

Lead, follow, or get out of the way may be popular bumper sticker management but it's a formula for failure today; it leaves out the vital middle relationship—team up!

Fitting Teamwork into the Grand Scheme of Things

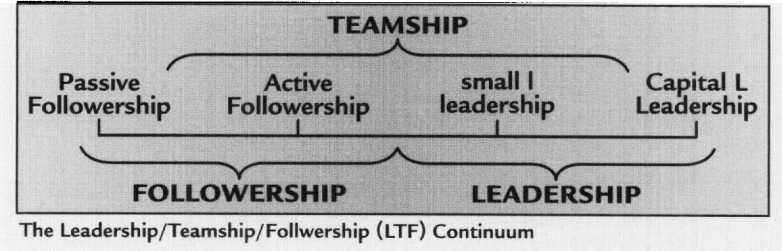
Pat Townsend

Everything, including teamwork, is easier to study—and it is easier for us to believe we understand it—if we look at it in isolation and, too often, out of context. Free of considerations about the impact the object of our study has on other things, people, or concepts or that others have on it, our analysis can have a neat beginning, a defined middle, and an orderly ending.

especially important with teamwork to understand the range and interplay of the combination of relationships if you are to fully understand any one.

Before we get to teamwork and how it relates to leadership and followership, we need to lay some groundwork. Picture a continuum, just a long horizontal line to start. Think of leadership as extending over the right half of the line and followership as extending over the left half of the line.

Put four marks along the line—at the left end, at the 1/3 mark, at the 2/3 mark, and at the right end. Label the far left mark, passive followership; the 1/3 mark, active followership; the 2/3 mark, small-l leadership, and the far right mark, capital-L Leadership.



But that's not how the world works. Not in real life, and surely not in a situation in which we are trying to get something done along with other people. Cries of "Who's in charge?" "Who's going to actually do the work?" and "If we could just all work together" quickly fill the air as people jostle into, or for position—and then re-jostle. The point is that leading, following, and working as a team are interrelated concepts. It is

The Leadership–Teamship–Followership (LTF) Continuum
Passive followership is the form of followership practiced by a potato when on the end of a string being pulled by a child. Active followership—the desired form of followership—occurs when a follower

interacts with his or her leader to insure understanding and success.

Small-I leadership is the form most often practiced. It is the personal form of leadership whereby the leader deals with his or her followers on a one-on-one or one-on-few basis. Capital-L Leadership is the form of leadership where loneliness is possible, where decisions are made to move people and resources and to commit an organization to a particular action. And there are, of course, untold thousands of stops in between any two points on the continuum.

So where does teamwork (or, for sake of auditory/visual consistency, teamship) fit in with everything else? It's the middle third of the continuum; it's where leadership and followership meet and overlap.

The exciting thing about the LTF Continuum is that no one is locked at any one point on the line. A person can get on a particular LTF Continuum at any point and then, through personal efforts, perhaps augmented by the help of a mentor, move left or right and back again.

The middle is fluid, not muddled

When in the middle third, relationships are most fluid. If a smoothly operating team, one in which all members are in the middle third, is observed from outside, it is often difficult to discern exactly who has the formal position of leader.

Everyone is, or can be, on several LTF Continuums at once

A person might spend most of his or her time in the followership third at work but, once home and functioning as the chair of a small town school's building committee, he or she might spend part of the evening in the leadership third and part of it in the teamship third. Once the weekend comes, and he or she joins a group of friends trying to

decide where to go on a skiing trip, it is back into the teamship third.

The point of interest here is that everyone moves back and forth on the LTF Continuum at work with the ease of that movement and the range of that movement having a lot to do with their perceived worth to the company. The fact that some folks can move easily all along the LTF Continuum can be explained by looking at the nature of the three neighborhoods on the continuum: leadership, teamship, and followership.

The profession that has studied these relationships for the longest period of time and that, as a result, is a primary benchmark source of information about the theory and practice of these concepts is the military and, in particular, the military forces of a democratic country.

Consider the "Leadership Principles" defined by the United

Leadership Principles from the United States Marine Corps Guidebook for Marines.

1. Be technically and tactically proficient.
2. Know yourself and seek self-improvement.
3. Know your Marines and look out for their welfare.
4. Keep your personnel informed.
5. Set the example.
6. Ensure that the task is understood, supervised, and accomplished.
7. Train your people as a team.
8. Make sound and timely decisions.
9. Develop a sense of responsibility among subordinates.
10. Employ your command in accordance with its capabilities.
11. Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions and the actions of your unit.

States Marine Corps as spelled out in the *Guidebook for Marines* noted in the adjacent box.

Substitute people for Marines in the third principle and this is no longer a recognizably military list; it has far wider application.

