

## The Role of a Student Organization Leader

*Leadership is not a goal. It's a way of reaching a goal.*

*I lead best when I help others go where we've decided we want to go.*

*I lead best when I help others to use themselves creatively.*

*I lead best when I forget about myself as leader and focus on my group, their needs, and their goals.*

*To lead is to serve, to give, to achieve TOGETHER.*

- Kathryn E. Nelson

### The Role of the Leader

The practical question for leaders becomes, "What should I do as the leader of the group?" Leaders are expected to be the pace-setters of the group as well as lend some purpose, direction, and guidance to the organization.

There are basic functions a leader can and should perform in order to ensure that their organization is successful and effective. These functions are identifiable in terms of behaviors that constitute roles a leader can play in a group.

The following roles are expected of leaders at various times. The roles will vary depending on the situation, but the leader must be capable of assuming any of them. We do not expect that you will be an expert at every one of these roles, but it is important that the leader be sensitive to the needs of individual members and of the group as a whole to determine when a change in role is necessary.

1. **The Coordinator Role** Communicate to all members in a clear and effective manner; act as an information clearing-house and resource person for all group members and as a contact person with other groups. Use resources in the Office of Student Activities and Poster Room.
2. **The Facilitator Role** Set the pace for the group by determining and defining procedures and structure. Assist members in retaining their identity in the group, in defining issues and summarizing progress. This role involves minimal direct influence on the group. It concentrates on establishing an interpersonal network that helps members work together.
3. **The Trainer Role** Teach group members new ways of approaching problems; provide the group with methods they can use to learn from their own experiences. Evaluating the progress of an organization on an ongoing basis is essential if the group is to continue moving forward. Training members of the organization to evaluate programs and assess the degree to which goals are being met is also an important component of this role.
4. **The Observer Role** Be alert to how the group is functioning and particularly to which functions are not being met; be aware of each individual's participation; show the group areas in which change might facilitate their work; let the group process occur.
5. **The Gap Filler Role** Fulfill those functions that are not being handled by anyone else, particularly the functions of addressing problems, serving as the neutral observer, including and extending a continued welcome feeling to all members.
6. **The Helper Role** To be an interested, caring individual whose main concern is for the welfare of the group.

### Some Unsolicited Advice for Leaders

1. Realize that people support what they help create. The member who feels actively involved with the organization will continue to be committed to it.
2. Respect the rights and opinions of each group member; keep the channels of communication open!

3. Remember that a large group can be broken into small groups to open the gates for involvement and commitment.
4. Be prepared to level with others and to maintain an atmosphere where others feel free to level with you. Through such communication you can move mountains. In silence hostility grows.
5. Remember that the group is not working for you; you and the group must work together.
6. Commitment and enthusiasm are contagious.
7. The good leader can be lead. They are not interested in having their own way, but in finding the best way. Have an open mind, after all – your way is not the only way.

### **How to Work with Your Advisor**

1. **Facts about Student Organization Advisors**
  - a. Most often advisors are employees of St. Olaf College, and their first responsibility to the College is their job.
  - b. Advisors volunteer to work with student organizations because they want to do it, and because they feel they can make a contribution to the organization's success.
  - c. Faculty advisors are human.
2. **The Student Organization can help their advisor by:**
  - a. Making clear the role they would like the advisor to take in the organization.
  - b. Keeping the advisor informed of the organization's plans and problems.
  - c. Making use of the advisor's background of experiences with the organization and at St. Olaf.
  - d. Working out tentative solutions to problems before going to advisor whenever possible.
  - e. Observing lines of responsibility. Don't go "over their head" or by-pass them entirely.
  - f. Taking the initiative in arranging for regular executive committee meetings with the advisor.
  - g. Inviting the advisor and their family to all activities. Don't take their attendance for granted.
  - h. Making them feel like a member of the organization. Present them with membership cards. Ask them to serve on certain committees in some appropriate way.
  - i. Extending appropriate courtesies to the advisor and their guests at special functions such as dances, banquets, and meetings which include important speakers.
  - j. Showing an appreciation for their services – by a letter, by appropriate comments at meetings, and other ways.

### **Effective Meeting Management**

While the word "meeting" is often associated with other words, such as *dull*, *unproductive*, and *disorganized*, there are many measures and effective leader can take to make meetings worthwhile and interesting for everyone involved. Meetings give members the opportunity to discuss goals, keep up-to-date on current events, interact, and pull together for decision making. By starting with careful planning, and finishing with a thorough follow-up, you will find meetings can almost run themselves. Here are some tips to make your next meeting successful and productive.

#### **1. Building an Agenda**

An agenda is an important tool for the leader who wants to make effective use of meeting times. Agendas can also be used to assist in long-range planning and/or to help record keeping.

Important points to remember in building agendas are:

- a. Give organization members the opportunity to offer suggestions for agenda items.
- b. Agendas should be distributed to members **at least one day before the meeting**; this early distribution encourages members who might have a special interest in a topic to attend the meeting, and to prepare a response on a topic.

