

## Followers' Perspective Does Matter! (Follow up to You Have What? Personality! Traits that Predict Leadership Styles for Elementary Principals)

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### Abstract

If a transformational leader seeks to grow and be effective and efficient, then, it would be wise to listen to follower's perspective regarding the leader's effectiveness and efficiency. How many times do followers have opportunities to evaluate their supervisor? Not often. Feedback is provided at least once a year via evaluations. A good follower will question areas of opportunities and work towards improving in areas of growth. A good follower makes a concerted effort to learn from the evaluation to grow professionally while others choose to take the feedback personally. In a school setting, the Principal runs the school and teachers are in charge in the classroom. Principals and vice principals observe the teachers at least twice a year. Imagine having teachers evaluate the principal? Better yet, imagine students' evaluating teachers? What kind of results can we expect?

**Keywords:** Followers' perspective; Leadership styles; Perceptions matters; Student perspectives matters; Big five personality traits

### Introduction

There is a plethora of research on how personality can affect leadership, but most of those studies were self-assessed. Extraversion has been the top leadership predictor for the Big Five Personality Traits when correlations were measured. Extraversion, as explained by Daft [1] is the degree to which a person is sociable, outgoing, and comfortable and talkative to new people. According to a study by Judge et al. [2] article that included both quantitative and qualitative research, the strongest predictor of leadership was Extraversion. According to Garcia et al. [3], "Leadership is like a tornado: leadership encapsulates everything in its path and leaves a lasting effect." The type of leadership a leader possesses can positively impact or be detrimental to followers in an organization. Waters et al. [4] stated that school leadership makes a difference.

In a school setting, during school and after-school, educators and administrators have the opportunity to be agents of change. Having a title or credentials does not assure that a person possesses great leadership skills. If a person in a leadership role does not take on the responsibility of leading followers, then problems will arise, especially with teachers which can transcend to students. It is easy to blame the teacher, but let us be realistic. There are some teachers and principals, for that matter, who do not belong in the classroom or in a school setting because of ineffective leadership and a negative outlook. Compile that negative outlook and it trickles down to the students. I am not suggesting that all students are unruly, but for those that already are difficult, the lack of leadership by a teacher or principal only exacerbates the problem. That type of mentality can be toxic to the teachers, students, school, and environment during school or afterschool programs.

Connelly wrote [5] that for effective learning to take place by both students and teachers, the role of the principal has become more complex. In other the words, the principal's must demonstrate vision, courage and the skills to advocate so that effective learning can take place for both adults and students. When a principal possesses those needed skills, then the principal will likely be equipped to handle adversity. School staff today seems to walk on pins and needles because principals are focused on meeting state requirements for standardized testing. In Texas schools, accountability is measured in three categories: not rated,

met standard and needs improvement, according to Texas Education Agency website [6]. I can only imagine the stress that the principal deals with, but think of how the principal's leadership is being perceived by all: teachers, staff, students, parents and the community.

Leithwood et al. [7] summarized key findings of a comprehensive review of successful school leaders. They found seven items that claim effective school leadership. One of the identified seven claims results from successful leaders gravitating to basic leadership. Previous studies suggest that Extraversion is a predictor of leadership which is good to know, but how does that help the leader deal with the follower? Dealing with at-risk youth in urban food deserts in San Antonio and Houston for two grant-funded projects has made me more cognizant of how I lead as I am trying to positively impact vulnerable youth. The team I have in place needs to be aware of their actions as our at-risk youth followers can be affected in a positive or negative manner. There is no room for negativity when dealing with at-risk youth. Students can easily detect the mood that the teacher is in, as well as the principal's mood. As much as teachers and parents complain, some students have valid concerns when they make comments that suggest their teacher/principal is not being an effective leader. If only the students can be heard in some manner that would allow them to express them on how they perceive the teacher/principals to lead. After all, the principals and teachers are professional, right? One would hope that if they are transformational leaders, they will be open to constructive criticism and make the needed changes to accommodate the individuals they lead.

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How empowering would that be to allow students to rate their teacher's and principal's leadership styles using the Big Five Personality Traits? It is amazing to hear what students have to say when rapport has been established with them over a period of time because the coveted trust has also been established. This communication might lead to student success in the classroom and bolster self-confidence and self-esteem for those students who struggle to deal with authority.

## Body

Leaders are often seen only as those who are at the helm, but followers can be leaders too. Leaders impact followers in many capacities, but more importantly, how leaders are perceived by followers should be considered when hiring the individuals, especially for those that work with at-risk youth. Leadership is a trickle-down effect. Followers reflect their leaders' effectiveness. Working with at-risk youth in urban food deserts in San Antonio and Houston has shed more light on this area. My background as an educator and advocate for youth puts me in the limelight as I am turned to for leadership. Equally important is how the followers feel. As a transformational leader, I am open to constructive criticism as I quickly make adjustments to meet the needs of my followers. Sharing the responsibility with students for input to rate those that lead them should prove to be interesting, to say the least. As adults, we are set in our ways.

Heaven forbid that adults take feedback from students! Think about it for a moment. Let it sink in and process the idea of having followers, in this case, students, rates those who lead them. I feel that this not only provides accountability on both parties involved, but also shows that adults are willing to trust the students for feedback to make the learning environment conducive for success to be attained. I would hope that the results of the assessment lead to changes that are visible so everyone can move forward knowing that students do have a voice. It is easy to get caught in research, but adults can be blinded to what is in front of them: the students they teach and lead. Whether it is in the classroom or an afterschool program, students should have the opportunity to have their voices heard. We must let followers (especially students) know that

anything can be accomplished when teamwork is present. Talk about empowering vulnerable youth!

## Conclusion

While there is much research on leadership and personality, most of the research is self-assessed. For many studies, extraversion was a predictor of leadership. That was not the case for the study I conducted in 2013. Follower perceptions of leaders needs more attention. My research proved that not be the norm. Followers seek emotionally stable leaders which fall under neuroticism under the Big Five Personality Traits. According to Daft [1], neuroticism is the degree to which a person is calm, well-adjusted, and secure. When leaders truly seek to grow and be transformational, leaders are easily able to accept constructive criticism to make the collaboration with followers more effective and efficient. More studies having followers rate leaders may show there to be a paradigm shift that is desperately needed. Just like the old theory that leaders are born and not made, we can say times have changed. Leadership can be taught.

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