Chapter One

FICTIONS

In 2003 an ad agency by the name of McKinney and Silver rolled out a slogan that caught on fast. Hired to persuade people in the market for premium cars that Audi cars were better than their competition, the agency created a tag line, “Never Follow.”

The “Never Follow” print ad was striking. One two-page spread had a shot of most but not all of a sleek, gray Audi A6 Avant on the left hand side; and on the right a picture of front of the car, the nose, along with the words “Never Follow” etched in fine white letters. These glossy, minimalist ads were so effective that in short order “Never Follow” was transformed from a routine promotional campaign into a “multi-tiered communications program honoring innovators in the fields of music, film, literature and sports.” Celebrities such as rock legend David Bowie and actor William H. Macy were held up as exemplars of Audi’s “Never Follow philosophy” – as talented performers who “embraced a Never Follow approach.”[1]

Over time the tag line was associated with all Audi automobiles, and as I write it is still being used. The question is what accounts for its stunning success? Why has this particular slogan – which admonishes us *never* to follow – lasted so long when so many others come and go? Because “Never Follow” taps into a fear rooted deep in the American psyche. It reflects our aversion to being, or to be seen as being, one among many in a meek and mindless herd.[2] The word “never” says it all. It says plainly that there is no conceivable circumstance under which we should fall so low as to fall into

line. And it says equally plainly that to be a follower rather than a leader is to be second best.

I should add Americans are not the only ones quick to deny they are followers. On announcing he was stepping down as Prime Minister, Tony Blair made it a point to declare that: "Britain is not a follower. It is a leader."[3] But Americans have had an anti-authority, "Never Follow," mindset from the beginning, going all the way back. In 1683 a Flemish missionary monk observed of Native Americans: They "think every one ought to be left to their own opinion, without being thwarted." Another added there was "nothing so difficult to control as the tribes of America." They do not know what is "meant by the bridle and bit." In turn, Native Americans were apparently aghast at the European habit of hierarchies, in which those on the lower rungs of the ladder deferred to those higher up.[4]

Until the mid 1700s most European Americans assumed their way of doing things would never be challenged. They were content with stratified societies, in which some were rich and some poor, some honored and some obscure, some powerful and some weak. But the Revolutionary War changed everything. As historian Bernard Bailyn wrote, it "brought with it arguments and attitudes bred of arguments endlessly repeated, that undermined [the] premises of the *ancient regime*."[5] There could be no clinging to a strictly stratified society during a decade in which defiance of the highest constituted powers "poured from the colonial presses and was hurled from half the pulpits of the land. The right, the need, the absolute obligation to disobey legally constituted authority had become the universal cry." Rather than *obedience* it was *resistance* that became a

"doctrine according to godliness."[6] In other words, rather than following, it was refusing to follow that was considered at the time to be necessary and appropriate. .

Once religious dissent joined political dissent - in New England a scion of the church went so far as to negate "all human authority in matters of faith and worship" – it became commonplace, commendable even, to challenge people in high places and to be in obvious ways defiant.[7] It was this anti-government, anti-authority attitude that came over the years to be considered quintessentially American. As political scientist Samuel Huntington has observed, the ideas that constitute the American Creed - equality, liberty, individualism, constitutionalism and democracy - clearly demonstrate that "opposition to power, and suspicion of government as the most dangerous embodiment of power, are the essential themes of American political thought."[8] In other words this was a political culture in which anything was better than being, merely, a follower.

The culture of capitalism further fed the habit of resistance. In nineteenth century America, Alexander Hamilton's grand capitalist dream fused with Thomas Jefferson's democratic idealism. "The result was to electrify the democratic individual with a passion for great achievement and to produce a personality type that was neither Hamiltonian nor Jeffersonian but a strange mixture of them both: the heroes of Horatio Alger."[9] Alger wrote hugely popular rags to riches stories, in which young boys, whose only resources were their own determination and drive, advanced from poverty to wealth and acclaim. The moral of each story was obvious: The rewards of success go to those who are individualistic go-getters, not to those who are content to conform. Put another way, it now seemed America's economic system went hand in glove with its political system. Both valued the entrepreneurial individual more than the group as a whole.

Our reluctance to go along complicates the lives of leaders – and that of followers as well. Moreover it puts on them, on us, an onus. For in a country that since its revolutionary inception has honored those who resist people in positions of authority, there is no glory to be had in toeing the line. In fact, the American Revolution or, more precisely, the ideas that inspired it, created a culture in which even now, at least under certain circumstances, civil *dis*obedience is more admired than is civil obedience. This is not to suggest that Americans ordinarily honor those who break the law. As we have just seen, constitutionalism and the rule of law that it implies are among our core beliefs. But it is to point out that we do not place an especially high value on convention and conformity. Recall the American archetype – he is not the common man content with the commonplace. Rather he is the cowboy, who prefers to be alone, rather comply with the conventions of others.

Alexis de Tocqueville observed in his classic, *Democracy in America,* that Americans did not "recognize any signs of incontestable greatness or superiority in any of their fellows." Rather they relied on "their own judgment as the most apparent and accessible test of truth." While the independence to which Tocqueville alludes is generally considered admirable, it does not make it easy to govern, to lead. In fact in a national culture in which, again in Tocqueville's words, there "is a general distaste for accepting any man's word as proof of anything," the exercise of leadership is destined to be difficult.[10] But the implication of the resistance to which Tocqueville alludes is even more fundamental and far-reaching. For not only are the roles and reputations of leaders at stake, so are the roles and reputations of followers. To refuse to recognize "incontestable greatness or superiority" in anyone else is to put a premium on

individuality and independence. Anything less is to be a follower – anything less is to be a sheep.

