the decision maker is in a better position to make the decision. What is important is that, as long as the decision is ethical and legal, you support it and move on without dwelling on what could have been in your opinion. This ties into the concepts of loyalty discussed above and the core value of Volunteer Spirit.

It is recommended that you occasionally conduct a self-evaluation as a follower/ collaborator/group member to determine if you are performing and fulfilling your role to the best of your ability and to the benefit of your organization. Good times to do this are: before meeting with your mentor (see the Mentoring Lesson of this course), your membership renewal, getting ready for an inspection, on particular calendar dates that relate to CAP (1 December) or when someone else is getting ready for a promotion (it may be too late if you wait to self-evaluate just before you become eligible for promotion).

It is fundamental to remember that effective leadership requires effective followership so do your best to make your unit and organization the best it can be. During your self-evaluations you should identify what type of follower you are and identify how you contribute to the Civil Air Patrol's roles and missions.

Robert Kelley categorized followers into five different types based on the factors of " independence, critical thinking versus dependent, and uncritical thinking" (Kelley 1992). The five categories as designated by Kelley are:

- **Alienated** - independent and critical thinker, but is lacking in engagement due to a sense of disgruntled acquiesce.
- **Conformist** - highly active in their organization but lack independent, critical thinking skills.
- **Pragmatist** - straddles the "middle of the road" a , but either questions their leader too much or too little.
- **Passive** - neither thinks for himself or herself nor is an active part of the organization.
- **Exemplary** - a constant critical thinker and is actively engaged in his or her organization.

It is also important to understand that followers do not normally fall into the extremes of each category but rather tend to combine the categories depending on the situation at hand. It is not uncommon for a follower to fall within two or more categories depending on the situation and surrounding circumstances. Take a moment and ask yourself four questions:

- Which type(s) of follower am I in this situation?
- What type of follower do I want to be?
- What type of follower are (pick 2 members of your unit)?
- Is that the type of follower we need? If not, how can I make a difference in that member's career?

CRITICAL THINKING

Another important competency that each followership should develop is "Critical Thinking". Everyone thinks often and routinely but critical thinking is when we improve the quality of our

thinking by skillfully taking charge of the structures inherent in thinking and impose intellectual standards. What this means is making decisions on any subject or problem utilizing our experiences and education in a systematic method.

In 1941, Scholar Edward Glaser wrote that the ability to think critically involves three things:

- An attitude of being disposed (state of mind regarding something) to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences,
- Knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning,
- Some skill in applying those methods.

Followers have an obligation to think critically and problem solve. It is not up to the Squadron Commander to solve all the problems of the unit. Every member has an obligation to do what they can. So when something happens at the unit meeting that did not turn out the way it should ask your self these questions:

- What should have happened?
- What were the root causes that made something else happen?
- How can the unit and I do better?

Or you can use the problem solving techniques discussed in other lessons in this course. Then make thoughtful and respectful suggestions as discussed above.

Whether it is through active engagement or critical thinking, each follower has the ability to interact with a leader who usually has more experience in the organization. An important factor to remember is that regardless of the type of follower you are, you have the ability to play an active role in your leader-follower relationship. Use your strengths to support the Civil Air Patrol and your leader and simultaneously use your leader and peers to strengthen your weaknesses.

3. Outline the leader-follower relationship.

A positive and strong relationship between leaders and followers is imperative within any organization. The success of any organization depends heavily on the followers more so than its leaders when considering that 80% of the work that is accomplished is completed by the followers.

Ira Chaleff, a thought leader in the field of Followership compares the relationship between leaders and followers as: "to think of leaders without followers is like thinking of teachers without students. Both are impossible. They are two sides of one process, two parts of a whole" (Chaleff, 1995). This means that one cannot understand leadership without understanding followership and vice-versa.

During your volunteer service in Civil Air Patrol you will refer to the core values of Integrity, Volunteer Service, Excellence, and Respect. We essentially mirror the U.S. Air Force core values but have added volunteer service because of the volunteer nature of our organization. As a Civil Air Patrol volunteer and as a follower you should always remember the core values and ensure your actions reflect positively on our organization. Leaders and followers should never sacrifice their core values. Core values should dictate everyone's actions and conduct. An effective follower, and leader, for that matter, will be guided by the core values, which will produce a more efficient organization and increase the ability of a volunteer to have an impact on CAP's missions.

Comprehending the leader-follower relationship helps us all utilize the skills, abilities and knowledge of each other to increase the potential performance and potential success of the Civil Air Patrol.

Lesson Summary and Closure

The Civil Air Patrol needs effective followers who are willing to contribute to the overall effort of the organization. Therefore, it is important to understand the basic principles of followership, and apply them in all that you do. This will not only improve your participation in the Civil Air Patrol but it will also help you in your professional working environment. It will make you a better person. Remember, the first step in becoming a better leader is mastering the concepts of followership.

Works Cited

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