

LEADERSHIP FOR YOUTH

Designing Youth Leadership Training Programs

Many youth organizations have the goal of developing the leadership potential of youth. The critical task of providing effective training programs to help youth acquire leadership skills and knowledge can be a difficult one. The purpose of this publication is to provide adult leaders of youth programs with a step by step process to help design effective leadership training programs.

This publication discusses leaders and leadership. Points to consider when developing effective youth leadership programs are given, followed by steps in developing leadership training programs for youth.

WHO IS A LEADER?

Many programs explore personal views of leaders. This can be accomplished by having participants list successful leaders they have known. Often, people identify types of leaders including family, work, community, political or religious. It is uncommon for people to include *youth* in their list.

Those working in youth development programs believe in the leadership capacity of youth. They can usually identify youth leaders as well as adult leaders.

WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

Social psychologists provide many different definitions. Most say that leadership involves the interaction of *leaders*, *followers* and *goals*.

Leaders need followers who are willing to use the talents of the group and respect their opinions.

Together, leaders and followers must determine the goals and decide on the course of action needed to accomplish them.

Are leaders born or made? Some people believe that leaders are born into leadership positions by their inheritance and destiny. Others believe that it takes a special situation for a person to achieve a leadership position. When working with youth, we need to believe that each individual has the capacity to lead. Who will lead depends on the membership of the group and the demands of the goal to be accomplished.

Each individual has their own leadership style. Youth will also develop a style unique to them. Some leaders take charge of the followers and give orders on what needs to be accomplished. Other leaders listen to the followers and together decide on a goal and how it should be accomplished.

Youth organizations provide many different opportunities for youth to develop and practice their leadership skills and styles. These include serving on a committee, being a club officer, planning an event, speaking in front of groups or networking with other organizations. Providing training for youth who serve in these leadership capacities is essential so that youth feel confident in fulfilling the challenges required of them. Once they have achieved a measure of success, youth will continue to strive for more demanding and difficult roles.

POINTS TO CONSIDER FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMS

When designing an effective leadership training program for youth, consider the following:

Know Where The Youth Are Developmentally

Adolescence is a period when youth are establishing a sense of personal identity. They are learning to be goal directed and principle-oriented rather than parent directed and feeling-oriented. During adolescence, family ties are growing weaker and peers are becoming more important.

At this time, adolescents are also developing the ability to see things from another's point of view and developing a commitment to a system of values. Youth are learning to make more decisions and take on more responsibilities. They lack experience in dealing with this new independence.

Help Build Self Esteem

Each youth develops a sense of his or her identity that is unique from everyone else. This identity can best be found in interaction with significant other people. Adolescents need to know that they have special talents that are unique to them. By helping them develop a positive self image, they will have the confidence needed to meet the demands of leadership.

Provide a Nonthreatening Atmosphere

Youth need to feel comfortable in participating in scheduled activities and in voicing their opinions. One of the first activities should be one in which members of the group can get to know one another. This will help set the pace for the rest of the training program.

Help Youth Build Social Skills Through Group Activities

Leaders need to know how to communicate with their followers. This includes talking with the group members, listening to their ideas and concerns, and reading their reactions through non-verbal communications. Youth should be given opportunities to practice these communication skills.

Provide Opportunities For Different Youth to Emerge as the Leader

In order to provide leadership training for youth, each individual needs to have the opportunity to experience the leader role. At times, one person in the group may dominate and not let others have the experience of leading the group. Program planners should make an effort to see that each participant has his or her turn at being the leader.

Provide for Planning and Decision Making

Invite youth to be a part of the program and give them tasks that are relevant. This will help them make the transition of using newly learned skills when they are actually in the leadership role in their organization, school or community. If youth are asked to give their opinions on decisions, make sure their suggestions are given consideration.

Provide Additional Leadership Opportunities Beyond the Length of the Training Program

Allow the participants to further develop the skills they were exposed to during the training program and to accept additional leadership roles in their club, school and community. If youth are not given the opportunity to reinforce the skills learned and continue to build on these skills, they tend to forget them.

Include the Topic of Followership in the Training Program

Not only do youth need to learn how to be effective leaders, but also how to be good followers. This includes learning how to build good leader-follower relationships and learning how to build strong team attitudes.

Use an Effective Measurement Tool to Assess Program Outcomes

What skills will the youth learn when they participate in your training program? How will you know if they actually learned those skills? One of your priorities should be in establishing clear program goals that can be measured. Effective measurement tools should be developed and used to track the progress that youth are making by attending the training program.

STEPS IN DEVELOPING A LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAM FOR YOUTH

Recruit the help of youth and adult leaders who have an interest in leadership development when forming the committee to help develop, plan, conduct and evaluate the training program.

The following steps will help in planning all aspects of the program.

1. Determine Audience

The first step in planning a leadership training program is to decide on the audience your program will reach. Will the program be for all age youth or only for teens? Your program will be more effective if you have age-appropriate goals and activities.