- c. Arrange the agenda to fit your organization's needs and your leadership style; for example: you may want to report group announcements, committee reports, action items, and long-range decisions items; or, you may want to alternate between items for discussion and items for report so that members don't get restless with a series of similar items. You may want to place high interest items at the end of the agenda to keep members involved. It is wise to end the meeting on an "up beat;" it is important to let people leave feeling good about the meeting.
- d. During the meeting, record those items or concerns that need to go in future agendas. After the meeting, make sure those items make it to a subsequent agenda. If there will be a delay of more than two meetings before items can be added to the agenda, contact those persons interested in the item to explain the delay. Without this follow-up members, may become frustrated with being tabled.

## 2. Planning the Meeting

- a. Begin by asking yourself, "Is this meeting needed?"
  - i. Would a memo suffice?
  - ii. Can this week's information wait until the next meeting?
  - iii. Clearly define the purpose in your own mind before calling the meeting. Will the focus be:
    - 1. information giving
    - 2. information and opinion collecting
    - 3. decision making
    - 4. task accomplishment
- b. Let people know what will be discussed in advance by posting, mailing, or phoning the agenda.
- c. Carefully select meeting time and location.
  - i. Scheduling meetings at a regular time and place allows members to make the meeting a part of their schedule. Vary the time and location for special events.
  - ii. Schedule your meeting so it will not conflict with other activities.
  - iii. Choose a comfortable, quiet, and convenient location.
- d. Advise members of meeting time, date, and location at least 48 hours in advance.
- e. Indicate ending time; plan how long each task/item will take.
- f. Invite all necessary participants, guests, facilitators.
- g. Plan how you will run the meeting.
  - i. Do you have all necessary supplies?
  - ii. What special skills or techniques will you need to handle the meeting?
  - iii. Think through each agenda item. Anticipate potential questions, and be prepared to respond.

## 3. Conducting the Meeting

- a. The best way to begin any meeting is on time.
- b. Make sure the purpose of the meeting is clear to the members.
- c. Define the objectives of the meeting. What will be accomplished by the end of the meeting?
- d. Make sure the guidelines to be followed are clear.
  - i. Will the entire meeting be open discussion?
  - ii. Will Parliamentary Procedures be followed?
- e. Follow the agenda carefully. Keep discussion on task.
- f. Encourage group discussions to obtain a variety of viewpoints and ideas. You will have better quality discussions as well as highly motivated members. It is essential for them to see their impact in the decision making process. If members are hesitant to discuss, break

them into small groups and ask them to solve a specific problem (How can meetings be more effective? What kind of fund raiser would be profitable?). Then have each student organization report to the large group and discuss the options as an entire organization.

- g. Facilitate the group's movement toward making a decision when appropriate, but be careful not to stifle discussion.
- h. Be conscious of discussion manipulators. Solicit opinions from all participants.
- i. If a difficult question arises, do not be afraid to say, "I don't know." Make a note and follow up after the meeting.
- j. After a decision is made, clarify the who, what, where, and when necessary action will be taken.
- k. Ending the meeting.
  - i. You will need to organize and prepare for the end of the meeting throughout the meeting.
  - ii. Be prepared to implement decisions and delegate responsibilities.
  - iii. Never let a meeting fade away. Stop while interest is high.
  - iv. Ensure closure; make it clear when you are finished.
  - v. Conduct a brief evaluation.
    1. Ask participants to complete a form or conduct brief "interviews" with various members of your organization (officers, newcomers, etc.).
    2. Determine the effectiveness of the meeting based on how each member felt about:
      - a. Their own participation level as well as that of other members.
      - b. The quality of discussion.
      - c. The extent to which the leader was prepared.
      - d. Any problems that arose, and how they might suggest things be done differently next time.
- l. Meeting follow-up:
  - i. Distribute minutes.
  - ii. Sending periodic newsletters to members will keep them up-to-date between meetings.
  - iii. Check the progress of committees who are responsible for completing tasks between meetings.
  - iv. Announce plans for the next meeting.

#### 4. **Student Organization Executive Board**

Your constitution should explain how officers will be selected for office. It is valuable to leave the structure of officers flexible so you can change their roles as the purpose and goals for your organization change. You may choose to have a traditional structure with a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, etc. You may also want to make additions such as a fundraising coordinator, publicity director, etc. Another option is to rotate the leadership role. Each week/month a different member is responsible for running the meeting. To add some continuity to this system, a member may serve as secretary one week and then as chairperson the next. Regardless of the structure you choose, it is crucial that each member know what the role and responsibilities of each officer are.

Often, executive committees get in the habit of making decisions for the group without consulting the members. While it is important for officers to discuss important issues, it is equally important that the entire group decide how to act on these issues. If the members make the decision, they will be more committed to carrying out the task. If member's sense a decision was made before the mass meeting began, they are likely to feel their opinion does not matter.

