

Looking at Leadership



Some of the most important people in America are volunteer leaders. They devote countless hours to programs and projects that help improve the country's social, cultural, and natural environments. The contributions volunteers make to democracy and community life cannot be adequately measured.

Many volunteers, however, realize they could be more effective leaders if they had leadership training and guidelines. This publication has information that can help you improve your leadership skills.

Who Is a Leader?

A leader is someone who influences the attitudes, opinions, or actions of others. If a leader intends to influence others, that influence is deliberate or planned. If others are influenced because of who the leader is, that influence is unintentional or unplanned. At some point, everyone influences others; therefore, every person is a leader.

Effective leaders set good examples for people, originate ideas and actions, delegate responsibilities, listen, attend to group satisfaction, praise, learn, and act natural. Leaders need to know how to work with people, and they need to know some of the personality types found in groups.

Types of Leaders

Formal Leaders

These leaders are elected or appointed to positions of authority and influence in organizations such as civic clubs, community clubs, churches, and hunting clubs. Another good example is the PTA, an organization active in almost every school system in the country.

Informal Leaders

Informal leaders influence others, not because they have specified positions but because they have certain characteristics such as wealth, knowledge, ability, social standing, or certain personality traits.

Characteristics of Leaders

Effective leaders, formal or informal, have these characteristics:

- Respected by others
- Cooperative with others
- Knowledgeable and understanding
- Patient and persistent
- Driven
- Congenial
- Mature and stable

What Does a Leader Do?

Sets an Example

Every group has its own values, beliefs, and customs. The leader upholds those values, beliefs, and customs by reflecting the beliefs and values of the group.

Delegates

Effective leaders do not try to do everything for the organization. Leaders recognize the leadership abilities in others, and effective leaders provide them with opportunities to exercise those abilities.

Applies Leadership

A leader is one who originates ideas or activities, applying his or her strengths to being positively effective. A good leader encourages suggestions, opinions, and ideas from other members of the organization.

Attends to Group Satisfaction

Effective leaders know people will not take part in the group if they receive no satisfaction from participation. Leaders, therefore, try to help the organization's members plan satisfying experiences.

Learns

Effective leaders do not assume they know all there is to know. Leaders are aware of the complexities of working with people, and they spend time learning about people and situations.

Praises

Effective leaders recognize the value of giving credit where credit is earned. Good leaders are conscious of thanking others.

Listens

Leaders make their decisions based on their understanding of the needs and wants of the organization. Leaders listen to the group to help gauge the group's feelings and moods.

Acts Natural

Effective leaders know that a good way to destroy the confidence of their followers is to act like someone they are not. A good leader is natural.

What a Leader Should Know

Good leaders do only what they know how to do. For example, if a leader does not know how to follow parliamentary rules of order in formal meetings, that leader cannot properly conduct the meeting or properly lead the group.

How to Conduct a Meeting

Formal leaders must know how to conduct a meeting, but informal leaders can also be effective if they know the rules of order as well. To conduct a successful meeting, you should consider three phases: before, during, and after the meeting.

You should have two goals when conducting a meeting. First, you want to get something done. This might be reaching a group decision about a project or problem or conducting a forum or panel discussion. Second, you want the meeting to give a sense of satisfaction to the group members.

Getting things done is a task performance function of groups. Getting satisfaction from working together is a group maintenance function.

Before the meeting

- Give proper notice. Postcards, telephone messages, radio PSAs, newspaper features, emails, and newsletters are means of informing your group.
- Create the proper setting. Before the meeting, set up chairs and tables (not 50 chairs for 20 people, or vice versa), turn on lights, set a comfortable temperature, and take care of other arrangements that will help members be comfortable.
- Provide equipment for the speaker. Before the meeting, set up and test any equipment such as microphone, projector, or computer. Make certain a screen is available and that the podium is at an acceptable height for the speaker. Provide the speaker with information about the group, such as the number of people you expect and their age level.

During the Meeting

- Arrive early to help welcome guests.
- Start the meeting on time and end on time.
- Clearly state the purpose of the meeting.
- "Loosen up" the group with an amusing story or anecdote.
- Use precise and relevant information when you introduce the speaker.

