

In working to improve our communities, *leadership* is our most important resource. It is the engine that pulls the train.

If you are involved in *any* group or organization, you will need to develop leadership in order to accomplish anything of significance.

Why? Because it is leaders who make things happen. It is leaders who have a vision, take initiative, influence people, make proposals, organize logistics, solve problems, follow-up, and - most of all - take responsibility.

The complex problems we have in our communities will require many people who are willing and able to lend an active hand and work together to solve them. Whether you want to create more jobs in your community, stop child abuse, improve tenants' rights, or accomplish any other community goal, you will need many leaders working together. The old model of one leader on top, with many followers at the bottom, isn't workable anymore.

That is why leadership development should be a central activity for any leader.

You *can* develop a team of leaders around you. Leadership doesn't have to be a lonely business. You can train people to competently share your responsibilities, vision, and commitment.

In this chapter, we will focus on many aspects of leadership development. In this first section, we will talk about how to develop an overall leadership plan for your group or organization. We will also give you some practical ideas for how you, as a leader of your organization, can train others to lead.

Why do you need a plan for building leadership?

So, why do you need a plan in order to develop a team of leaders? As with any endeavor, a plan will get you where you want to go. It doesn't have to be complicated or technical. Here is an example of a part of an organization's leadership plan:

Bakersville Arts Council: Leadership Plan for Volunteers		
Goal	Leadership Development Activities	Timeline
Volunteers should learn skills in giving speeches about Bakersville's historic sites	Training given by Amy Nakamura, Outside Trainer	This Month
All volunteers will learn how to recruit other volunteers	Training given by Troy Bray, Volunteer Coordinator	Next Month
Increase ability to work as a leadership team	Schedule volunteer group planning meetings	This Year

As you can see, a simple leadership plan is just a list of leadership development goals, with a timeline and some actions for accomplishing the goals. You and potential leaders can put one together after some discussion.

In general, it's a good idea, for several reasons, to involve the people you hope to train as leaders in planning their leadership development.

First, it lets them know that you value them, respect their potential, and think they would be good leaders, which can help them believe in their own possibilities.

Second, it models the kind of inclusive leadership that good leaders practice. Perhaps the most powerful lessons leaders learn come from watching the behavior and actions of leaders they respect. If you want someone to learn a leadership skill, you should be practicing that skill yourself and be making sure that other leaders in your organization or initiative do so as well.

Third, the people you're training may have a better grasp on what they need than you do. If they're included in planning their training, it's more likely that the training will be appropriate.

Finally, it's a mark of respect and fairness to include potential leaders in decisions that have a bearing on their work and perhaps on their lives.

When do you develop a plan for building leadership?

You do it at the very beginning. But if you haven't done it already, the best time to do it is now. The sooner you start thinking about how many leaders you want and with what skills, the sooner you can begin to move toward your goals. In fact, you can put aside an hour or so a week to think about building leadership in your organization.

You may feel that you don't have time to think about developing leaders. It may feel impossible to step back from the minute-to-minute crises that confront you in order to think about something that sounds like a frill. However, taking the time to think about leadership may be the key to helping you prevent many of these same crises. It is time well spent.

Leadership development is an ongoing project. Every person, no matter how much she already knows and how well she already functions as a leader, needs to continue learning and growing in order to meet the ever growing challenges around her.

How do you develop a plan to build leadership?

Envision your leadership team

Whether you are part of a small or large group or organization, it is useful to envision your ideal leadership team. Answering the questions below can help.

- How many leaders do you want on your team?
- What kinds of skills will they have?
- Will your leadership team reflect the community which your organization serves or works in?
- How will your leadership team support each other and you?
- How will your leaders be committed to the goals of your organization?

Questions like "How many leaders do you want?" can be limiting if you make too many assumptions about them. The ideal in most organizations is that an individual or small group has overall leadership

responsibilities, but that many people take leadership roles in different situations. You may have a picture of your ideal leadership team, but that doesn't mean that others – perhaps all staff members – shouldn't get leadership training as well. You may find untapped potential, or may be preparing people for the one time they need to step up and take charge.

Set leadership development goals for your group or organization

To start, think about the group you have right now, and compare it to what you envision your ideal leadership team to be. What are the strengths of your group, and how do they fit in with your vision? What are its difficulties? Comparing your vision to the reality of your group, you can determine the areas for which your group as a whole can use leadership development. Do people need to increase their awareness of diversity issues? Do they need help in working together as a team?

Once you've identified these areas of need, choose specific goals to address those areas. For example, if everyone needs to improve facilitation skills, figure out a list of priorities for who needs to learn what kind of facilitation skills. Then set up a training that will help you reach your goals.

Below is one example of a part of an organization's leadership plan for its staff and volunteers. The organization, Sunnyside Metro Food Pantry, has five staff members and eight volunteers.

