



CHAPTER 12

Followership, Submission, and Self-Efficacy

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INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of the followership role influences our interpretation of how certain words are defined. Followership implies a hierarchical relationship in which the roles have different responsibilities. There is a leader and a follower who both have influence in the relationship. Whether through an employment contract, an ecclesiastical agreement, or other arrangements, a follower has submitted themselves to a certain degree to a leader. The understanding of the Biblical concept of submission shapes the relationship dynamic between the leader and the follower. This, in turn, may impact the self-efficacy of the follower. Self-efficacy is the belief that the completion of a task is achievable (Bandura, 1997). This chapter

Version of the Bible: New American Standard, 1995.

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K. Patterson, B. E. Winston (eds.), *The Nature of Biblical Followership, Volume 1*, Christian Faith Perspectives in Leadership and Business, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37085-4_12

seeks to examine the potential impact a broader understanding of the Biblical concept of submission could have on the self-efficacy of followers.

Does a narrow understanding of submitting to leaders reduce the self-efficacy and effectiveness of followers? Does the extreme interpretation of submission as “do as you’re told” silence the voice of followers and decrease their contribution to their organization? Questions such as these display the value of challenging our underlying assumptions (Schein, 2017) about the submission to leaders in an organization. Kittel et al. (1972) provides a definition of submit that includes a wide range of meanings based on the context of a situation rather than a singular meaning. However, many factors influence how followers view submission, including culture, religion, gender, family dynamics, and generational differences. When these influences encourage a narrow definition of submission, it can impact followers and reduce their self-efficacy and effectiveness. In addition, these factors can create personal tension for those who understand submission as simply doing what one is told to do. In this chapter, I suggest that challenging our underlying assumptions about submission impacts the self-efficacy of followers. Also, this chapter examines the self-efficacy of two Old Testament Biblical characters in followership roles related to their submission to leaders. Daniel and Abigail provide examples of followers displaying self-efficacy while navigating challenging situations in followership roles.

Followership

The term followership has gained traction over the years, and for many, there is a realization that followers in an organization have equal importance as leaders. Several years ago, Kelley (1988) stated, “followership is not a person but a role, and what distinguishes followers from leaders is not intelligence or character but the role they play” (p. 146). Depending on a person’s work or life situation, they may be in both the role of a follower and a leader in the course of a day. As a result, it is beneficial for all leaders and followers to continue expanding their knowledge about these roles.

As we consider followership in relation to submission and self-efficacy, we will use the definition developed by Crossman and Crossman (2011). The authors stated that “followership is a relational role in which followers have the ability to influence leaders and contribute to the improvement and attainment of group and organizational objectives. It is primarily a

hierarchically upwards influence” (Crossman & Crossman, 2011, p. 484). Followership is not meant to be a passive role. Organizations need followers who engage in innovation or direct communication when required with their leaders (Gobble, 2017). When followers are disengaged or face constructs that limit their engagement, the organization loses out on their contributions. Therefore, it is helpful for us all to consider the benefits of creating an environment where followers are engaged and challenge any misconceptions that may hold them back from full engagement.

Submission

Throughout my time working in higher education, I noticed a pattern of followers commenting in a defeated fashion about their lack of voice in the organization. I often heard statements such as, “[W]ell, she’s the one in charge” or “I guess we’ll have to do it because he’s the boss.” Even when these followers had insights and knowledge from the front lines of their areas that could positively influence the decision-making process, there was a sense that they were not permitted to speak and must submit to their leaders without input.

Many factors influence a follower’s interpretation of submission in the workplace. Cultural background, religious beliefs, gender role attitudes, family of origin, and generational differences all have the potential to impact a follower’s understanding of how to engage with a leader effectively. Followers often navigate the tensions between these factors and what they experience in their followership role.

