

# Courageous Followership in Support of VCE's Mission

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## What is the relationship between your role and the VCE Mission?

Virginia Cooperative Extension helps lead the engagement mission of Virginia Tech and Virginia State University, the commonwealth's land-grant universities. Building local relationships and collaborative partnerships, we help people put scientific knowledge to work through learning experiences that improve economic, environmental, and social well-being.



### Are you a leader or a follower?


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## What would happen if people stopped following each other?




[www.naturalfollowership.com](http://www.naturalfollowership.com)

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## Session Overview

- 1) Identify five behaviors of a courageous follower.
- 2) Outline an appropriate formula for intelligent disobedience.
- 3) Recognize key strategies for effective collaboration in leader-follower relationships that fulfill the VCE mission.



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**Why We Might Neglect Followers** 

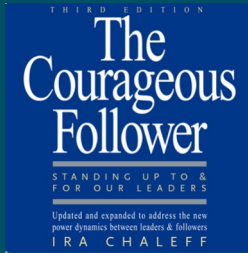

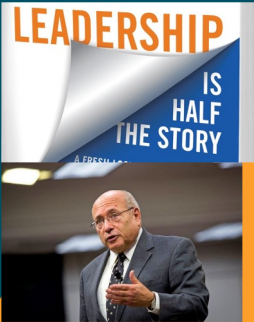
- Leaders are Privileged.
- The Follower is "Invisible" in Leadership Research.
- Followers are Indistinguishable from Other Followers.
- Leaders are the Cause and Followers the Effect.
- Followers are Mere Audience Members.
- Followers are "Noise."
- Followers may not be as Smart.

Riggio, R. E., Lowe, K. B., & Levy, L. (2023). Why are followers neglected in leadership research? *Organization Development Review*, 55(3), 56-60.

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**A Different Leadership Model** 

"Standing up to and for our leaders"

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### The Leader-Follower Relationship Model

Figure from *A British Army Followership Doctrine Note (2023)*.

The diagram consists of three concentric circles. The innermost circle is labeled 'Shared Purpose'. The middle ring is divided into two sections: 'Leaders' at the top and 'Followers' at the bottom. The outermost ring is labeled 'Shared Values'. The entire model is enclosed within a dashed circular border labeled 'Changing Context' at the top and bottom.

THE CENTRE FOR ARMY LEADERSHIP

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“Followership is a discipline of supporting leaders and helping them to lead well.”  
- Rev. Paul Beedle

“Followers are more important to leaders than leaders are to followers.”  
- Dr. Barbara Kellerman

ESSENTIALS OF FOLLOWERSHIP  
RETHINKING THE LEADERSHIP PARADIGM WITH PURPOSE  
MICHAEL W. LINVILLE MARK A. RENAKER

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### We All Have Blind Spots

And, the bigger you are... the bigger your blind-spots.

The diagram shows a top-down view of a road with three vehicles: a small car, a medium truck, and a large train. Red shaded areas behind each vehicle represent their blind spots. The car's blind spot is the smallest, the truck's is larger, and the train's is the largest, extending far behind it.

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### Courageous Followership Dimensions

Assume Responsibility for common purpose.

Serve/Support the leader & group energetically.

Constructively Challenge harmful policies & behaviors.

Participate in transformation.

Take a Moral Stand, if needed.

**Courage to:**

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Followership & Tango



Weak followership is more restrictive for the leader.



What Tango Teaches Us About These Roles in Life

Embracing the Dance

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Followership & Tango




Strong followership can help stabilize a leader that loses focus.



What Tango Teaches Us About These Roles in Life

Embracing the Dance


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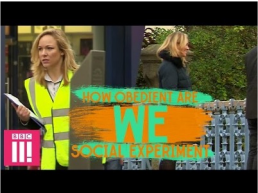
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**Intelligent Disobedience**

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**THE COURAGE TO CHALLENGE**  
Effectively giving feedback to a leader can be difficult.



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## Intelligent Disobedience - Origin Story

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If we can teach dogs to intelligently disobey, why not people?