Leadership plan for all staff and volunteers of Sunnyside Metro Food Pantry		
Goal	Leadership Development Activities	Timeline
Support staff will learn basic e-mail and Internet skills	Training given by Jerome, Operations Manager	This Month
Mobilizers will learn how to lead effective meetings	Training given by Jasmine, Program Director	Next Month
Increase ability to work as a team among all staff members	Have group rotate leadership in community development projects; Executive Director, Carmine, will teach people how to support each other's leadership	This Year
Increase diversity awareness among all program leadership and staff	Ongoing diversity awareness program; bring in an outside facilitator	Meet monthly throughout this year

Your organization may have a very different plan than the one shown above. It isn't crucial what the plan looks like physically -- sketching it out on the back of a napkin may be just fine. The point is, if you think ahead and plan your goals, actions, and timelines, you will be more likely to get the kind of leadership team you want.

Pick your methods

There are different methods for developing leaders. Here are some of them:

Sharing your thinking about what you are doing and why you are doing it can be an invaluable learning experience to someone you are training.

Modeling good leadership

The most important thing you can do to develop leaders is to demonstrate what a good leader looks and acts like. If you have good leadership skills, the chances are that staff members or volunteers will be aware of and copy them. If you're not a good leader, potential leaders will also probably copy your behavior, and your teaching of good leadership skills may not help much.

Teaching as you lead

You can teach people about almost anything you are doing -- as you are doing it. If you are handling a delicate negotiation, seize the opportunity to teach someone about the art of negotiating. Bring along your assistant or another person who is ready to learn. When you have a moment alone together, tell your assistant what you are thinking about the negotiation. What is your strategy? What else do you consider? What are your hunches?

Sharing your thinking about what you are doing and why you are doing it can be an invaluable learning experience to someone you are training.

Mentoring

Mentoring means you take someone under your wing and teach her one-on-one over a period of time. It includes teaching people as you lead, as described above, but it is a bigger and more significant process. When you mentor someone, you make a commitment to her. You help her become a leader by teaching her what you've learned and by encouraging her as she takes on new challenges.

For example, you might sit down and listen to someone you are mentoring after he tries to lead a focus group for the first time. Listening can really help him think through his experiences so he is ready for the next challenge.

Your confidence in another person and commitment to her as a developing leader is one of the most effective ways to help her become a leader. It is also an important contribution, because you are helping to develop a person who has the potential to be leading for years to come.

Exchange programs

Sometimes it helps to do a leadership exchange with another group or organization. You can trade staff or volunteers for a period of time, so each group gets to learn how another group works. People can learn skills that aren't available in their own organization. Even a visit to another organization can give people a picture of new possibilities.

Orientations

Whenever a new person becomes part of your organization, whether as a staff person, volunteer, or member, an orientation is important to help him get on-board quickly. People want to feel that they are doing a good job, and they need the information and training in order to do their jobs well. Giving people the help they need early on is a worthwhile investment of your group or organization's time. If people are left on their own when they first begin, they can often feel left-out or resentful.

Make sure the new person gets:

- The [training](#) he needs to get the job done
- A history of the organization
- A chance to learn about the mission, policies, and procedures of the organization
- An understanding of what help is available and how to get it
- A chance to [meet people](#) in the organization
- A warm welcome

Workshops and training sessions

[Workshops](#) can help your whole group move forward on key issues. Perhaps your group needs a workshop on decision-making, fundraising, or creating an action plan. Having a workshop that addresses key issues can set the organization on the right track. If the workshop solves a long-term problem, it also has the potential of lifting morale and renewing commitment.

Retreats

[Retreats](#) can be excellent for revitalizing or refocusing groups or organizations. A retreat can help a group identify new goals or plan new strategies. A retreat can also be used when the organization is poised to take a new direction and when everyone must understand the coming changes in order to make the change successful.

Retreats can help people recommit to the mission of the organization. They can also help people remember the importance of their relationships to each other as they work together.

To insure the success of a retreat you should:

- Check with the group to verify that this is something they want to do
- Get a commitment from members to attend
- Set the date well in advance, so that people will be able to come
- Find a comfortable and accessible retreat location--preferably away from your regular workplace
- Have clear goals
- Be realistic about what can be accomplished in the period of time allotted
- As much as possible, get input in planning the retreat from participants
- Make sure there is active participation
- Make sure people have enough time to connect
- Make sure the facilitators are competent

Leadership groups

[Leaders](#) need ongoing development too. Leaders need relationships with other leaders to help them keep growing and get through the difficulties they face. As leaders, we sometimes feel isolated in our jobs; we need others to listen to our thinking, and we need to listen to others' ideas.

To do this, you can set up a peer leadership group. Invite leaders from other organizations to meet every other week or once a month. In these meetings you can talk about your experiences of being a leader, both the rewards and the difficulties.

Leadership groups can also be valuable for a group of leaders inside your organization. If you regularly convene a group in which people can support one another's individual leadership, that can help them focus on their work and keep growing.