Followers are impacted by their cultural experiences and often filter the world through these influences. One cultural dimension that connects with the concept of submission to leaders is power distance. Hofstede (2001) described the concept of power distance which measures the amount of “interpersonal power or influence” (p. 83) between two individuals involved in a hierarchical relationship. Power distance varies worldwide, with some countries having a greater power difference, resulting in followers not questioning their leaders. Other countries with less power distance reflect a more collaborative mindset between followers and leaders (Perez, 2017).

Religious beliefs influence followers’ understanding of submission to their leaders. Throughout the world, there are religious environments where complete submission is required, and it is not permissible to question those in authority. There are also religious structures that are more

egalitarian and may influence how followers view submission to leaders. In evangelical circles in the western world, an emphasis on submission in church and home situations, particularly for women, may impact the assumptions that followers bring to the workforce. Purser and Hennigan (2017) state that some religious-based employment training programs strongly emphasize submission to employers without providing a space for employees to express positive or negative insights to the organization.

From childhood, many people are conditioned to submit to authority and are aware that adverse consequences may result if they question those in authority over them (Chaleff, 1996). Followers who grew up in strict households with an authoritarian parent or parents may view the concept of submission to leaders differently. Authoritarian parenting centers on control and discipline without permitting autonomy to the child (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). A study by Yousaf (2015) discovered that an authoritarian parenting approach negatively impacts a person's self-efficacy. Often one-way communication is linked to an authoritarian style (Johnson & Hackman, 2018). While one-way communication is effective for younger children for instruction and safety reasons, as they develop, two-way communication provides a space for them to learn how to use their voice appropriately to have their needs met.

Generational differences may also impact how a follower interprets submission in the workplace. Older workers are more likely to respect a hierarchical system, while younger workers are more likely to be skeptical about structures until they are convinced (Smith, 2021). The views of followers in an organization on when to use their voice and when to complete tasks without questioning are likely to vary and include multiple influences along with their generational age.

For those approaching this topic from a Biblical framework, the word submit in the Bible is often used to describe how we should relate to each other. In the New Testament, the Greek word *hupotasso* typically translates as "submit." According to Kittel, in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (1972), this word "embraces a whole series of meanings from subjection to authority on the one side to considerate submission to others on the other. As regards the detailed meaning this can finally be decided only from the material context" (p. 45). Often, the Biblical understanding of the word "submit" is relegated to the authority side of the continuum and not defined based on a particular situation. A deeper understanding of submission may influence the way followers view their roles.

We are all born with certain personality traits which impact how we interact as followers and leaders. The concept of submission is a philosophy or pattern of thought that is influenced and developed throughout our lifetimes. For example, a follower may submit to their leader outwardly, but inwardly they may not possess the characteristics of someone with the agreeableness personality trait. Therefore, their outward observable behavior may not align with what they think or feel privately.

So, how does the concept of submission in the workplace differ from the personality trait of agreeableness? In the five-factor model of personality, agreeableness is one of the traits, along with openness to experience, extraversion, conscientiousness, and emotional stability (McCrae & Costa, 1996). Agreeableness is defined as “helpful, good-natured, cooperative, sympathetic, trusting, and forgiving” (Parks-Leduc et al., 2015, p. 4). Conversely, a person who is not agreeable may be “rude, selfish, hostile, uncooperative, and unkind” (Parks-Leduc et al., 2015, p. 4).

While agreeableness is a positive personality trait for the workplace, it does not require silencing a follower’s voice. Agreeableness is not contradictory to a follower using their voice to express ideas, questions, or uncertainty toward a presented idea or assigned task. Submitting to a leader can include these expressions and still be done in an agreeable fashion. How a follower interacts with their leader is influenced by their personality traits along with other dynamics such as self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1997) states that “self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). The concept of self-efficacy encompasses the followers’ belief that they possess the ability to accomplish tasks needed in their position. It is different from self-esteem, which centers around a person’s sense of worth but instead centers on a level of confidence in producing accomplishments (Trzesniewski et al., 2013). A high level of self-efficacy is displayed by the sense that a person can accomplish the task or challenge before them.

