



**Great leaders
know when to be
great followers**

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“Lead me, follow me, or get out of my way”

General George Patton

As an AoEC coach you're going to be whip-smart and super-wise, and as such you'll know the answer to this question.

Imagine that you're a leader in a room with 10 colleagues, all of whom are gnashing their teeth in disagreement on which way the team should proceed.

Whose job is it to make the final call?

Yes, if you're the leader - it's yours. That's a given.

As you know, it's always the leaders' job to make the final decision - that's what they get paid the big bucks. After all, somebody within the four walls has to - and that's what leaders are there for (even if the leader decides to delegate the decision, or delay the decision - they've still decided that to be so, as such they always decide.)

Needless to say if you've got sweaty palms right now because the very idea of making rapid-fire decisions make you want to run for the hills, and you certainly don't see decision making as a 'natural strength', then fear not; it's a mental muscle that can be strengthened. Daniel Goleman, the Author of *Emotional Intelligence* told me once: "You can build mental muscles just like you can build biceps when you go to the gym." - decision making is just one of those muscles.

But what if you're NOT the leader in the room, what if you're one of the 10 followers? Then what? What if the decision, despite your astute protestations goes against you? How do you respond then? Well, how you respond is a sure sign of your leadership quotient and ability.

Let me explain:

A Captain of a trawling fishing boat calls everybody to the bridge of the boat and says, 'I believe our next big catch of Atlantic Haddock are due South East from here, I want to steer that way - what say ye?'...Then suddenly the crew (including you) adamantly disagree, ranting; 'No way! the next big catch, just like last time, is North West - definitely North West'. A good Captain will genuinely listen to the crews' logic and argument - and then decide. So let's assume that the Captain in this instances sticks to his judgement and heads SE.

How would you / the 9 other followers usually respond? Well, it's usually one of these four (not just on fishing trawlers, but in life):

- i) They go down below deck and sulk. Then for the rest of the journey, they put in 20-30% of the normal effort in - hoping the lack of their effort will ultimately result in poor results thereby proving the Captain wrong.
- ii) They go down below and take out their fish filleting knife and start trying to cut through the bottom of the boat to drown sink the boat and everyone with it (these folk don't represent the Captain's best talent).
- iii) They agree with the Captain say "Aye Aye Sir", and then as soon as they're out the Bridge, with soft breath they utter "our Captain is a muppet" and undermine them whenever possible.
- iv) The great follower-leaders recognise that although they disagree with the Captain - they nod, they say "Aye Aye Sir" and put 110% effort in going forward, hoping that the Captain is right - They remember ; "It's not who is right, it's what is right". They do this because they have respect that the final decision is that of the Captain. They also remember that one day they might be, and probably will be, in the Captain position and would wish for the same.

You see to be a great leader you also have to be a great follower - otherwise if everybody sets sail in different directions, the boat isn't going to catch many fish. As the big man himself, Aristotle said, *"He who has never learned to obey, can never be a good commander"*.

Back to the shore, and over at the O2 head office:

When I interviewed Matthew Key the CEO of Telefonica UK (O2) he said:

"It's a sign of a great team - that you can have tensions in the boardroom, but as soon as you all walk out of the boardroom you're all absolutely aligned behind the decision. I call it constructive tension: constructive tension is very good, destructive tension is not good. Have the debate, decide what you're going to do, but when you walk out that boardroom you have to be 100% aligned - as a team".

This is because he's got great followers beneath him - aka as: great leaders.

So, unless you're the CEO of the business, even then the Chairman is your boss, then it's very likely that you'll be overruled by a superior and you'll find yourself in the *'follower position'*.

When this happens - remember that when the orders are given, commit 110% to making them work, even if it proves you wrong.

After all - being a great follower, whether you're on a trawling boat or in a FTSE 100 boardroom, is what defines great leaders - and when it's your turn to make the 'final call' you'll want those great followers around you too - this is how lots of fish are caught, and this is how high performance teams operate.

To be a great leader, be a great follower. Good luck.