

# Everyday Followership: How We Lead by Following in Life's Most Personal Arenas [Facilitated Session]

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## Abstract

Followership is often framed in workplace and organizational contexts, but its impact extends far beyond professional settings. This facilitated session explores followership in deeply personal aspects of life, including healthcare, fitness, religion, and civic engagement. Participants will engage in discussions about how individuals navigate power, responsibility, and decision-making as followers in these areas. The session will examine how effective followership contributes to well-being, ethical decision-making, and social cohesion. Through interactive exercises and shared experiences, attendees will identify strategies for enhancing their followership in ways that support personal growth and community development.

## Session Learning/Participant Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will:

1. Recognize the role of followership in personal decision-making and well-being.
2. Analyze the dynamics of followership in non-work settings, such as healthcare, faith communities, and civic participation.
3. Identify ways to apply followership principles to enhance collaboration and leadership in personal contexts.
4. Discuss ethical and social implications of followership in everyday life.
5. Engage in interactive exercises that highlight the nuances of personal followership.

## Background & Overview of Session Idea

Much of the existing research on followership emphasizes professional and organizational environments, yet followership permeates all aspects of life. Individuals routinely act as followers when seeking medical care, participating in religious communities, engaging in civic duties, or pursuing personal development in fitness and health (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019; Chaleff, 2018, 2024; Lilleaasen, 2023; Schultz, 2025; Whitlock, 2013). Understanding how followership operates in these domains provides insight into the ways people navigate power, influence, and responsibility in daily life.

A Center for Creative Leadership report on “Everyday Leadership” highlights the significance of atypical leaders—individuals who may not fit the conventional mold of leadership but who nonetheless play crucial roles in shaping communities and decision-making (Martin, 2007). The discussion of atypical leaders—including stay-at-home parents, students, and civic volunteers—draws attention to how everyday followership might be an important consideration.

Building on the idea of everyday leadership and followership, a 2024 podcast episode on “Leading & Following in Community Settings” (Fabiano, 2024) reinforced that leadership in community contexts is often fluid, with individuals moving between leading and following roles based on situational needs. The discussion highlights the importance of shared leadership and how community members often engage as followers when aligning their actions with a collective vision. Related research on civic organizations suggests that effective followership may be essential for sustaining engagement in volunteer-driven groups, where individuals choose to contribute based on trust, alignment, and shared purpose (Kaufman et al., 2019).

Further, Kaufman’s (2024) lightning talk at the 2024 Global Followership Conference explored the deeply personal role of followership in healthcare. Drawing from his own experience navigating medical decisions in a high-stakes environment, he illustrated how followership is integral to patient care, emphasizing the trust and communication required between doctors, nurses, therapists, and patients’ families. This perspective underscores how followership is not just a workplace dynamic but a critical component of personal well-being and decision-making.

All these contexts require “smart followership,” a concept that Elser (2022) surfaced in his book on *Doing The Chores: Creating The Groundwork For Success*. Smart followership challenges the traditional view of passive followership, emphasizing proactive engagement, critical thinking, and accountability (Elser, 2024). This approach is particularly relevant in personal domains where followers must make informed decisions, collaborate effectively, and contribute to successful outcomes. By understanding and adopting “Smart Followership,” individuals can navigate complex social dynamics, support ethical leadership, and foster stronger communities.

This session will shift the conversation beyond traditional leader-follower dynamics by considering followership as a conscious and strategic practice in personal arenas. Through this lens, followership is not passive but an active and intentional role that shapes individual and collective experiences.

### **Session Outline with Audience Participation**

1. **Introduction & Framing the Discussion** (10 minutes)
  - a. Brief overview of followership beyond the workplace.
  - b. Introduce key domains: healthcare, fitness, religion, and civic engagement.
  - c. Pose a guiding question: *How do we intentionally engage as “Smart Followers” in these areas?*
2. **Small-Group Reflection & Experience Sharing** (15 minutes)
  - a. Participants form small groups based on interest (healthcare, fitness, religion, civic engagement).
  - b. Each group discusses:
    - i. *When have you found yourself in a followership role in this area?*
    - ii. *What challenges and responsibilities came with that role?*

- c. Groups identify key themes to share with the full session.
- 3. **Rapid Case Analysis & Collective Insights** (15 minutes)
  - a. Each group receives a short real-life scenario related to "smart followership" in their chosen area.
  - b. They discuss:
    - i. *What makes someone an effective "smart follower" in this situation?*
    - ii. *How does "smart followership" influence decision-making and outcomes?*
  - c. Quick share-out of key insights from each group.
- 4. **Synthesis & Takeaways** (15 minutes)
  - a. Facilitator highlights common themes from group discussions.
  - b. Participants reflect: *What's one "smart followership" strategy you can apply in your daily life?*
  - c. Closing remarks and encouragement to consider everyday followership as an intentional practice.