Closely tied to self-efficacy is the concept of locus of control developed by Rotter (1966), which engages a person’s belief in their ability to control events in their life. Locus of control focuses on the control a person believes they have over a situation and not on the ability to complete a task with competence (Strauser et al., 2002). A follower with an internal locus

of control believes that their actions control the outcome of a situation. In contrast, a follower with an external locus of control believes that outside factors influence the outcome, such as luck, fate, and other individuals (Rotter, 1966). It is important to distinguish between self-efficacy and locus of control as both impact a follower's performance.

Throughout my years working in higher education, I witnessed students taking responsibility when they did not complete a task or assignment and students placing the blame on the circumstances around them or other individuals. It was often relatively easy to determine which students were operating with an internal locus of control versus an external locus of control. According to Judge and Bono (2001), individuals were more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and perform well when they possessed a higher level of "core self-evaluation traits" (p. 80) which include internal locus of control along with self-esteem, self-efficacy, and emotional stability. All these traits hold importance when considering how followers perform in the workplace. However, we will proceed by examining the development of self-efficacy in individuals.

Sources of Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Bandura (1997) indicated that people's beliefs about their self-efficacy arise from four primary sources. Mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional and physiological states provide information that a person engages with as they understand their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). These four sources reflect the concepts of doing, seeing, hearing, and feeling (Halliwell et al., 2021). You will see these four simplified concepts reflected in the sources of self-efficacy as we explore their meanings.

Mastery experiences or the actual accomplishments of an individual provide the understanding that they have the skills and ability to perform a task (Bandura, 1997). For example, when we successfully organize an event, deliver a speech at a luncheon, or prepare the annual departmental budget, we have proof that we can accomplish the assignments given to us. This provides support for challenging those we are leading or mentoring to undertake tasks they have the skills for but may not yet have experienced. Petrie (2015), a Senior Faculty member with the Center for Creative Leadership, uses the term "heat experiences" to describe putting someone into a situation to expand their skills by stretching them (p. 3). These experiences increase a follower's sense of self-efficacy. When a follower experiences failure in completing a task, self-efficacy is potentially

lowered (Bandura, 1997). The response of those around them regarding failure can help alleviate the sense that they will never be able to accomplish a task, or it can feed into this fear.

Vicarious experiences or observing others like themselves complete tasks provide feedback to a person that they also are likely to succeed at the same task (Bandura, 1997). When working alongside others, there is a natural tendency to observe, compare, and make assessments of others' accomplishments (Bandura, 1997). When we observe others accomplishing tasks or succeeding with a challenge, our perspective and belief that we could also have that same success increase. This increase in self-efficacy does not require having the experience ourselves, but only that we have observed another follower like us meet a challenge.

Bandura (1997) explained that verbal persuasion provides another source for developing self-efficacy. When others communicate that they believe in a person's capabilities to achieve the desired outcome, this bolsters the self-efficacy within the person (Bandura, 1997). The impact may be positive or negative depending on who is influencing the followers' self-efficacy beliefs through verbal persuasion. Consistent messages that a person is not intelligent, capable, or permitted to think independently hamper their ability to develop self-efficacy. Not all voices speaking into a follower's life are equally beneficial.

Emotional and physiological states relate to how a person feels while completing tasks (Bandura, 1997). When there are negative physical symptoms such as a sense of anxiety, an upset stomach, bodily tensing, rapid heartbeat, or shaking when facing a task, a person reads these signals as indicators that they will not succeed in accomplishing the task (Bandura, 1997). People focus on their somatic reactions at various levels. Some resolve the tension by stopping the task, and others by pushing through and concentrating on signals outside their body to complete it (Bandura, 1997).