<A> <u>Fear of Following</u>

Since the word "follower" is considered something of an insult, certainly in the United States, it has been shunned by those in the leadership industry. For example leadership expert John Gardner so disliked the word "follower" that he chose simply not to use it. "The connotations of the word 'follower' suggest too much passivity and dependence to make it a fit term for those who are at the other end of the dialogue with leaders," Gardner wrote. "For this reason I shall make frequent use of the word 'constituent.'"[11] Other students of leadership have similarly distanced themselves, on the presumption that to be a follower is to be somehow diminished. So, in addition to "constituent," euphemisms such as "associate" or "member" or "subordinate" have been used.[12] The Wharton School's Michael Useem went even further. Although one of his books was clearly intended for those in subordinate positions as opposed to those in superior ones, he titled it *Leading Up: How to Lead Your Boss So You Both Win.* The point of *Leading Up* was to urge people to "come forward [even] when an organization or superior does not encourage it."[13] But since "leading" of any kind is better than "following" of any kind, Useem made his pitch by embracing the former and rejecting the latter.[14]

Even when "follower" has been used, there was a strong sense that somehow it had to be justified, explained away. In *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, Joseph Rost insisted that although others might find it condescending, he had "no trouble with the word *followers*."[15] But then he went on to disassociate himself from the idea that

followers were “passive.” This, he insisted, was an old-fashioned way of thinking, one that reflected the dynamics of decades past in which leaders were directive and active and followers were “submissive and passive.” Now, Rost argued, things were different. Since leaders are no longer equated with being superior, followers should no longer be equated with being subordinate.

Rost was typical of leadership experts more generally: Under no circumstance did they, we, want to be seen as callous calculators of a dynamic in which one party was destined always to be dominant, and the other always to be dominated. For most of the last two decades, the period during which leadership education and development became big business, this was the prevailing sensibility. While on the one hand we were obsessed with leaders, on the other we did not want to appear to diminish followers.

In the last couple of years our reluctance to use the word follower has receded - somewhat. We are more willing now than we were before to acknowledge that followers are integral to the leadership process, and to use the word without worrying that we are being condescending. As one scholar noted, “An increasing number of writers argue that ‘exemplary,’ ‘courageous,’ and ‘star’ followers are a precondition for ‘successful’ organizations.” Rejecting the common stereotype of followers as “timid, docile sheep,” these experts claim that good followership matters – a great deal.[16]

Still, the fear of following has precluded us from exploring followership in full – and deluded us into thinking that power between leaders and followers is easily shared, which it is not. In corporate America especially, we are loath to admit the obvious: Those high on the organizational ladder generally dominate those lower down. To obscure the unpleasant truth that power relationships persist, we use language that lulls us into

thinking things are different from what they really are.[17] Words and terms recently in fashion, especially in corporate America , including “empowerment,” “participation,” “teams,” and “distributed leadership,” all suggest rather a level playing field, which by and large is false. While many if not most organizational hierarchies have been flattened in recent years, leaders and managers remain firmly in control. Whatever the jargon, the fact is that most organizations still have systems and structures in which superiors control their subordinates.

Joanne Ciulla has suggested the word “empowerment” is the most insidious. Employers who empower their employees “to be leaders in their own way” are presumed to be those who are the most enlightened, the most willing to blur the distinction between those at the top and those at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy. The trouble is the promise of empowerment is often empty, bogus.[18] Rather than being indicative of genuine power-sharing, the very use of the word empowerment is often manipulative, intended to keep subordinates in line by deluding them into thinking that in some fundamental way their relationship to their superiors has changed.

Again, this is not to suggest that to speak of empowerment is by definition to be inauthentic. In their recent book, *True North*, Bill George and Peter Sims clearly mean it when they ask, “If mutual respect provides the foundation for bringing out the best from people, what are the steps needed to empower them?”[19] Rather it is to point to the persisting gap between what is promised and what is delivered. To take perhaps the most glaring example of how the most fundamental power relationship in corporate America has not really changed, there is this simple statistic: During the three year period 2003 to 2005, more than four and one quarter million American workers were involuntarily

separated from their jobs. So at a minimum we can say this: In those situations in which superiors have the right to dismiss their subordinates, words like “empowerment,” and “distributed leadership,” are more in the realm of fantasy than fact.

So keen are we to avoid the very idea of followership that sometimes even our reasoning is tortuous. “Followers do not do followership,” Rost wrote. “They do leadership. Both leaders and followers form one relationship that is leadership. There is no such thing as followership in the new school of leadership.”[20] Where is the logic in this? How can there be leadership but no followership? How can followers not “do followership”? What does it mean to speak of a “new school of leadership” if the dynamics of power, authority, and influence are endemic to the human condition? It is telling, is it not, that by his own testimony, each and every one of William Styron’s novels focused on one recurrent theme: “the catastrophic propensity on the part of human beings to attempt to dominate one another.”[21]

I have colleagues who, when I told them I was writing a book about followers, insisted there was no such thing. Every leader is a follower, they argued, a point with which I agree. But then they went on to claim that every follower is also a leader, a point with which I emphatically disagree. It is true that those at the top of the greasy pole are vulnerable to being bumped off. Thus they have no choice but to track, to follow if you will, their followers, if only to ensure they stay in line. The converse, though, is not true. While in some circumstances it is possible for followers to exercise leadership, to “lead up,” in other circumstances it is not. Sometimes followers are in every way and at every moment subordinate to, or even at the mercy of, those who are in positions of power and

authority. We must conclude, then, that however endearing the idea that subordinates can freely and easily impact on their superiors, it is mostly misguided.

<A> The Importance of Being a Follower

Notwithstanding the obvious – that leaders generally have more power, authority and influence than do followers - we still overestimate the importance of the former and underestimate the importance of the latter. Undeterred by the fact that leaders and followers are inextricably enmeshed, each defined by and dependent on the other, we continue to dwell on the first and dismiss the second.