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# Everyday Followership

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## Vignette 1: Healthcare — Speaking Up in the Exam Room

### Scenario:

Maria, a 56-year-old woman, accompanies her elderly father to a cardiology appointment. The physician begins to explain treatment options using technical jargon. Her father nods but doesn't ask questions. Maria is unsure whether to interrupt but worries that her father doesn't understand the risks.

### Discussion Questions:

- What does "smart followership" look like in this moment?
- Should Maria challenge the physician's approach? How?
- How can followers navigate professional hierarchies respectfully but effectively in healthcare settings?
- Which followership concepts or frameworks might further guide your thinking?

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## Vignette 2: Fitness — Following the Influencer

### Scenario:

Jake, a college student, follows a popular fitness influencer on social media who promotes an intense diet and workout regimen. Despite warnings from his campus wellness center, Jake trusts the influencer's confidence and "no excuses" messaging. He begins skipping meals and overexercising.

### Discussion Questions:

- How do followers critically evaluate influence when there's no formal leader-follower structure?
- What does ethical followership look like in digital fitness spaces?
- When is it time to stop following?
- Which followership concepts or frameworks might further guide your thinking?

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### **Vignette 3: Religion — Supporting or Questioning the Sermon**

#### **Scenario:**

Ava is deeply involved in her faith community. During a sermon, her pastor expresses views that conflict with her own beliefs about inclusion and justice. Ava feels torn between her loyalty to the pastor and her commitment to her values.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- How can Ava express dissent while maintaining her commitment to the community?
- What might "courageous followership" require in this case?
- Is dissent an act of support?
- Which followership concepts or frameworks might further guide your thinking?

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### **Vignette 4: Civic Engagement — The Homeowners' Association Vote**

#### **Scenario:**

In a suburban neighborhood, the homeowners' association president proposes a costly neighborhood security upgrade. Danielle, a new homeowner, is unsure about the proposal's necessity and financial impact. Most neighbors seem to agree silently, not wanting to challenge the long-standing president.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- What are the risks and responsibilities of speaking up?
- How can Danielle practice "smart followership" in a community setting?
- What does trust and shared leadership look like in civic life?
- Which followership concepts or frameworks might further guide your thinking?

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## Facilitator Notes: Everyday Followership Vignettes\*

### Purpose:

To encourage participants to identify followership behaviors in everyday, non-work contexts and explore the practice of "smart followership" through active reflection and group dialogue.

### Vignette 1: Healthcare

- **Theory Tie-in:** Chaleff's Courage to Challenge and Take a Moral Stand
- **Facilitation Tip:** Highlight intergenerational roles and the healthcare hierarchy
- **Prompt:** Ask how informed consent and support relate to ethical followership

### Vignette 2: Fitness

- **Theory Tie-in:** Implicit Followership Theory; Kellerman's Participant/Activist
- **Facilitation Tip:** Discuss informal leadership and accountability
- **Prompt:** Explore influencer culture and self-leadership responsibilities

### Vignette 3: Religion

- **Theory Tie-in:** Chaleff's Courage to Take a Moral Stand; Transforming Discourse
- **Facilitation Tip:** Frame dissent as a form of community care
- **Prompt:** Consider faith-based ethical alignment and consequences of silence

### Vignette 4: Civic Engagement

- **Theory Tie-in:** Gallup's Four Needs of Followers: Hope, Trust, Stability
- **Facilitation Tip:** Illustrate civic courage and community leadership
- **Prompt:** Examine the dynamics of silent conformity vs. shared responsibility

### Suggested Workshop Flow:

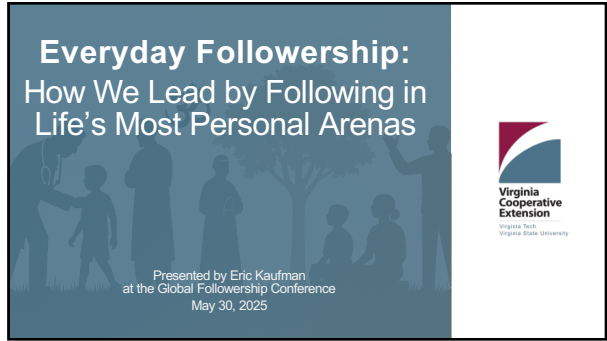
1. Divide into small groups based on interest or assigned vignette
2. Each group reads their vignette and reflects individually
3. Discuss in small groups using provided questions
4. Report out key takeaways to the full group
5. Facilitator synthesizes insights, linking to followership models and "smart followership" takeaways