Incorporating reflection into the rhythms of life of the followers provides a space to consider the impact emotional and physiological states have on their self-efficacy (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). The need for reflection supports the concept of coaching followers as well as leaders. As other authors in this book explore the role of coaching with followers, I will not go deeply into this territory but will advocate the benefit of followers finding a way to incorporate coaching into their development and understanding of their self-efficacy.

Self-awareness of the benefit of expanding self-efficacy, along with the ability to recognize the value of relationships to support this goal, is essential (Aron et al., 2013). Self-expansion theory proposes that “people have a basic motivation to expand their efficacy and building close relationships with others is a major way to achieve self-expansion” (Duan et al., 2022). In reviewing the four primary sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), a clear connection of the value of relationships is observed. Both vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion rely on relationship connections. Through these relationships, a follower benefits from the resources and perspectives of individuals around them (Aron et al., 2013). Observing how others interpret submission in the workplace could influence a follower to expand their interpretation of this concept.

Biblical Examples

In considering the connection between submission and self-efficacy in followers, two characters in the Old Testament provide rich examples of individuals who displayed a high level of self-efficacy while remaining in a submissive posture. The passages about Daniel reveal a lifetime of effective followership. Throughout the book of Daniel, examples provide clarity on his self-efficacy, starting from when he was a young man and extending to his experiences with several rulers. Although Scriptures provide only one significant section regarding Abigail’s life, the interactions in this segment display her high level of self-efficacy as a follower.

Daniel

Daniel, a character from the Old Testament, provides an example of a follower who submitted to his leaders and God while displaying a high level of self-efficacy. As a Jewish follower of God, Daniel faced many challenges when he was taken to Babylon and put into the service of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:1–6). The Babylonian King imposed his role as a follower upon him, but his role as a follower of God remained his choice and top priority. As a strongly committed follower of God, Daniel knew God had protected people in dire situations throughout the centuries. These vicarious experiences would have emboldened him as he balanced his follower roles.

Daniel lived as a follower of God “at the highest levels of pagan political authority,” along with his friends, and was faithful in his service and true to God (Wright, 2004, p. 241). It is important to note that to “these four

youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom” (Daniel 1:17, NAS). God equipped Daniel and his friends for the work they were to do in Babylon. When Daniel stood before the king to interpret a dream, he continued to give God all the credit for his abilities (Daniel 2:28). Daniel’s self-efficacy was likely impacted through verbal persuasion, through his relationship with both God and his fellow peers.

Even at a young age, Daniel appeared to possess an “expert level” of development which required him to understand his role, the role of others, and to adjust his behavior to what was happening at the moment (Van Velsor et al., 2010, p. 150). For example, one of Daniel’s first actions recorded involved a request not to eat the king’s diet, which required him to resist the desires of his new leader (Rindge, 2010). Daniel was aware that meat was often offered to idols in his new culture, and he “made up his mind that he would not defile himself” by disobeying God (Daniel 1:8, NAS). These mastery experiences built upon each other throughout his life, increasing his self-efficacy.

Under King Darius, Daniel did not compromise his beliefs and was thrown into a den of lions and subsequently protected by God (Daniel 6:16). This situation undoubtedly produced a level of intense emotional and physiological reactions that did not result in Daniel altering his stance. It is possible to feel strong somatic responses when facing a difficult situation and press forward with God’s strength. Daniel and his friends rose to the highest levels of government, according to Wright (2004), while remaining devoted to God. Daniel remained faithful to God throughout his long life as an advisor to the rulers in Babylon.

Daniel’s excellent reputation and unwavering integrity allowed him to stay in service through many changes in sovereign rulers (Wright, 2004). He served in a follower role for his entire service in Babylon. As evidenced by the amount of trust placed in him by his leaders, we can surmise that he possessed a high level of self-efficacy. Daniel displayed an understanding that he knew that his skills came from God, and he used these skills effectively as he served his leaders.