This disposition affects not only how we perform in the present but how we perceive the past. To take one of the most obvious and extreme examples, while there have been a few excellent books on Germans who fuelled the machine that was Nazi Germany, the explanatory paradigm that still prevails is Hitler. It is Hitler who is held responsible for the Second World War, and for the genocide that was a consequence. But there is no evidence that, although many millions died, including six million Jews alone, that Hitler personally killed even a single one. Instead Europe's Jews were massacred by Hitler's followers who, in the words of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, were his "willing executioners."[22]

This all-important truth does not deter those who insist, "No Hitler, No Holocaust."[23] Milton Himmelfarb, for example, argued the genocide had to be viewed through the lens of a single man. "Hitler willed and ordered the Holocaust, and was obeyed," he wrote. "Hitler murdered the Jews because he wanted to murder them."[24] While I do not deny the importance of leadership, or suggest that Hitler was anything other than the driving force behind the war and the Holocaust, there is a big difference

between assuming that one individual explains all and granting that a situation is far more complex than the "great man" theory of leadership would suggest. In fact, Himmelfarb used two verbs – "ordered" and "obeyed" - that undermine his own argument. When leaders give orders they are, by definition, engaging their followers in the task at hand. Therefore every German who obeyed Hitler and his deputies, as opposed to defying them, was somehow implicated in the murder and the mayhem. In short, while "No Hitler, No Holocaust" may be a necessary formulation, it is not a sufficient one.

Our tendency to see great change through the prism of great leaders is not confined to our reflections on the past. Even now we are told, repeatedly, that we should aspire to leadership, to becoming a leader. What accounts for the widely held belief that leaders dictate the course of human history? How has it happened that there is a "leadership industry" in which followers are in effect invisible? And, if everyone is educated to lead, who exactly is supposed to follow?

There is more than one reason for this skewed view of human affairs. At this point I will focus on one in particular, on what has been called the "romance of leadership."[25] We fixate on leaders to the exclusion of nearly everyone else because leaders help us order a world that otherwise is hopelessly confusing.[26] The capacity of the human mind is finite - coming at us from all sides is more information than we can possibly absorb. Leaders, then, provide a convenient solution to an obvious problem: how to perceive and then process what is happening in the world in which we operate. A leader like Bill Gates helps us to understand the remarkable story of Microsoft, even though the full truth is much more complicated than the easy attribution to one man would seem to suggest.[27]

Attribution theory explains why we have the mistaken belief that individuals, leaders in particular, have more power than they really do. We assume the all-importance of leaders, even when the assumption is demonstrably false, as in blaming Hitler for in effect single-handedly murdering six million Jews. Of course on some level we know full well that the story of Hitler cannot be told out of context, separate and distinct from the story of what was happening more generally in Germany in the 1920s and '30s. Nor can we leave on the cutting room floor the story of Hitler's followers, ranging from early and enduring acolytes such as Joseph Goebbles and Hermann Goering, to ordinary Germans, most of whom stood by and did nothing while people and places burned. Still, we prefer to keep it simple. We prefer to look at leaders because they provide an easy explanation. They provide an observable someone who appears to account for what happened.[28] Recall Orwell's making this point plain: Although "seemingly the leading actor of the piece," in reality he was no more than "an absurd puppet pushed to and fro" by untold numbers of others.

Richard Hackman has written about what he calls the "leader attribution error." As a student of teams, and as an admirer of teams that energize, orient, and engage the talents of its members, Hackman is demonstrably put off by our tendency to assume that team leaders more than team members deserve credit for the group's accomplishments. "When we think about a great team," Hackman writes, "the image we conjure up almost always includes a great leader." For example, when the final chords of Mahler's Resurrection Symphony reverberate in the concert hall, "the conductor, exhausted but beaming, turns to accept the applause of the audience." By the same token, the standard remedy for an athletic team that is losing rather than winning is to fire the coach, on the

expedient but often mistaken assumption that replacing the designated leader will solve the problem.[29]

Our tendency to make the leader attribution error is especially strong when the leader is especially strong. For example, the story of the Sunbeam Corporation under the leadership of Al Dunlap became one and the same as the story of Dunlap himself. So large and fearsome a figure was "Chainsaw Al" that the fate of the company was thought to be in the hands of this one man. Dunlap, of course, was notorious for being the world's worst boss. Known for being mean and nasty even when he was CEO at Scott Paper, by the time he got to Sunbeam his reputation was that of a "street fighter with a sharp blade." With regard to layoffs in particular, "he always cut big, deep, and a little wild."[30] Moreover Dunlap had a fearsome temper that intimidated even his closest aides. Sunbeam's corporate culture was a "culture of misery;" Sunbeam's work environment was one in which "the pressure was beyond tough. It was barbarous."[31]

One consequence of Dunlap's tyranny was that he overshadowed everyone else. None of the other players seemed to us to play any kind of meaningful role. But even in this case, in which one man so dominated, it is a mistake to attribute to him all the credit for what went right at Scott Paper (the stock price in particular), and all the blame for what went wrong at Sunbeam (it finally ran aground). Dunlap got away with outrageously bad behavior at Sunbeam because those around and beneath him tolerated it. On the one hand then this is the story of a powerful leader. But on the other hand it is, equally, the story of submissive followers, who were unwilling or unable to stop him from leading badly.

This was not a case in which just a few people did nothing to save the day. Rather it was one in which large numbers of stakeholders freely followed their leader over a cliff. For example, until nearly the end of his reign, members of Sunbeam's board supported Dunlap. They were not especially interested in what he was doing, nor did they seek to interfere with how he ran the business, even in those cases in which large layoffs made the headlines. In fact, no matter how draconian his proposed measures, Sunbeam's board unanimously approved Dunlap's plans for restructuring. Those beneath Dunlap on Sunbeam's corporate ladder offered equally little resistance. To be sure, rank and file employees in particular typically think of themselves as powerless. But this was a case of downsizing in the extreme, and still there was no screaming and yelling, and no organizing to protest what turned out to be widespread layoffs. Finally there was Dunlap's management team, his closest aides, every one of whom was craven, who did as he was told, no matter how mean the message or the messenger.

The fact is that no one had the fortitude to call Dunlap privately or publicly to account, either as chief executive of a company in trouble, or as leader of a business on which many thousands depended for their livelihoods. Nor did any one who was any one dare take a stand by resigning in protest.[32] Clearly this was not for lack of options. Members of his management team and members of the board especially could have chosen another course, such as quitting Sunbeam altogether, or trying their utmost to modify Dunlap's behavior from within.[33] The fact that they did nothing to stop or at least slow Dunlap's bad leadership, made virtually certain it would continue until both he and the company tanked.

