



**GEORGIA SOUTHERN**  
UNIVERSITY

# Lessons on Influence and Followership

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# Agenda



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# Followership & Followers

- Followership is a field within leadership studies that seeks to understand the behaviors, characteristics, and identities that followers use.
- Followers **choose** to **dynamically** interact and commit within a relationship, to complement the strengths and weaknesses of another, to use and accept influence and share knowledge, and to work together to achieve a common goal.

## Reversing the Traditional Leadership Lens



**The Outdated Myth:** the romanticization of the leader

**The Strategic Reality:** Organizational success is largely dependent on followership and relies on multi-directional influence.

**Reversing the Lens:** *Follower-centric* studies allow us to study how how followers perceive themselves, build relationships, and drive shared goals, *for the benefit of the follower.*

# Followership Continuum



## Passive Followership

Focuses on obedience, deference, and limited responsibility. Prefers taking orders.

## Active Followership

Balances deference with providing feedback when asked. Highly engaged and supportive of the mission.

## Proactive Followership

Values accountability, independent decision-making, and initiative. Frequently initiates communications and acts without prompting.

## Three Pillars of Exemplary Followership: EA Edition



**Competency:** Unmatched situational awareness, deep institutional expertise, and rigorous attention to tactical details

**Connection:** High emotional intelligence, authentic relationship building, and an altruistic service mindset

**Initiative:** Autonomous problem-solving, managing uncertainty, and decisive action without requiring explicit direction

## Dynamics of Upward Leadership



**Informal Power:** Exerting influence through proximity, trust, problem-solving, and gatekeeping

**Redefining Influence:** Leadership is not determined by title; it is multi-directional. Power exchanges in modern organizations are dynamic.

*'A **strategic** and orchestrated **approach** for developing **clear expectations** and **communication** patterns that enable you and your supervisor to **work productively together** on behalf of both personal and **institutional goals**' (Gallos & Bolman, 2021, p. 162-163).*

# The Seven Steps to Managing Up

## *1: Know thyself*

- *Are you onboard with the mission?*
- *How do you respond to authority?*
- *What do you need to do your job well?*
- *What can you bring to the table?*

## *2: Understand the Principal*

- *What are their priorities, problems, and goals?*
- *What are their work styles and communication preferences?*
- *If you don't know, ASK!*

# The Seven Steps to Managing Up

## ***3: Offer solutions, not problems***

- ***Saves time, stress, attention***
- ***When you have an issue, come prepared with observations, research, ideas***

## ***4: Use time wisely***

- ***Use your time to be tactical, logistical, detail-oriented***
- ***Use your principal's time to check in, ask for support, report on goals***

# The Seven Steps to Managing Up

## ***5: Avoid surprises***

- *Do your research ahead of time*
- *Give them the heads-up when appropriate*
- *Learn when it is urgent, critical, or a show-stopper*

## ***6: Keep promises & deliver on commitments***

- *Creditability*
- *Trustworthiness*
- *Dependability*

# The Seven Steps to Managing Up

## *7: Speak up when necessary*

- *No one is perfect, including principals.*
- *Your perspective is valuable.*
- *Ask questions and offer opportunities to reflect*
- *Suggest alternatives*
- *Tell the truth!*

## Cultivating the Power of the Network

### **Internal Mentoring and Bridging**

Creating safe spaces to share institutional knowledge and advocating for staff across campus improves morale and institutional success.

### **External Professional Organizations**

Engagement within networks like NAPAHE exposes PAs to diverse institutional perspectives and validates unique professional challenges.

### **The Ripple Effect**

Peer-to-peer knowledge sharing rapidly breaks down institutional silos and directly enhances organizational continuity.

# EA + Principal = Exponential Impact

## Co-Constructed Leadership:

Success is not achieved by a solo hero, but through a dynamic partnership operating with shared goals.

## Exponential Capacity:

By proactively managing uncertainty and executing upward leadership, the EA exponentially increases the principal's strategic reach.

## Institutional Alignment:

EAs operate without regard for personal visibility, focusing purely on advancing the mission of the institution.

## Reclaiming Your Professional Identity



You are not a passive subordinate. **You are a dynamic, strategic follower who deliberately chooses to influence organizational outcomes.**

**Own Your Influence:** Use your institutional knowledge to shape decisions and guide operational processes.

**Advocate for your growth:** Pursue professional development that matches the strategic reality of your daily responsibilities.

**Sinew (noun): A chief supporting force; the connective tissue that provides strength and holds a complex structure together**

- **Institutional Stability:** providing crucial stability that outlasts individual leadership transitions
- **Cross-functional bridging:** connecting administrative units by nurturing extensive internal networks
- **Reputational Protection:** setting the tone, managing complex relationships, and safeguarding the integrity of the executive office.



# Targeted Growth Opportunities



**Executive Systems Thinking**

**Higher Education Leadership**

**AI Integration**

**Crisis Response**

**Strategic Communications**

**Project Management**

# **Discussion: Shared Practices and Institutional Impacts**

**-In what ways do you enact followership in your role?**

**-What are your strategies for upward leadership?**



**Thank you!**

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