

Being a Better Leader for your Organization

by Del Suggs

Happy New Year! Coming into the new academic year is a lot like New Year's Day. Fall is a great time to set new goals for yourself and your organization. Let your "New Year's Resolution" for this new academic year be to do a better job leading your board. 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 this year. In today's world, we have access to incredible communication technology, yet we seem to be even more out of touch. Use your email, your cell phone, and your IM to maintain keep your program board better informed about upcoming events and meetings.

Set up a list serv or simply an email list for all of your board 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 keep in the loop. Communicate!

Office Hours

Just a few years ago, committee chairpersons had to physically be in the program board office to make phone calls and conduct business. Today, we can do business from anywhere-- which is why it 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 homework, 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 board 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 your and your organization. Some very simple actions can lead to big results. Set up a regular meeting schedule, such as every Tuesday at 7 p.m. Set a beginning and ending time for each meeting, and stick to it! Your board members are far more likely to attend your meeting if they know it will only last for one hour.

Email out the meeting agenda in advance, so your board will be informed and ready to act. And, 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: "Select the band for Fall Festival."

Finally, 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 committee or board members are no different. Effective

leaders express their gratitude strongly and openly. Think about the ways you express your thanks to your committee 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 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 and 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 giftwrapped bottle of aspirin and antacid tablets, and thank them for eliminating your headache and ulcers! They will know you appreciate their work, and who doesn't need some aspirin at some time?

Ceremony

Add some ritual to your board. Think about great organizations, and how effectively they use ceremony, pomp and circumstance. If you've ever pledged a fraternity or sorority, you know all about ritual. But it's really used everyday and every where for positive effect, whether we're inaugurating a new President or singing the National Anthem at a ball game.

When I was president of the Tallahassee Museum, I began every board meeting with a group recitation of the organization's Mission Statement. It was vital for the board to be familiar with the

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mission of the Museum, and that ritual guaranteed that they said it at least once a month. Plus, I had it printed at the very top of the meeting agenda, to symbolize that it was the first thing to consider at every meeting. It was a very effective ritual!

Start by creating a ceremony to induct new members to your board. It can be as elaborate or as simple as you want, but do something more than just introducing new members at their first meeting. Have a pledge or swearing in ceremony. Have a secret handshake or sign. Do something to make your organizational membership seem as special as it is.

How about a ritual for changes in leadership? It should be more than just having a new chairperson run the meeting. Create a "pass the gavel" ceremony, when power actually changes hands. Recognize new leaders with a special event or dinner. Great them with a chant (huzzah!!) or cheer when they take over.

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 some team building and to learn the skills they need to serve on the board.

If it's too late to plan a retreat at the beginning of the year, then do a retreat at mid-year. There is no better time for training, because you will have already uncovered their weaknesses as a board. 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 board 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 on the program board. Just remember, there is no wrong time to do training.

Lead By Example

Let your final "New Year's Resolution" for the new academic year be to lead by example. We all seek two

things from our leaders: Vision and Integrity. Demonstrate your vision clearly to your activities board. Let them know your goals for the board, 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.

Oh, and Happy New Year!

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