The importance of being a follower notwithstanding, the popular leadership literature still suggests that leaders matter and followers do not. As earlier indicated this does not mean that followers are in any obvious way put down. In fact, in keeping with the point I made about words like "empowerment," leaders are encouraged now to take their followers into account and to treat them well. They are further encouraged to gain voluntary, as opposed to forced, compliance. When Daniel Goleman and his colleagues write that, "Great leaders move us. They ignite our passions and inspire the best in us," that's what they have in mind – followers who follow because following is what they want to do.[34] But let's be clear: Since the leadership industry sells to those who would be leaders, not followers, its products are crafted so as to attract this particular customer base. The title of Goleman's book is *Primal Leadership* – not *Primal Followership* . And, as the book jacket makes clear, the intended audience is the "leader in any walk of life," not the follower.

In fact, the appetite for books on leadership and management is now so great that many if not most have the sexier of the two words, "leadership," right in the title. And many if not most imply, if they do not so say outright, that if you read this book you will increase the likelihood of your becoming a leader - or you will increase the likelihood of your becoming a better leader than you are now. While the focus on leadership and management began during the first half of the twentieth century, with writers and thinkers like Mary Parker Follett, Chester Barnard, and Peter Drucker paving the way, the outburst of interest is more recent, beginning only in the 1980s. This was the decade during which books with the word "leader" or "leadership" right in the title began to flood the marketplace (my own included), for example, Warren Bennis's *On Becoming a*

Leader and John Kotter's *The Leadership Factor.* Both books distinguished between leaders and managers; and both similarly claimed the first was more important than the second.[35] A decade or so later the literature on leadership expanded still further, now including, among countless others, Ronald Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers* and James Kouzes's and Barry Posner's *The Leadership Challenge.* Both of these books dealt of course with leaders, but also with the contextual complexities of exercising power, authority, and influence.[36] More recently, practitioners have climbed on the bandwagon. To take just one of many examples, Rudolph Giuliani wrote *Leadership,* in which he claimed among other things that leadership is a capacity that can be acquired. "Leadership does not simply happen," Giuliani wrote. "It can be taught, learned, developed."[37]

As noted there has been a slight shift: Followers are finally getting more attention. In particular there is a gradually growing interest in the leader-follower relationship, as opposed to an interest in leaders only. Still, much more often than not the work in this general area is leader-centric. The question that still seems most to interest us is how leaders can impact on their followers, not the other way around. By making followers the effect, rather than the cause, one could reasonably argue that experts contribute considerably to the conventional wisdom that leaders are all-important while followers are unimportant.[38]

One of the most important scholars of leader-follower relations is social psychologist, Edwin Hollander. He was among the first to draw our attention to two key points, both of which remain widely ignored. First, Hollander observed that followers can make "significant contributions to successful leadership;" and second that "at every level

in organizations, leaders are called upon to be responsive also as followers." But even Hollander fell into the trap of selling us the importance of followers primarily on the grounds of their importance to leaders. His major book on the subject was titled, *Leadership Dynamics;* and as he himself testified it was written primarily "for the leader or would-be leader who wants to learn more about the leadership process."[39]

Some of the most recent research on the leader-follower relationship further fuels the idea that the second is merely an appendage of the first. Consider this article titled, "The Link Between Leadership and Followership: How Affirming Social Identity Translates Vision Into Action." The question it poses is how leaders can get followers to do what they want them to do.[40] More specifically, "What makes workers willing to 'go the extra mile' to enact the commands of their bosses?" No doubt the question is an important one, of genuine consequence to most organizations, which remain hierarchical in their structure. But the concern it reflects is conventional - the impact of leaders as opposed to that of followers. Like most of the leadership literature this article, although in theory about the leader-follower relationship, in fact is about how followers can be motivated/manipulated by their leaders into doing what they want them to do.

My intention is not to diminish the leadership literature, or the leadership schools, institutes, centers, courses, seminars, workshops and programs this literature sustains. Rather it is to point out that the canvas on which we paint is simply too small. It should hold more than a single looming figure, the leader. It should be enlarged to accommodate followers as well.

<A> **Focus on Followers**

We know that during roughly the first half of the twentieth century the gradually developing literature on leadership and management presumed that superiors did, and should, control their subordinates. While the growth of large organizations gave rise to an increasing interest in how those with power, authority, and influence related to those without - particularly in the workplace - no one questioned the pecking order. Rather the ranks and roles associated with organizational hierarchies were seen as the natural order of things.

To be sure, some early students of leadership and management, Follett and Barnard, for example, were concerned about the general welfare as opposed to the welfare of only a few.[41] Moreover several social science experiments in the late 1930s and early 1940s explored the different effects of democratic and authoritarian leadership styles on the behaviors of group members.[42] So it is not as if followers were excluded from the discussion altogether. Still, to prompt serious study of followers in their own right, took another kind of circumstance altogether. It took genocide to get scholars systematically to consider this question: Why do followers follow their leaders?

Professor Stanley Milgram was once asked why he conducted his famous – or, maybe more accurately, infamous - experiments on obedience to authority. He said it was the Holocaust that made him want to understand better how ordinary people could act so "callously and inhumanely." As he put it years later, the question that haunted him was, "Under what conditions could a person obey, when commanded, actions that went against conscience?"[43]

The murder of millions by the Nazis during the Second World War motivated some of America's most prominent social scientists, Milgram among them, to study man's inhumanity to man. They recognized what I earlier described as the not-so-obvious – that, our obsession with Hitler notwithstanding, the Holocaust was not his handiwork alone. Rather it was the consequence of orders obeyed, directly and indirectly, by millions of apparently ordinary Germans.

Obedience is not by definition something to be abjured. To the contrary: Some measure of obedience or at least compliance is necessary to the effective performance of nearly all groups and organizations. Moreover under certain circumstances, in the heat of battle, for example, near blind obedience is essential. But as the Nazi regime receded into the past, the question of how it happened that one of the most highly educated and culturally sophisticated people in the world "supported and even cheered the bestial schemes of their deranged leaders" became more compelling.[44] In addition, it had become glaringly apparent perhaps for the first time that those who obey orders play as important a role in human affairs as those who issue them.