Abigail

Abigail provides an example of a woman who displayed a high amount of self-efficacy while remaining in a submissive position to David, the future King of Israel. When Abigail confronted the leader David in 1 Samuel 25, we have an excellent case of a person selecting the correct technique to

challenge a leader. As a result of her God-given wisdom in this situation, her household was spared, and David did not act rashly.

In this story, Abigail goes to meet David with the intention of persuading him not to destroy her household due to a disrespectful exchange her husband Nabal had with messengers sent by David. Abigail persuaded David by bringing perspective to the situation and focused his attention on the future and the harm that would occur if he chose to commit murder due to vengeance (Carman, 2015). Abigail framed her speech with the understanding she was speaking to the next anointed King of Israel by referencing his dynasty and the negative impact that bloodshed would have on his future (Carman, 2015). She understood his motivation was to serve God and that a rash decision would not be in alignment with this desire (van Wolde, 2002).

Abigail provided a different plan of action by requesting forgiveness from David for her household and explaining that he would benefit by not having murder on his conscience (van Wolde, 2002). Her willingness to run toward danger and give a compelling speech resulted in David recognizing her “good judgment” (1 Sam. 25:33, NAS) and acknowledging that she had diverted him from a terrible situation (Hyman, 1995). By providing a positive response to Abigail, David offered a form of verbal persuasion to her, reinforcing that she was capable of persuading and protecting her family.

Chaleff (2003) recommends that when followers find themselves needing to challenge a leader, they select the correct technique to encourage a leader to view a decision from a new angle. Abigail did this well by persuading David to spare her household and not blemish his reputation as the next King. She was likely experienced in using this technique with her husband Nabal, who was described as “harsh and evil in his dealings” (1 Samuel 25:3, NAS). These mastery experiences prepared her for the encounter that she had with David and probably impacted her effectiveness. Her self-efficacy as a follower is evident in her speed of action and ability to navigate a tense situation successfully.

Daniel and Abigail Submitted to God and Earthly Leaders

Both Daniel and Abigail displayed appropriate submission to the leaders they interacted with and demonstrated self-efficacy in their interactions. Daniel’s self-efficacy was evident in the way that he confidently used his voice to interact with those in authority over him. He was respectful in his discourse while balancing the tension of honoring God as he served his

captors. Although the information about Abigail only allowed a glimpse into her life, her self-efficacy was apparent in her interactions with David. She also balanced the dual role of obeying God while engaging in a challenging dialogue with the future King of Israel. These two Biblical characters provide examples to followers who desire to submit to those in authority over them with a style that reflects a high level of self-efficacy.

The concept of submission in Scripture varies based on whom a follower is submitting to in a particular situation. While we understand that our submission to God is different from our submission to human authority, we also see situations where individuals question God about what he asks of them. For example, Abraham questioned God about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18), and David, throughout the book of Psalms, questioned God while remaining submitted to him. Submission to an authority does not mean that a follower cannot engage in dialogue to understand a situation better or attempt to influence their leader.

Being fully submitted to God looks different than submitting to an earthly leader. God is omniscient and cannot overlook important information. His nature does not leave room for errors or misjudgments. Followers of God can safely submit to his instruction and leading without concern that a misstep by God may occur. Submission is both an observable behavior and an attitude of the heart. As displayed by the examples of Daniel and Abigail, it is possible for followers to possess high levels of self-efficacy, express concepts and concerns to their leaders, and remain in an appropriate submissive posture in challenging situations.

Connecting the Concepts

In the workplace, effective followership will require the follower to practice agility by interpreting which situations require compliance without questions and which cases invite their input. This agility will likely require a mindset shift from interpreting each instruction from a leader as a directive to evaluating instructions through a different lens. The follower would then consider whether or not there is additional information that they could add to the situation to provide clarity or perhaps innovation. This increased participation could result in a more collaborative partnership between followers and leaders. The subsequent positive impact on followers' self-efficacy provides an incentive to continue to partner with their leaders. As followers develop into strong contributors in the workplace,

there is a positive impact on organizational objectives (Crossman & Crossman, 2011).

