

leadership

FOR STUDENT ACTIVITIES

Gear Up!

For
the
New
Year

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NHS & NJHS edition



Leadership training should be intentional,
not just a by-product of activities.

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A new school year offers a unique opportunity to rethink what you do as an adviser. Schools vary in their expectations for the adviser role, but ultimately it's about developing student leaders. Many advisers, however, get caught up in the day-to-day frenzy of events, projects, and programs and don't make leadership development a priority.

I love the story of the two bricklayers. When one was asked what he was making, he said, "I'm making \$18 an hour." The other one said, "I'm building a cathedral, to reach heaven and inspire people." The problem is, the second guy was supposed to be building a garage.

Some advisers think that they will develop student leaders naturally by getting them involved in student government and other projects. But if you're serious about training your students to become leaders, it requires intentional and specific attention. Use these four ideas to help you rethink your strategy:

Begin with the end in mind. What kind of student leader would you like to hire after graduation? How can you train toward that end?

Go after influencers, not warm bodies. Don't stop with student government. Chances are only half of them are leaders. Popular students often get elected, but they are not always good at organizing. Instead, look around for who has social influence. Ask teachers. See who gets sent to the principal's office. List the affinity groups in your school (i.e. jocks, geeks, skaters, and so on) and identify the unofficial ring leaders. Then invite everyone

to a leader training program, whether or not they have an official role. (Use the free Social Influence Survey at www.leadyoung.org to get started.)

Train to lead. Many scholastic organizations confuse character and confidence building with leading. These are different qualities. Whether it's at a summer camp, a weekend retreat, a lunch, or an evening elective, offer a training series that actually teaches organizational skills. Then planning other events can happen more effectively. Find local leaders to mentor, speak, and offer leader coaching.

Let students lead. A lot of "leadership" teams consist of students following staff members or a couple students running a team of followers. Instead, shape your group to function as an executive team and separate strategic issues from tactical ones. Use your meeting times for subleaders to check in regarding their team's progress, not to debate whether you should put the posters on the cafeteria walls or rely solely on handouts.

Fall is a great time to reconsider how your group will function and, more importantly, why you do what you do. If your aim is events, projects, and programs, chances are you're settling for less than you really want. Building student leaders is an intentional goal, not a by-product. ■

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