Milgram's experiments on obedience, conducted mainly in the early 1960s, are the most important ever conducted on followership. But the interest in the Holocaust – and in Germans more particularly – began years earlier. In America during the 1940s probably the best known book on the subject was Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom.*[45] Fromm, himself an émigré from Nazi Germany, developed a theory of the "sado-masochistic character" as it related to totalitarian leadership. His basic notion was that since the demise of the medieval church-state, which dominated the social order in the Middle Ages, Europeans especially were searching for a new source of authority. In

other words, the rhetoric of the enlightenment notwithstanding, Fromm argued that people did not necessarily want to be free. Above all, and particularly during hard times, they wanted to be taken care of, to be protected. This, he maintained, is why Germans in the early 1930s, beset first by their defeat in World War I and then by the depression, followed Hitler, no matter where he led.[46]

Another important book on this general subject was, *The Authoritarian Personality*. [47] Published in 1950, it made an argument similar to Fromm's. Using social scientific tools such as interviews and attitude scales, the authors developed a measure that tested people for potential fascism, and found there was an authoritarian "pattern," not very different from Fromm's sado-masochistic character. In other words, both of the above-mentioned books described followers who achieved their "social adjustment by taking pleasure in obedience and subordination."[48]

Years later the two books came under attack for various reasons, above all for what came to be seen as the simplistic and even dangerous suggestion that there were personality types such as "sado-masochistic" and "authoritarian," and that these could be broadly associated with a particular people, for example, the Germans.[49] But their intellectual impact was considerable - and they certainly set the stage for Milgram's study of obedience.

There were other reasons Milgram conducted his experiments in the early 1960s. They coincided roughly with the trial in Israel of Nazi war criminal Adolph Eichmann; and with the publication of Hannah Arendt's controversial but important book on the subject, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.[50] Arendt insisted that Eichmann and his ilk were not monsters or aberrations of any kind. Rather, she claimed, they were more or less ordinary

bureaucrats who murdered Jews not because they were virulently anti-Semitic, but because they were doing what they were told to do – they were following orders. Hence Arendt's famous phrase, "the banality of evil."

Milgram's experiments have been widely described in the social scientific literature; and there is a film that shows the experiments as they were actually being conducted.[51] Here then I will describe his work – undertaken initially at Yale University but eventually repeated in different places and involving more than a thousand participants – only briefly.[52]

The set up was simple. Two people came to a lab to take part in what they were told was a study of memory and learning. One was designated the "teacher" and the other the "learner." The experimenter, properly dressed for the occasion in a white lab coat, proceeded to describe the study, which ostensibly was about the effect of punishment on learning. Then the learner was then led into a room and seated in a chair. His arms were strapped to prevent excessive movement, and an electrode was attached to his wrist. He was told that he was to memorize a list of word pairs – but that whenever he made an error, he would receive electric shocks of increasing intensity.

However the real focus of the experiment was the teacher. After watching the learner being strapped into place, the teacher was led from the room and seated before a large shock generator. He was told that the thirty switches in front of him, over which he would have complete control, could inflict on the learner shocks of increasing intensity, all the way up to 450 volts. What the teacher did not know was that the learner was really an actor, who in fact would be receiving no shocks at all. As Milgram put it, the purpose of the experiment was "to see how far a person will proceed in a concrete and measurable

situation in which he is ordered to inflict increasing pain on a protesting victim."[53] In other words, at what point, if any, would people follow the dictates of their own conscience and defy the man in the position of authority, the so-called teacher?

The results of Milgram's experiments were appalling. Not one of the subjects refused to administer a shock. And a substantial proportion were willing to administer the last shock on the generator, even though what they were hearing from the other room, from the presumed learners, were escalating cries of pain and discomfort, that ended finally either in agonizing screams or in a deadly silence. To be sure, the shocks were not lightly inflicted. Many of the subjects experienced intense conflict between wanting to quit and wanting to continue, if only because the experimenter was enjoining them to do so. Nevertheless what became terribly clear is that under the "right" circumstances only a few of us have what it takes defy authority. What this meant to Milgram was that, "ordinary people, simply doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process."[54]

We now know that under ordinary circumstances followers tend strongly to obey their leaders. What we know as a result of Milgram's experiments is that under *extraordinary* circumstances followers tend strongly to obey the orders of their leaders – even when they consider such orders to be badly misguided or morally wrong. As a result of other studies along similar lines, such as the similarly well known Stanford Prison Experiment, conducted in 1971 by Philip Zimbardo, in which within days some college-students were turned into brutal guards while others became weak and despondent prisoners, we know that perfectly natural patterns of dominance and deference can be downright disheartening. In short what we have learned is that certain social settings -

from Auschwitz to Abu Ghraib - contaminate both superiors and their subordinates.[55]

<A> **Times Change**

Both before and after the Second World War the most important question in the field of leadership and management was: How can superiors get their subordinates to do what they want them to do? While the leadership industry has now distanced itself from hierarchical models that assume command and control, it still remains leader-centric.

But in the real world, the world outside the academy and outside the leadership field, there are signs of change. These signs of change – Zbigniew Brzezinski refers to a "global political awakening" – are so significant that those of us with any interest at all have no choice but to pay attention.[56] *The fact is that* f*ollowers are gaining power and influence while leaders are losing power and influence.* Which brings us to why - what is it about this moment in time that favors those of lower rank over those of higher? Before I turn to this question, which I do in the next chapter, here are just a few examples of what I have in mind.

The first is from Israel. The Second Intifada - yet another wave in the cycle of violence between the Israelis and Palestinians - began in September 2000. One of its characteristics was the use of suicide bombers by the Palestinians against the Israelis; to which the Israelis responded by engaging in "targeted killings," to eliminate the most militant leaders in the West Bank and Gaza strip. While the Israeli military usually carried out such attacks without any repercussions, in 2002 there was an incident that aroused public ire. An Israeli Air Force plane dropped a one-ton bomb on the house of a particular target, killing him, his family, and some neighbors as well. In all, fourteen Palestinians died in the attack, eight of whom were children.

