

# Being a Better Leader for your Organization

## by Del Suggs

Happy New Year! Okay, so it's not actually January 1. But remember that every day is a fresh start, and a chance for you to begin anew. With that in mind, let your "New Year's Resolution" be to do a better job leading your organization. Here are some great ideas for improving your leadership skills, and improving the effectiveness of your organization.

### Communication

Resolve to do a better job communicating. Today we have access to incredible communication technology, yet we seem to be even more out of touch. Use your email, your cellphone, Facebook and Twitter to keep your members better informed about upcoming events and meetings.

Set up a an email list for all of your members, or a private Twitter feed just for your members. You can also set up a "secret" Facebook group that is only visible to members! Keep everyone informed of ongoing discussions, upcoming deadlines, and the constant concerns of your student leaders. It is so much easier to make decisions when your executive committee and your general members are kept in the loop. Communicate!

### Office Hours

Just a few years ago, organizational officers had to be in an actual office to make phone calls and conduct business. Today, we can do

business from anywhere-- which is why it is even more important to maintain office hours.

You should designate regular hours each week when you will be in your office. Use that time to focus on board business, return phone calls, reply to emails, read your mail, and all that other boring stuff that is so easy to put off. By setting and keeping office hours, you'll be more productive, more informed, and a better leader for your organization. Your office hours are not the time for doing class assignments, surfing the Internet, or text messaging your friends. Use the office hours as an excuse to concentrate on your job of leading the organization. Take care of business during office hours, and you'll be amazed at how efficient you can be.

### Meetings

There are many ways to improve your meetings, and make them more effective for you and your organization. Some very simple actions can lead to big results.

**Set up a regular meeting schedule**, such as every Tuesday at 7 pm. If you always meet on the same day and time, it becomes part of your members' schedule. Attending will basically become a habit.

**Set a beginning and ending time for each meeting**, and stick to it! Your members will give you a certain length of

time, but everyone hates those open-ended meetings that go on forever. Your members are far more likely to attend a meeting if they know it will only last for one hour.

**Email out the meeting agenda in advance**, so your members will be informed and ready to act.

**Have an anticipated action for each agenda item.** For example, don't just list "Fall Festival" as an agenda item. Include the action you plan to take: "Fall Festival: Select the Band" is a far better agenda item.

**Keep accurate minutes of each meeting**, and send them out with the agenda in advance of each meeting. That will keep everyone informed about board business, and upcoming decisions.

### Appreciation

Everyone likes to feel appreciated, and your members are no different. Effective leaders express their gratitude strongly and openly. Think about the ways you express your thanks to your members. Does it really reflect your thankfulness for their work? Come up with new ways to say "thank you."

**Write thank you notes.** Everyone appreciates a handwritten note. How about a thank you gift? It doesn't have to be expensive to show appreciation. Buy some movie

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tickets (sometimes you can even get them at a discount from AAA or your credit union!) or a meal card from a local restaurant. How about a nice fountain pen, for those fancy signatures? Go browse through the local Dollar Store--you'll be surprised at all the cool stuff you can get for a buck.

**Try something clever and creative.** Thank your members for completing a major assignment by giving them a gift-wrapped bottle of aspirin and antacid tablets, and thank them for eliminating your headache and indigestion! They will know you appreciate their work, and who doesn't need some aspirin at some time?

### Eliminate Committees

Can you hear the cheering from your organization when you announce that you've abolished committees this year? Nobody likes to serve on committees. They meet too often, for too long. They never get anything done, and once you get on one you can't ever seem to get off the committee. Well, bid committees goodbye!

This year, institute a "Task Force" system to meet your goals. How is it different from a committee? To begin with, a task force has a specific goal, such as produce Spring Fling, as opposed to the music committee which might have to produce numerous events. Second, it has a clear

completion date. Your Spring Fling task force is over the day after Spring Fling!

You'll find it much easier to recruit members for a task force than for a committee. The assignment is clear, with a beginning and an ending, for a specific length of time. When the task is finished, then you can recruit good task force members to another new task. Give it a try!

### Training

Make this the year that you begin some formal training for your organization. Plan a retreat at the beginning of the year to do team building with your members and teach them the skills needed to serve the organization.

If it's too late to plan a retreat at the beginning of the year, then hold a retreat at mid-year. There is no better time for training, because you will have already uncovered their weaknesses as a group. You may find board members who don't cooperate; here's the need for team building. You may find poor attendance at your events; here's your need to teach promotion and publicity techniques. By the middle of the year, you will plainly see what your organization needs in order to be more successful.

You may need to schedule your retreat at the end of the year. That is also an excellent time for training. Just make sure that you've already selected

your new officers for the coming year. Then you can really take the lead in training them to do the very best possible job. Remember, there is no wrong time to do training.

### Lead By Example

Let your final "New Year's Resolution" be to lead by example. We all seek two things from our leaders: Vision and Integrity. Demonstrate your vision clearly to your organization. Let them know your goals for the organization, and how you intend to achieve those goals. Demonstrate your integrity by the way you live your life everyday. That's what great leaders do.

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