Now let's look at a list defined by the United States Army and published in *Infantry* magazine and labeled Followership Principles.

Followership Principles from the United States Army, Infantry magazine.

1. Know yourself and seek self-improvement.
2. Be technically and tactically proficient.
3. Comply with orders and initiate appropriate actions in the absence of orders.
4. Develop a sense of responsibility and take responsibility for your actions.
5. Make sound and timely decisions or recommendations.
6. Set the example for others.
7. Be familiar with your leader and his job, and anticipate his requirements.
8. Keep your leaders informed.
9. Understand the task and ethically accomplish it.
10. Be a team member—but not a yes man.

These two lists can easily be used for:

- Self-assessment, followed by a short (no more than three projects at a time) and very specific personal improvement plan.*
- Mentoring or counseling—to have an impersonal standard against which a person's actions can be measured, with those measurements serving as a beginning point for improvement plans.
- To study leaders, either historical or current, in order to decide which actions are worth trying to emulate.

*Author's note: A personal improvement plan (PIP) is one way an individual can improve his or her mobility on the LTF Continuum. It is, after all, not natural talent alone that counts. The determining factor is the combination of each person's natural skills and his or her acquired skills.

The teamship principles are derived from the leadership and followership lists of principles and define the ideal behavior for the middle third of the LTF Continuum. They are:

1. Know yourself and seek self-improvement.
2. Be technically and operationally proficient.
3. Make sound and timely decisions or recommendations.
4. Set the example for others.
5. Develop a sense of responsibility in yourself and your teammates.
6. Keep each other informed.
7. Ensure that all teammates understand the task in the same way and work together to ethically accomplish it.
8. Be an active contributor to the thought process and actions of the team.
9. Comply with orders as a team and initiate appropriate actions in the absence of orders.
10. Be familiar with the mission of the organization and anticipate required actions.

Perhaps the first thing that occurs to most people when they look at these three lists is how very similar they are. That is the point.

Leadership, teamship, and followership are not all that distinct from each other—skill at one is preparation to be skilled at another.

It is, of course, leadership that gets the headlines but leadership—in the sense of always being the leader, perpetually being the one up-front in a continuous series of challenging

situations—is not all there is to life.

No matter how many “seize control” books are published or how often motivational speakers, their voices rising and their arms waving, stir up corporate audiences, leadership is not the only working relationship skill with high value.

For no matter what anyone proclaims, not everyone can be a leader all the time. The world doesn't work like that.

At any given moment, in any particular place, with any specific group of people, there will indeed be an absolute need for a leader—or perhaps a team of leaders—but there will also be an urgent need for effective teammates and/or followers. Somebody, after all, has to actually do the work. Not everyone can stand in the front organizing, inspiring, teaching, making decisions, exhorting, and/or pointing.

But it must be remembered that the world is not permanently divided into leaders, teammates, and followers with everyone foredoomed to one or the other single, specific role in life.

Leaders can't operate in a vacuum—and they are generally ineffectual when they attempt to block themselves off from the people and teams they would lead. In an effective organization, one that is to not only survive but to grow and succeed, there is a lot of traffic on the LTF Continuum and there are no artificial barriers to movement left or right on the original information highway.

What connects the two ends of this very human and very pragmatic set of relationships is teamship. It is where leaders and followers not only meet, but intermingle, often switching roles for varying periods of time while future actions are defined and agreed to.

As mentioned above, a person can initially enter a particular LTF Continuum at any point—based on everything from their natural skills to their technical knowledge, to an outside appointment (a position that must then be ratified, even if unofficially, by the other members of the LTF Continuum in order to be truly effective). If they have not worked on their skills as a teammate, however, a person who has newly arrived on a specific LTF Continuum will be stuck on one end of the continuum or the other, bereft of effective ways to communicate with folks at the opposite end.

Effective teams and cooperative teammates are not only necessary for today's successes; they are imperative for guaranteeing the future. Where else will tomorrow's leaders come from?



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chief quality officer for UICI, a financial services company headquartered in Dallas, TX.

Townsend spent the previous dozen years giving keynote presentations and conducting workshops throughout the world. He was a member of the original team that defined the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award in 1987 and served as an examiner for that award for two years. His contributions to The Journal for Quality and Participation are numerous and many of them are included in his last book, Quality Is Everybody's Business (CRC Press, 1999).

His other books include: Commit to Quality (John Wiley & Sons, 1986), Quality in Action: 93 Lessons in Leadership, Participation, and Measurement (John Wiley & Sons, 1992), Five-Star Leadership: The Art and Strategy of Creating Leaders at Every Level (John Wiley & Sons, 1997), Recognition, Gratitude & Celebration (Crisp Publications, 1997), How Organizations Learn: Investigate, Identify, Institutionalize (Crisp Publications, 1999).