In the wake of the civilian casualties, and in response to the public condemnations, the chief of the Israeli Air Force, General Dan Halutz, publicly defended his pilots. In an interview he said to his men, "Your execution was perfect. Superb….You did exactly what you were instructed to do."[57] But, however well-intended, Halutz's comments were judged a callous and even arrogant response to what the Americans call "collateral damage." So after another similar incident, in which more innocent civilians died, twenty-seven Israeli Air Force pilots had enough. They came to the conclusion that since targeted killings were imprecise, such attacks should be considered "immoral and illegal."

Israeli pilots are typical in that they are part of a strict military hierarchy: They are expected to obey the orders of their superiors, especially in times of crisis. But in response to the collateral killings the twenty-seven pilots drafted a "moral statement." It was directed at Halutz, and was intended to bring to an end "the turning of pilots into controlled machines and into criminals." Moreover they used the media to make their case to the people, affirming their deep loyalty to the state of Israel, while at the same time declaring they would neither "harm innocent civilians," nor carry out orders that were "blatantly illegal."

The response was predictable. The military angrily defended its position. Left-wing activists supported the pilots. And politicians on the right condemned them. To this response from the right, however, there was a striking exception - Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Sharon did not by any means bestow on the pilots his blessing. In fact, he called their resistance a "very grave matter." Moreover in the short term, several pilots paid a

heavy price for breaking the rules, including expulsion from the military for refusing to obey orders to engage in more of the targeted killings. However over the long term the twenty-seven pilots had an impact far greater than they could have expected. While it is impossible to say exactly what determined Sharon's stunning decision several months later to disengage from Gaza by the summer of 2005, there seems to be a connection. In explaining Sharon's outright reversal of a policy he had long championed, one of his closest advisers, Dov Weisglass, said that by the fall of 2003 Sharon had come to see Israel as "stuck." The economy was stagnating and relations with Palestinians were continuing to deteriorate. Then, Weisglass continued, "We were hit with letters of officers and letters of pilots and letters of commandos." These men were not "wierd kids with green ponytails and a ring in their noses who give off a strong odor of grass." Rather they were Israel's "finest young people," young people who had reached a breaking point.[58] In other words, by refusing to go along, and by using clever tactics such as standing together, going public, and making their case on moral grounds, these subordinates affected their superiors.

Of course followers who break rank are hardly typical - most go along with what their leaders want and intend. But this single story is emblematic. And it substantiates one of the claims I make in this book: *Those who lack obvious sources of power, authority, and influence are not usually helpless. Many can and do find ways of being heard.*

Here are some other examples, indicators of how times are changing in the United States. The first is the story of what happened in 2007 to talk-show host or, if you prefer, shock jock, Don Imus. He had long been outrageous, but on this one occasion he was more outrageous than usual. By referring to the Rutger's women's basketball team as

"nappy-headed ho's," he offended nearly everyone, and women and African Americans in particular. Still, for a couple of days nothing much happened. It seemed as if his remark would go largely unnoticed and certainly unpunished. But then the tide turned. Within a few more days, after the video and transcript were posted on the web and played over and over and over again, and after an e mail blast was sent to several hundred reporters, and after bloggers started to weigh in, the "digital brush fire" could no longer be contained.[59] In spite of his apologies, Imus was under relentless attack - by swarms of people with far less power and influence than he. Staffers at NBC, who were unexpectedly angry and outspoken, led the charge to, "dump Don." As one NBC News executive put it: "We went out and created diversity in our newsrooms and we empowered employees to say what they think. And they're telling us."[60]

Don Imus was not, of course, a leader in the conventional sense of this word. But he was an opinion leader or, as *Newsweek* put it, "one of the media powerhouses of the age." Nevertheless those who wanted him down and out came together in various ways - literally, virtually - so as to give Imus's employers nearly no choice but unceremoniously to get rid of him. Lesson learned? "In earlier eras he would almost certainly have withstood the storm, but 2007 is a different time."[61]

At the 2006 graduation ceremonies of New School students, a vocal minority protested in anger that Senator John McCain was keynote speaker, particularly because of his support for the war in Iraq. Who really upset them though was not McCain, but New School President Bob Kerrey, who had the temerity to choose McCain without consulting them. As one of the students put it: "This invitation was a top-down decision that did not take into account the desires and interests of the student body on an occasion that is

supposed to honor us all."[62] This student protest paled in comparison with those taking place at about the same time, at Gallaudet University. Many months of campus unrest, started by students but not confined to them, finally obliged members of the University's board to withdraw their choice of a new president. While there had been some students and faculty on the search committee, they claimed they were ignored. And so they vowed to fight to the finish, until the board's decision was reversed. They did - and it was.

Then there was the time the "grass roots roared, and an immigration plan fell."[63] Monique Thibodeaux was an example of an ordinary citizen who joined with countless other ordinary citizens to defeat, if only temporarily, an immigration bill that was so contentious it motivated legions of angry voters in some way to act. An office manager at a towing company in suburban Detroit, Mrs. Thibodeaux and many thousands like her made calls and sent e-mail messages to senators around the country – and urged their friends to do the same. The idea that some 12 million illegal immigrants would be granted a path to citizenship was enough to spark what the *New York Times* called "a furious rebellion among many Republican and even some Democratic voters, who were linked by the Internet and encouraged by radio talk show hosts." Advocacy groups played their part as well. Groups such as NumbersUSA, whipped up and organized their constituencies and managed to sign up 7,000 new members in a single week. For its part, Grassfire.org,, a conservative Inernet group called for volunteers for a petition drive and instructed any one with any interest on how to barrage lawmakers with telephone calls and e-mails The result of this relentless offensive was to derail a bill that had been cobbled together only with great difficulty.

The fact that some of these same individuals and groups later reversed themselves, thereby managing to resurrect a measure already declared dead, only underscores the point: People power has the potential to be greater now than ever before. Within days it can, near single-handedly, turn things around. There is in any case a growing sense of entitlement, a growing sense that leadership should in fact be "distributed." In turn there is the inevitable counterpart – leaders who are more vulnerable now to being pushed and pulled in every direction.