2. Determine Program Objectives

Writing measurable program objectives is the next important task. Using a system of testing objectives called SMAC, (Specific, Measurable, Achievable and Compatible) can help you in writing your objectives (Wilson, M. 1976). After writing an objective ask yourself: Is it specific? Is it measurable? Is it Achievable? Is it Compatible?

Objectives may include statements, such as:

- 100 percent of the participants will learn two goal-setting techniques by the end of the training session.
- 100 percent of the participants will be able to list five positive characteristics about themselves by the end of the training session.
- 90 percent of the participants will be able to list three active listening techniques by the end of the training session.
- 100 percent of the participants will be able to list one value or principle that he or she believes to be important in life after the session on values.

3. Select Leadership Topics

Once objectives are written, decide what topics you want to feature in each session. Examples include:

- self-esteem
- self development
- creativity
- ethics and values
- understanding leadership
- goal attainment
- group dynamics
- teamwork
- problem solving
- communication skills

4. Select Activities on Topics

Tired of trying to reinvent the wheel? There are many sources of information that feature activities and lesson plans on leadership topics. Leadership resources are available from the State Extension 4-H and Youth Programs Office or your local county Extension office. In Kansas, specific 4-H Extension resources include: *Leadership Leader Notebook*, *Teen Leader College I and II Resource packets*, *Hello Beautiful Person School Enrichment Program*, *4-H Cares Notebook*, *Camp Counselor Training Booklet*, and *Project Leaders Training Notebook*. Ask state Extension 4-H specialists or county Extension agents who have conducted leadership programs to share their resources with you.

5. Determine Teaching Methods

When deciding which method to use remember that greater learning takes place when people see, hear and do something.

Based on the age of participants and length of program, you will need to decide what methods you will use to teach the selected leadership topics. Methods may include:

- group Discussion
- role Playing
- lecture
- group Activities

6. Determine Time Frame

Based on objectives written and topics selected, determining the length of your training program is the next step. Try not to cover too many topics in a short time. Programs can be scheduled for a day-long conference, a weekend retreat or a series of one-hour sessions.

7. Select Location

When selecting the location of your training program, select a location that will provide the type of environment that is favorable to learning. Youth generally prefer an informal environment rather than a formal classroom setting. Consider a more relaxed setting, perhaps at a camp site or an attractive meeting room.

8. Set Budget

Financing your training program is an important step. Allocate funds to cover the following costs:

- resource materials
- supplies
- speaker fees
- food for snacks and meals
- room or site rental fee
- accommodations if staying overnight

Sources of funds may come from:

- participant fees
- donations
- grants
- combination of resources

9. Publicize Training Program

With all the time and work you put into the planning of the leadership training program, you'll want to publicize the event to get the maximum number of participants. A personal invitation by peers or a trusted adult is often the most effective way to get youth to attend.

Promotional activities can include:

- articles in newsletters
- articles in local newspapers

- announcements on the radio
- direct mailing of promotional brochures to youth
- promotional posters to be posted at schools

10. Assess Program Outcomes and Conduct Evaluation

Use varying methods to assess the knowledge gained by participants of the program. This will help determine if the objectives of the program were achieved. This will also help you know if the participants of the program gained the leadership skills that were the focus of the program.

Methods of data collection can include:

- Using a pre- and post-knowledge test to measure differences in knowledge before and at the conclusion of training to indicate the understanding of leadership concepts.
- Observation by an adult following the training, using a checklist of key skills or practices demonstrated to indicate that leadership skills were enhanced.
- Self assessment by the participant, a year following the training to indicate active involvement in new leadership roles.

Another important avenue of feedback is to have the participants complete an evaluation at the end of the program. Evaluations provide valuable information to use in planning future training programs.

TAKE THE CHALLENGE

Youth organizations have the challenge of providing effective leadership training programs to help youth acquire leadership skills and knowledge. These skills

will allow youth to serve as catalysts for change in their personal lives, the organizations in which they belong and communities in which they live.

Youth who serve in leadership capacities should feel confident in fulfilling the challenges required of them. Once they have achieved success, they will continue to strive for more demanding and difficult roles in adulthood.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you would like to learn more about leadership, listed below are resources you may find informative:

- Bass, B. M. (Ed.) (1990). *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership* (3rd ed.). New York: The Free Press.
- Brungardt, C.L. & Ryan, M. J. (Eds.). (1993). *The Kansas Directory of Leadership Education*. Topeka: The Kansas Rural Development Council.
- Clark, K. E. & Clark, M. B. (1994). *Choosing to Lead*. Charlotte: Leadership Press, Ltd.
- Conger, J. A. (1992). *Learning to Lead*. San Francisco: The Jossey-Bass Management Series.
- Covey, S. R. (1991). *Principle Centered Leadership*. New York: Simon & Shuster.
- The Journal of Leadership Studies*. Michigan: Baker College Publishing Company. ISSN Number 1071-7919. Published since Nov. 1993.
- Wilson, M. (1976). *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*. Boulder: Johnson Publishing Company.

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