Devastating results can occur if followers do not speak up during critical situations. When followers understand submission in the workplace to mean that they are not permitted to question leaders, this may result in the withholding of valuable information. For example, a British plane crashed in England in 1989 after the pilots turned off the wrong engine while dealing with an engine fire (Guenter et al., 2017). One of the survivors indicated that the cabin crew members noticed the mistake but chose not to tell the pilots as they did not want to question the authority of their leader. As a result of this decision, 47 people died in this crash. The crew members appear to have interpreted submission to their leader as doing what they are told instead of understanding they would still be respecting their leader by being proactive and providing information about the error. Terms such as “proactive followership (Guenter et al., 2017),” “courageous followership (Chaleff, 1996, p. 16),” and “intelligent disobedience (Chaleff, 2015, p. 1)” are used by leadership experts to adjust the paradigm in complex situations when fully submitting to a nonomniscient leader is unwise.

Organizational leaders who observe followers displaying a narrow view of submission in the workplace are positioned to engage the followers in conversation about their beliefs around this topic. Approaching these conversations using a coaching framework by asking questions and listening to the nuance in the follower’s responses is a helpful first step to shifting the mindset of the follower and potentially increasing their self-efficacy.

Leaders can directly impact self-efficacy development by intentionally using verbal persuasion. Verbally encouraging followers when they are completing tasks provides an environment that fosters self-efficacy. When followers successfully complete tasks, they then have mastery experiences to reference when facing the next challenge. Leaders can also showcase followers in the organization who have successfully completed assignments. These vicarious experiences provide evidence to followers that there is a likelihood of success when they face these assignments. When followers express that they are experiencing negative emotional and physiological states, leaders can provide a safe environment to express these concerns. Offering coaching to followers at all organizational levels gives them space for reflection. It also provides accountability for followers who desire to press forward when experiencing these emotional and physical impacts.

The concept of follower voice ties in closely with our focus on self-efficacy and the proper understanding of submission in the workplace. Morrison (2014) defined employee voice as communication by an employee or, in our case, a follower which contains “ideas, suggestions, concerns, information about problems, or opinions about work-related issues to persons who might be able to take appropriate action, with the intent to bring about improvement or change” (p. 174). Followers who have the freedom to communicate to their leaders their ideas and insights have the potential to positively impact their organization (Chen et al., 2021; Crossman & Crossman, 2011).

If followers have internalized the message that they are not free to exert influence up their hierarchical chain, the organization risks losing out on valuable insights, observations, and innovations. A clear understanding of what it means to be an effective follower while submitting to the leadership structure includes using their voice, their influence, and practicing self-efficacy in their role.

Encouraging an organizational culture that supports employee voice, collaboration, partnership, and innovation benefits the group and can provide fresh viewpoints and resources for the leaders (Morrison, 2014). In addition, intentionally inviting followers to participate, when appropriate, in organizational decision-making offers the opportunity to engage different voices. These efforts strengthen the organization while also strengthening the self-efficacy of the followers.

CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the connections between followers’ understanding of submission and their self-efficacy. Embracing the extreme interpretation of submission as “do as you’re told” reduces the voice of followers and decreases their contribution to their organization. When followers are silent, their influence in the organization decreases along with any positive impact their input would have yielded. For some followers, this will require a mindset shift and re-examining the dynamics between followers and leaders. This shift in mindset may permit followers to use their employee voice in a way they formerly thought was off-limits.

Leaders can impact how submission is viewed in their organization by encouraging followers to engage when appropriate. Directly supporting followers by using verbal persuasion, providing opportunities for mastery experiences, and offering coaching as an option for reflection can also

positively impact followers. Without overlooking the complexities of the followership role, the impact that embracing a broader view of submission could have on a person's self-efficacy for the benefit of organizations is worth exploring more.

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