

Morals more important than success in a role model

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Credit: University of Queensland

People choose role models who have achieved success in ways that are in line with their own moral values, according to University of Queensland research.

Dr. Kim Peters of the UQ School of Psychology examined the competency and moral characters of [role models](#) in the workplace and found that people did not blindly follow extraordinary ability and [success](#).

"The extent to which people see their work supervisor as a role [model](#), or consider a new supervisor as a potential role model, is determined by their perceived morality as well as perceived competence," Dr. Peters said.

"People are looking to model someone who not only shows what can be achieved, but also shows how to achieve it while remaining a good person."

The research involved four studies of workers in Australia and abroad, who were asked about the competency and [moral values](#) of supervisors in the workplace.

"Competency is not enough; it is when would-be role models are seen as decent and virtuous that their ability and competence makes people want to follow in their footsteps," Dr. Peters said.

"People don't unthinkingly model the immoral and undesirable behaviours of others, because they are uniquely sensitive to this dimension when choosing models in the first place."

Dr. Peters said the findings have wider implications, particularly when it comes to celebrities.

"We tend to assume that role models are the highly visible success stories in society – the movie stars, politicians, athletes and entrepreneurs," she said.

"With this comes a collective sense of anxiety when these stars are caught behaving badly.

"The fear is that members of the community will unthinkingly copy this bad and immoral behaviour.

"However, this fear is largely misplaced, as our role models are not only chosen on the basis of success and competence.

"Perceived morality is important too."

The study, conducted in collaboration with UQ's Dr. Nik Steffens and Dr. Thekla Morgenroth of the University of Exeter, is published in the *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

More information: Kim Peters et al. Superstars are not necessarily role models: Morality perceptions moderate the impact of competence perceptions on supervisor role modeling, *European Journal of Social Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2372](https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2372)

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