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Leadership and “Followership”: Do Department Chairs Actually Have “Followers”?

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Leadership and “Followership”: Do Department Chairs Actually Have “Followers”?

There is a paradox in higher education: Everyone agrees that good, creative leadership is essential ... but no one wants to be led. Most books on leadership or management discuss a leader’s “followers” or use some other expression (such as team members, direct reports, or associates) that *appears* to suggest a different sort of relationship but, when examined carefully, is really just a euphemism for followers. The chair role in higher education is distinctive, however, in that, although it includes supervisory aspects, the members of our departments are also our colleagues. So, how do you lead when you don’t really have followers?

In this best practices presentation, we’ll look at the organizational culture of higher education and how department chairs fit into the overall framework of that culture. We’ll explore specific strategies for “leading from the side” rather than from the top-down and consider why much of the advice presented in books on leadership or management simply can’t be replicated (or, at least, not replicated *effectively*) at a college or university.

Participants will leave this session with a clearer understanding of how they can provide genuine leadership in their departments within a “servant leadership” framework and with a set of specific approaches that can make them more effective in their leadership roles.