Keynote Speech by Ira Chaleff

APPLYING INTELLIGENT DISOBEDIENCE TO WORKPLACE SAFETY

DOING RIGHT WHEN WE'RE TOLD YOU SHOULDN'T

SEGMENT 1 OF 9  
INTRODUCTION TO INTELLIGENT DISOBEDIENCE

Watch all segments at [www.irachaleff.com/speeches/](http://www.irachaleff.com/speeches/)

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## Facing Fear

- You have a choice to act or not act.
- Make your choice with the purpose in mind.
- Take an action your courage permits you to at that time.

Photo by [Sammie Chaffig](#) on [iStock](#)

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## Formula for Intelligent Disobedience

1. **Understand:** Understand the mission, goals, and values of the group.
2. **Examine:** Clarify orders as needed, then pause to further examine them.
3. **Choose:** Make a conscious choice to comply or resist.
  - Offer an acceptable alternative when there is one.
4. **Own It:** Assume personal accountability for your choice, recognizing that you are accountable for obedience.

“INTELLIGENT DISOBEDIENCE OFFERS THE TOOLS TO STAND UP AND DO THE RIGHT THING.”

—Bastion Edwards, Executive Director, Government Accountability Project

PROFOUNDLY RELEVANT FOR OUR TIMES

IRACHALEFF

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## Constructive Dissent Award

State Department  
American Foreign Service Association (AFSA)

James W. Bayuk  
U.S. Embassy Pretoria

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## Elements of Intelligent Disobedience

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- Observe the risk.
- Pause the action.
- Resist obeying.
- Counter pull if needed.
- Find safe alternatives.
- Execute.
- Return the lead.

IF A GUIDE DOG JUDGES THAT A COMMAND IS UNSAFE,  
**IT WILL REFUSE THE COMMAND.**  
This is called "intelligent disobedience."

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## Considerations for Civic Engagement

Global Followership Conference  
April 24-26, 2018 • Washington, DC, USA  
ELEVATING THE FOLLOWERSHIP AGENDA  
Keynote by Ira Chaleff (www.irachaleff.com)

Never Forget that Hitler was Elected

"When the loyal opposition dies, I think the soul of America dies with it."  
- Edward R. Murrow

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## Fulfilling the VCE Mission

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## Followership as a Role

The dual operating system

REAL WORK IS DONE ON  
**DYNAMIC TEAMS**

NOT  
**STATIC TEAMS**

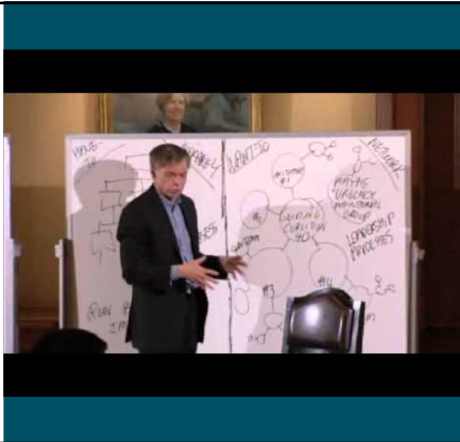
www.marcjacobsonhigham.com

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## Dual Operating Systems

"Believe it or not, we have, within the last hundred years, invented the modern organization—the modern corporation; and it is amazing what it can do, and it runs off of hierarchy and management process, and we take this for granted."  
- John Kotter



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## Our VCE Brand Narrative (Internal)



Virginia Cooperative Extension takes concrete action that advances the wellbeing of all Virginians.

Whether we're modernizing our food system, supporting local economies, or empowering youth, we help steward our natural resources, bridge access to knowledge, and shape a brighter future for our communities.

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## VCE Messaging Pillars



- 1) We understand the science and the context.
- 2) We advocate broadly and individually.
- 3) We plan strategically and act immediately.

How might courageous followership or intelligent disobedience relate to each of these pillars?

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## Meditations on Followership




MEDITATION ON FOLLOWERSHIP DAY 6

*"As an adult, I can relate on a peer basis to other adults who are the group's formal leaders."*

<https://irachaleffauthor.com/meditation-on-followership/>

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## Contact Us for More Information



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