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\* These vignettes were created by the "Followership in Practice" ChatGPT



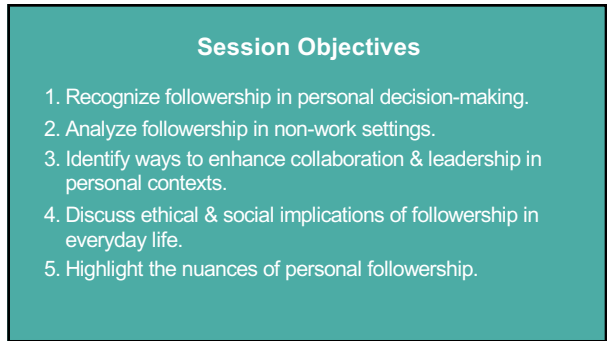
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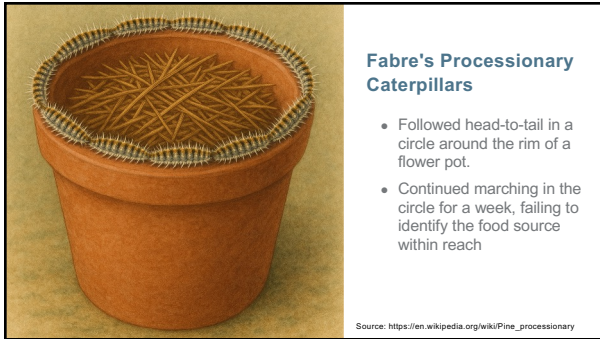
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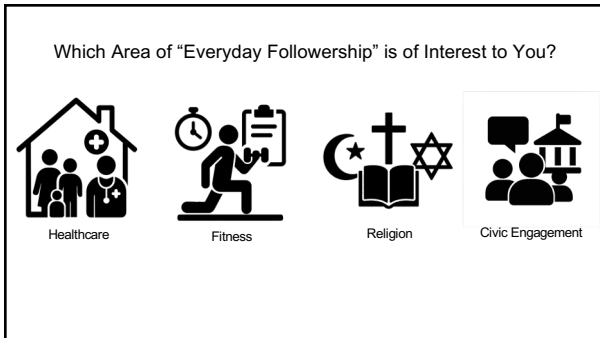
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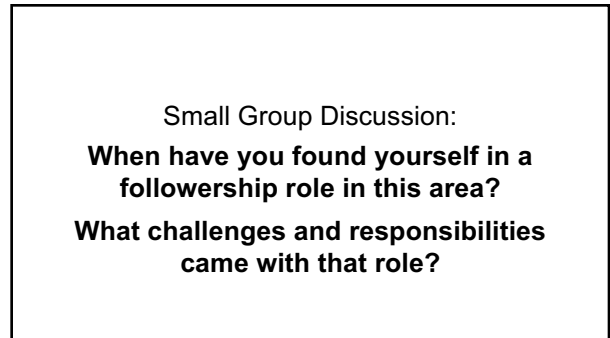
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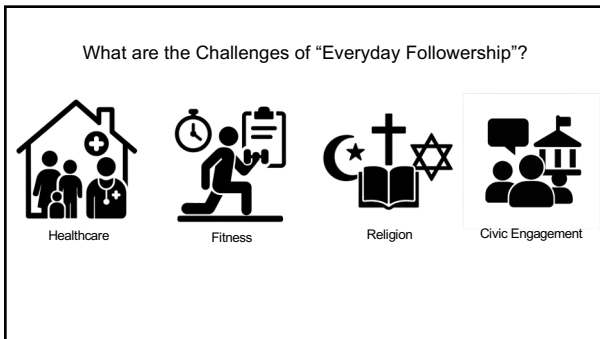
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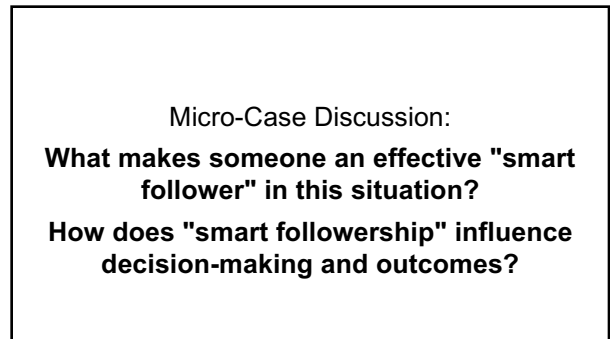
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**Healthcare — Speaking Up in the Exam Room**

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Healthcare

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Fitness

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Religion

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**Civic Engagement — Homeowners' Association Vote**

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Civic Engagement

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What's one "smart followership" strategy you can apply in your daily life?

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