No where is this as much in evidence as in America's corporate sector. In 2005 *BusinessWeek* ran a cover story that made the point. Titled, "The Boss on the Sidelines: How Auditors, Directors, and Lawyers are Asserting their Power," the piece was about how players other than the CEO "are more powerful than ever." Whereas in the past members of boards, for example, usually exercised their power as watchdogs only in moments of crisis, now times are different. Now the "chumminess and banter" of the past have given way to a "more adversarial attitude" which, in turn, has led to the toppling of top corporate leaders such as Fannie Mae CEO Franklin Raines, Boeing CEO Harry Stonecipher, Pfizer's CEO Hank McKinnell, and the legendary titan of AIG, Maurice (Hank) Greenberg. Of course professionals including auditors, directors, and lawyers are not the only ones now intruding on chief executive officers. Shareholders have also become more restive, thereby threatening corporate leaders who in the past could afford to be nearly impervious to their preferences. The bottom line is that while CEOs remain in charge, their power is diminished. As *BusinessWeek* put it, the age of the corporate monarch is over.[64] No wonder chief executives are leaving the corner office. No wonder that, for reasons both voluntary and not, CEO turnover is at an all time record.[65] In fact

one 2007 estimate is that nearly half of American firms will have a new CEO in the next four years.[66]

Moreover the impression that executives are increasingly beleaguered transcends the top office. Leaders and mangers at every level are being targeted by those around them, those above and those below. "Tough global competition, more diligent regulators, increasingly engaged boards of directors, and demanding investors have combined to create an environment in which new hires have to show results almost from Day One." [67] In fact leaders and managers are vulnerable even when the sin they commit would in years past be considered no more than a misstep. The chief executive of Home Box Office, Chris Albrecht, was forced to resign three days after he was accused of assaulting his girlfriend in a Las Vegas parking lot. Todd S. Thomson, the head of Citigroup's global wealth management group, was obliged to depart over questions about his relationship with CNBC anchor, Maria Bartiromo. And Wal-Mart fired Julie Roehm, its high-powered marketing executive, over allegations that she had accepted gifts from agencies and had an affair with a coworker.[68] This then is the bottom line: That position no longer affords protection, or at least not as much as much now as it did in the past.

The leader attribution error explains why we believe that leaders matter and followers do not. But explanations can be plausible without being accurate. As we have already started to see, in the real world followers have an impact. They have an impact if the role they play is a supporting one, or if they break rank, or even if they do nothing. For this good and simple reason, thinking leadership without thinking followership is not merely misleading, it is mistaken.

[1] Audi of America, April 14, 2004.
[2] As Max Lerner pointed out, the task of squaring Americans' "basic nonconformism with the stability required by property, investment, and law" fell to the Founders. See, *America as a Civilization* (Simon and Schuster, 1957), p. 718.
[3] http://www.labour.org.uk/leadership/tony_blair_resigns
[4] The quotes and the point more generally is in Charles C. Mann, "The Founding Sachems" in the *New York Times*, July 4, 2005, p. A13.
[5] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 302-04. This paragraph and several to follow also borrows from my book, *The Political Presidency: Practice of Leadership* (Oxford University Press, 1984), Chapter 1.
[6] Bailyn, p. 304.
[7] Bailyn, p. 306.
[8] Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 33.
[9] Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (Harcourt Brace, 1955), p. 111.
[10] The quotes in this paragraph are from Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Doubleday, 1969), p. 430.
[11] John Gardner, *The Nature of Leadership: Introductory Considerations*, Leadership Papers/1, Independent Sector, 1986, pp. 5, 6.
[12] The term is used by Patsy Baker Blackshear on page 2 of her unpublished paper titled, "The Followership Continuum: A Model for Increasing Organizational Diversity."
[13] The book was published by Crown in 2001. The quote is on p. 1.
[14] The point of this paragraph is made even more clearly in books such as Larraine R. Matusak's, *Finding Your Voice: Learning to Lead…Anywhere you Want to Make a Difference* (Jossey-Bass, 1997). The message this book sends is similar to the one most commonly delivered by leadership educators both inside and outside the academy: You too can be a leader! Matusak writes that, "You don't need an elevated position or a title of great importance to assume a leadership role" (p. 1). However seen from another angle, all the emphasis is on leaders and leadership. There is no discussion of followership, nor of what constitutes the good follower.
[15] Joseph C. Rost, *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*, (Praeger, 1991), pp. 107 ff.
[16] David Collinson, "Rethinking Followership: A Post-Structuralist Analysis of Follower Identities" in Leadership Quarterly, April 2006, p. 179.
[17] No one has written more trenchantly about power relationships that persist than Robert Michels. Early in the 20th century the young German sociologist developed the "iron law of oligarchy," which he wrote about at length in *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (Free Press, 1962).
[18] Joanne Ciulla, "Leadership and the Problem of Bogus Empowerment" in Joanne Ciulla, ed., *Ethics: The Heart of Leadership* (Praeger, 1998), p. 63.
[19] Bill George and Peter Sims, *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 2007), p. 176.
[20] Rost, p. 109.
[21] Quoted by Michiko Kakutani, "Styron Visible: Naming the Evils that Humans Do" in the *New York Times*, November 3, 2006, p. E 29.
[22] Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (Random House, 1996).
[23] Milton Himmelfarb, "No Hitler, No Holocaust" in *Commentary*, March, 1984, pp. 37-43.
[24] Himmelfarb, p. 37.
[25] The phrase is James R. Meindl's. See "The Romance of Leadership as a Follower-Centric Theory: A Social Constructionist Approach" in *Leadership Quarterly*, 6 (3), 1995. I am using the term somewhat differently from Meindle, but it nevertheless nicely captures my point as well.
[26] For early insights on the ways in which people make causal attributions about people's behavior, see Fritz Heider's classic discussion of "the naïve analysis of action" in *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (John Wiley & sons, 1958), especially chapter 5.
[27] For a good brief discussion of leader attribution, see James G. Hunt, "What is Leadership?" in John Antonakis, Anna T. Cianciolo, and Robert J. Sternberg, eds., *The Nature of Leadership*, (Sage, 2004), pp.