Now that we've examined some different leadership development activities, let's see how to develop a leadership plan for individuals in your group or organization.

Set leadership development goals for individuals

In addition to developing a leadership plan for your organization as a whole, it is useful to develop a leadership plan for each person in your organization. But first, let's look at how your view of leadership can affect how people grow as leaders.

Expecting people to act like leaders

If you expect people to act like leaders, they are much more likely to do so.

Leadership is an activity in which everyone can participate at some level. Everyone has a point of view that is valuable. Everyone has talents to share. When we think about whom to train for leadership, it's easy to overlook people who don't fit our stereotypical image of a leader.

For example, we often don't consider quiet or shy individuals to be potential leaders. Many of us also make inaccurate assumptions about an individual's leadership potential based on the cultural, racial, gender, or income groups that a person belongs to.

Of course, in reality, potential leaders come in every imaginable size, shape, and background. There are leadership riches all around us. Your expectations can go a long way in helping people stretch their perceptions of themselves and what they can accomplish.

In the words of John Gardner in his book *On Leadership*: "Most men and women go through their lives using no more than a fraction -- usually a rather small fraction -- of the potentialities within them. The reservoir of unused human talent and energy is vast, and learning to tap that reservoir more effectively is one of the exciting tasks ahead for humankind".

What individual leadership skills do you need in your group or organization?

Do you need someone to be able to take charge of a fundraiser? Do you need a person who can recruit volunteers? To develop a leadership plan for individuals, first list the leadership skills you need in your organization. Then, think about which individuals would be best suited to learn those skills.

In matching people to needed skills you should consider:

- Who already has many of the skills needed for this position?

- Who will be able to successfully handle the leadership responsibilities?
- Who would be interested in and excited by this challenge?
- Is there someone who will grow and blossom in this position?

Investing in each person

Each person needs to be supported to grow as a leader. Your encouragement and support will help people feel enthusiastic and hopeful about their work and about their group or organization.

In order to grow strong and sturdy leaders, you will need to give them some tending, thought, and care. This doesn't have to take a lot of time. You just have to get in the habit of thinking about each person.

You can meet with each person periodically to talk about their leadership development goals. Ask them to brainstorm ways in which they would like to make contributions in their workplace or community. Ask them what leadership skills they would like to learn. You may not be able to supply all the training or opportunities they want; however, you may determine ways to challenge them which will keep them engaged in their volunteer position or job, and perhaps keep them from leaving your organization.

You can also challenge people to try things they may not be able to imagine themselves. People often need lots of persistent encouragement to lead; many, many people in our society have been discouraged from seeing themselves as having important ideas, taking action, or making a contribution to others.

Writing the individual leadership plan

So now it's time to sit down with the folks in your group or organization and write individual leadership plans with them.

Leadership Plan for Keisha, staff person at Sunnyside Metro Food Pantry		
Goal	Leadership Development Activity	Timeline
Learn how to run a small donor campaign	Have Lisa teach her one-on-one	Next month
Develop more confidence as a leader	Give her opportunities to lead staff meetings	Next six months

As you can see, writing down a plan for leadership development is not a complicated endeavor. However, the plan will keep everyone moving towards the goals of both the individuals and of your organization.

Recruiting new people to lead

[Recruiting new members](#) and volunteers is a key element of leadership development. It should be part of your leadership development plan. Why? Here are a few reasons.

First, new members are your next generation of leaders. People always leave groups or organizations for a variety of reasons. They move to another city, or take a demanding new job, or their interests simply change.

Therefore, you need new people who are ready and willing to take the lead. Otherwise, the loss of one or two active leaders can seriously hurt a group or organization.

Second, bringing new people into an organization keeps new ideas coming in and keeps your group vital. New people will test your assumptions and challenge you to think about your ideas afresh.

Third, bringing new people into your organization is the foundation of [community building](#). The more people you have working for your cause, the more powerful you will be.

When you recruit a new member or volunteer, [give him a job](#) that brings him into the center of the organization as soon as possible. That way he will feel welcome and needed. Ask him what he thinks about organizational issues.

Develop yourself as a leader

Remember, you are in this picture, too. You will need leadership development in order to continue to grow. The more you succeed at leading, the more difficult challenges will come your way. People will see you as a resource and they will bring you harder and harder problems to solve.

So, draw up a leadership development plan for yourself. Get additional training when you need it; go to conferences that address issues that concern you; and form relationships with other leaders who can give you a hand when you need it. Paying attention to your own leadership development will not only make you a better leader, but will also make your organization a better organization, as well.

In Summary

"It takes a village to raise a child," is popular African proverb. By the same token, *it takes an organization to raise a leader*. Developing leadership is a serious endeavor, but it's worth the time and effort because leaders are valuable. Look at some of the great leaders in history - Martin Luther King, Jr., Susan B. Anthony, and Mahatma Gandhi. If we had many more of their kind, functioning at their abilities, what would the world be like?

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