After the Meeting

After the meeting, ask yourself these questions:

- How did it go?
- How could I have made the meeting better?
- How can I improve the next meeting?
- Did I send a personal “thank-you” to the speaker and to those who helped organize the meeting?
- Did the organization’s secretary or reporter send a wrap-up article to the local news media?

Timeliness

Start and end the meeting as scheduled. Effective leaders prepare and follow agendas. Revise your agenda to suit the program.

Your agenda could include the following:

1. Call to order
2. Additional opening exercises
3. Roll call
4. Introduction of guest(s)
5. Reading of minutes of previous meetings
6. Committee reports
7. Old business
8. New business
9. Program
10. Adjournment
11. Social time

Parliamentary Procedures

To conduct the business of an organization, it is best to follow parliamentary rules of order.

- The rules keep the meeting team-minded.
- Rules allow the group to consider one item at a time and avoid confusion.
- The rules assure majority rules and protect minority rights.

Leaders need to know the three types of parliamentary motions. The main motion introduces a new item of business. The subsidiary motion is related to the main motion. The privileged motion is a motion to get immediate action in an emergency, to take a recess, or to adjourn.

Leaders also need to know the steps necessary to completing a motion. These steps include the following:

1. Member stands to address the chair.
2. Chair recognizes the member.
3. Member states the motion.
4. Motion must be seconded.
5. Chair restates the motion.
6. Chair calls for discussion.
7. Chair puts the motion to a vote.
8. Chair announces the result of the vote by stating, “The motion is carried” or “The motion is lost.”

Understanding People

Leaders must have followers. Otherwise, they are not leaders. Having followers means a leader associates with people. The more you know about the needs, motives, and ambitions of people, the better you can lead.

If you are a formal leader, you know people will participate in group activities as long as they experience some satisfaction from group participation. People quit if they do not have pleasant experiences in the group. The type of satisfaction referred to here is satisfaction that helps people meet their need for recognition, security, a sense of belonging, and new experiences.

Recognition

People need to be recognized. One of the most destructive things that can happen to a human is to be ignored by others. Everyone needs recognition, and effective leaders do what they can to make sure followers are favorably recognized.

Leaders should learn what they can about their followers. When you meet a group member outside of the group, you can ask about personal things, such as a new baby, new car or house, promotions at work, a child’s school progress. This is a way to help group members feel recognized.

Belonging

The need to belong is related to the need for recognition. The need to belong means members want to feel accepted by their peers in their group. If our associates ignore us, we get the feeling we are not wanted. Effective leaders, therefore, do what they can to make their followers feel they really belong to the group. The leader delegates responsibility to the members. Leaders ask for opinions and advice, and they spend time with members.

Security

All people have a need for physical and emotional security. Effective leaders instill confidence in followers and are worthy of trust. A good leader makes the group member feel secure in the role of the follower.

New Experiences

People tend to “get in a rut.” Doing the same thing over and over can become tiresome, and they begin to feel a need to change the pattern.

Effective leaders try new things periodically. What a leader does depends on the situation and the group members. In other words, there should be a pattern in their actions as leaders, but they should not stick rigidly to the pattern.

If you can help your followers fulfill some of these needs through group participation, you will help motivate them to act.

Group Roles

Leaders know that people are different. Since people are different, there are different types of group roles. The effective leader needs to know something about group roles, which include the following:

Positive Roles

- Encourager: A warm, friendly person who likes cooperation and is good at group maintenance.
- Orienter: Helps guide the group toward its goals; asks questions, such as, “Where are we going? How do we reach our goals? Who should perform this task?”
- Facilitator: Helps the group tie up loose ends; keeps channels of communication open; provides facts and other information.

Negative Roles

- Quarreler: Likes to argue; cannot find much that is good.
- Talker: Monopolizes discussions.
- Nontalker: Shy and timid; makes little, if any, contributions.
- Blocker: Opposes change; tries to block actions.
- Know-it-all: Has all the answers, but many of them are wrong.

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