39, 39. Also see R. G. Lord and C. G. Emrich, "Thinking Outside the Box by Looking Inside the Box: Extending the Cognitive Revolution in Leadership Research" in *Leadership Quarterly*, 2000, 11, pp. 551-579.

[28] This paragraph borrows freely from Sonja M. Hunt, "The Role of Leadership in the Construction of Reality" in Barbara Kellerman, editor, *Leadership Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Prentice-Hall, 1984), see especially pp. 169-75.

[29] Richard Hackman, *Leading Teams: Setting the Stage for Great Performances* (Harvard Business School Press, 2002), pp. 199,200.

[30] John Byrne, quoted in Barbara Kellerman, *Bad Leadership: What It Is, How It Happens, Why It Matters* (Harvard Business School Press, 2004), p. 135. The material on Dunlap is taken from chapter 7 of the book.

[31] Matthew Shifrin, quoted in Kellerman, *Bad Leadership*, p. 135.

[32] Kellerman, *Bad Leadership*, p. 146.

[33] This is from Albert O. Hirschman's classic text, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 30.

[34] Daniel Goleman, Richard Boyatzis. Annie McKee, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Harvard Business School Press, 2004), p. 3.

[35] John Kotter, *The Leadership Factor* (Free Press, 1988) and Warren Bennis *On Becoming a Leader* (Addison-Wesley, 1989).

[36] Ronald Heifetz, Leadership Without Easy Answers (Harvard University Press, 1994) and Barry M. Kouzes and James Z. Posner (Jossey-Bass, 1995).

[37] Giuliani, p. xii.

[38] For a brief discussion of this point, and for the names of several researchers who earlier identified it, see, Taly Dvir and Boas Shamir, "Follower Developmental Characteristics as Predicting Transformational Leadership: A Longitudinal Field Study" in *Leadership Quarterly*, 2003, 14, especially pp. 327, 328. In their abstract Divr and Shamir write, "The leadership literature has focused on the effects of leaders whereas much less attention has been given to the followers' role in shaping their leader's style." And they quote Gary Yukl, who earlier wrote that "most research and theory on leadership has favored a definition of leadership that emphasizes the primary importance of unilateral influence by a single, 'heroic' leader."

[39] Edwin J. Hollander, *Leadership Dynamics: A Practical Guide to Effective Relationships* (Free Press, 1978).

[40] S. Alexander Haslam and Michael J. Platow in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc, 2001, Vol. 27, No. 11, 1469-1479.

[41] See, for example, Mary Parker Follett, "The Giving of Orders" in Pauline Graham, ed., *Mary Parker Follett: Prophet of Management* (Harvard Business School Press, 1995), pp. 121-140. Also see, Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Harvard University Press, 1938), especially chapter XII, in which the relationship between leaders ("executives") is directly addressed.

[42] For a description of some of these experiments, with which the name Kurt Lewin was most closely associated, see Bernard M. Bass, *Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership* (Free Press, 1990), pp. 289 ff.

[43] Quoted by Alessandra Stanley, "The Darkest Behaviors in the Name of Obedience" in the *New York Times*, June 1, 2006, p. E 5.

[44] The quote is from Michael Massing. See his essay titled "Trial and Error" in the *New York Times Book Review*, October 17, 2004, p. 17.

[45] Holt, 1941.

[46] This paragraph is based on a discussion in Nevitt Sanford, "Authoritarian Personality in Contemporary Perspective" in Jeanne N. Knutson, ed., *Handbook of Political Psychology* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1973), pp.139-70.

[47] Theodore Adorno, Elsie Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (Harper, 1950).

[48] Sanford, p. 153.

[49] So far as behaviors of dominance and deference are concerned, there are, however, some cultural as well as national differences. For example, in Japan there is the tradition of Bushido, a code of honor, especially held among the warrior class, which requires the strictest kind of obedience to those in higher positions of authority. See, for example, Inazo Nitobe, *Bushido: The Soul of Japan* (Filiquarian Publishing, 2007 edition).

[50] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Viking Press, 1963).

[51] For detailed analysis and description of the experiments see, Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (Harper & Row, 1974). Also see Herbert C. Kelman and V Lee Hamilton, *Crimes of Obedience: Toward a Social Psychology of Authority and Responsibility* (Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 148 ff.
[52] The quotes in this paragraph are in Milgram, pp. 1 and 2.
[53] Milgram, p. 4.
[54] Milgram, p. 6.
[55] For a complete discussion of this syndrome, see, Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (Random House, 2007)
[56] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Second Chance: Three Presidents and the Crisis of American Superpower* (Basic Books, 2007), p. 201 ff.
[57] All the quotes in this section are from the paper of one of my students at Harvard, Dana Savoray. I am grateful to her for providing me with such a telling tale of followership.
[58] Most of Savoray's sources are based on accounts in the Israeli press. For example, Weisglass was quoted in Ha'aretz on October 8, 2004.
[59] Brooks Barnes, Emily Steel, Sarah McBride, "Behind the Fall of Imus, A Digital Brush Fire" in the *Wall Street Journal*, April 13, 2007, p. A1.
[60] Quoted iin "The Power that Was" in *Newsweek*, April 23, 2007, p. 31.
[61] "The Power that Was," p. 29.
[62] David M. Herszenhorn, "In the Garden, Graduates Boo McCain. Kerrey, Too" in *New York Times*, May 20, 2006, B1.
[63] The quotes on this story are from Julie Preston, "Grass Roots Roared…." in the *New York Times*, June 10, 2007, p. A1.
[64] David Henry, Mike France,and Louis Lavelle, *BusinessWeek*, April 25, 2005, pp. 88-94.
[65] Nanette Byrnes, "The Great CEO Exodus," BusinessWeek, October 30, 2006, p. 78.
[66] Kevin P. Coyne and Edward J. Coyne, Sr., "Surviving Your New CEO" in *Harvard Business Review*, May 2007, p. 62.
[67] Nanette Byrnes and David Kiley, "Hello, You Must be Going," *BusinessWeek*, February 12, 2007, p. 30.
[68] Geraldine Fabrikant, "One Misstep and They're Out the Door," *New York Times*, May 15, 2007, C1.