#### 5. **Membership Recruitment**

In recruiting new members it is crucial the current members know the purpose and goals of the organization. Your best recruitment tool is the people who are already a part of your organization. If you have members, who have already expressed an interest in the organization by joining, but have not yet become actively involved, your first objective is to encourage their participation. After you have assessed the strengths of your current membership, identify the skills needed to strengthen your organization, and determine how you will recruit members with those skills.

- a. Methods of recruitment:
  - i. Hold an informational meeting and publicize it thoroughly and effectively.
  - ii. Identify groups of people who would logically be interested in your organization (i.e.: students in certain majors), and personally (if possible) or via letter contact them to invite them to your next meeting.
  - iii. Be sure your members are prepared to articulate the purpose and goals of the organization, and how the new member can become involved.
  - iv. Take part in the Co-Curricular Extravaganza held at the end of Week One. Ask the Student Organizations Committee Coordinator for details. This is a perfect opportunity to actively publicize your organization to the entire campus. Not only that – its FREE! Be creative and put together a colorful, eye-catching table! The more people who stop to look at your table, the more possible members you will have.

## 6. Committees

The general purpose of a committee is to determine through its collective wisdom the best solution to a problem, which is then recommended to the rest of the organization.

A “GOOD” committee needs:

- a. A “GOOD” purpose with a clearly stated, reasonable set of goals. A committee with no purpose usually gets no work done!
- b. A “GOOD” leader who guides the group’s discussions, encourages participation from each member, and provides ample opportunity for the members to become acquainted, thus becoming a more cohesive and productive group. A “GOOD” leader also makes sure the committee members are well informed regarding the committee’s purpose, schedule, and agenda.
- c. “GOOD” members who are somewhat knowledgeable in the area of the committee’s responsibility, but most importantly, interested in fulfilling the purpose of the committee. The group should be composed of members who represent various opinions; when this group agrees on a solution, you know it is a good one! Members need to be receptive and open to new ideas and to other’s opinions. Work is accomplished in a committee through the give and take of an open, honest, uninhibited discussion.

Committees can and should be integral part of every successful organization. A committee with a good purpose, a good leader, and good members will begin with a strong foundation.

Your organization may benefit from establishing standing committees that will help the organization meet its goals. Identifying a strong committee chairperson is crucial to the committee’s success. Whether the chairpersons are selected by the leader, by the executive board, or by the entire organization, it should be defined in our constitution. Members of the executive board could be utilized as committee heads, or you may want to extend leadership opportunities beyond the officers by involving other members in the role. Establishing committees in the following areas would allow members to be actively involved with a significant aspect of the

organization's function: fundraising, publicity, newsletter, social activities, education programming, membership recruitment and retention, public relations, etc.

Important to remember: Once a committee lays the groundwork, it is important they take the information back to the organization to obtain input. If the other members are to support what the committee is doing, they will want to have their voice heard.

## 7. **Delegating Tasks**

The effective leader knows how to delegate tasks to committees, chairpersons, and individual members. Delegation of tasks is important for several reasons:

- a. Members who have specific tasks to accomplish tend to become more involved in the organization.
- b. Time is freed for leaders to spend in coordinating and long-range planning.

While the benefits of delegating responsibility appear obvious, delegating is a skill that may take some practice. Especially if you have not met with success in delegating tasks before, it may often seem easier to do it yourself. Some guidelines to help you learn how to effectively delegate include:

- a. Be specific. Too often leaders are tempted to simply ask someone to “take care of publicity” because they know all the small tasks that lead up to getting the job done. However, many organization members may just be uncomfortable with such open-ended instructions. They need to know how much room they have to be creative, and where they can find helpful resources.
- b. Assess each member's strengths. The more closely you can “match” delegated tasks to members interests and strengths, the more likely the tasks will be completed. Know your members and know what they can and like to do; use that knowledge when delegating responsibility. On the other hand, be wary of “over assigning” a particular task to a particular person. Variety in delegating responsibilities can help organization members develop new strengths.
- c. Assess time constraints: Take your own and your members' time limitations into account when delegating. To delegate without allowing reasonable time for task completion can result in frustration on your part, and resentment on the part of your members.
- d. Follow-up on delegated responsibility. Especially if you do not know your members well, it is important to set a specific time to follow-up on the delegated task. Being specific as to this follow-up also gives your members a deadline, and indicates to them your interest in the task.

While attention to these guidelines does take time, following them can help you in attaining your goals of involving the members in your organization, and of developing new leaders for the coming years.

## 8. **Membership Retention**

There are a variety of approaches an organization can use to ensure members are satisfied with their involvement with the organization. Planning regular social events gives members the opportunity to interact in an informal setting. When members know one another, they are more committed to fulfilling responsibilities involved with the organization. Effective delegation, utilizing members in generating ideas and making decisions are other methods of keeping members interested and involved. It is also important that the leader obtain feedback from

members regarding their satisfaction with the organization. If they do not feel they are valued members, it is likely their involvement with the organization will quickly diminish.