



You Yoda

Give your student leaders a chance to interact directly with politicians.

Alan E. Nelson

One of the greatest benefits you can bring to society is helping young leaders gain socio-emotional skills. That's why your role is so important. Watch a few episodes of *The Apprentice* if you want to see the subpar emotional skills of many talented adults.

How do your student leaders respond to the each other? Let's say Katie feelings were hurt by something Josh said during a recent student government meeting. You catch wind of it and bring the two together to talk through the process. By helping each identify the actions, responses, and feelings of the other, you model the life skill of doing this as leaders. How many times do we wish our adult counterparts would employ healthy conflict resolution skills and relational sensitivity?

In our training systems, we teach the use of Socratic coaching. This methodology requires both emotional intelligence and leadership aptitude from the adult, who must read the situation, assess appropriate responses, and then ask the student leader a thoughtful question that catalyzes a reflective response. Like the game show, *Jeopardy*, you must know the answer and then turn it into a question. "So Susan, what are some possible ways people could have understood the way you said that? What is another way you could have communicated that so people would have better understood what you were expecting from them?"

Merely telling a student leader how to behave emotionally is usually ineffective in the short run and always in the long run. You want to train students how to think like leaders, not just mimic leadership behaviors or parrot leader words. Far too many academic courses confuse short term memorizing with long term knowledge. We often see a common misstep where adults tell students how to behave, instead of helping them effectively discover what does and doesn't work. This requires far more skill and patience from the adult adviser.

A common teen dilemma is overreacting to the socio-emotional responses of others who are on their team or somehow connected with their leadership. How a leader responds to others significantly impacts leadership outcomes. Reading others involves more than just noting obvious actions. It includes intonation, motivation, temperament, self-esteem issues, and attitude. Establishing an emotional baseline helps the leader know when a team member is subdued or enthusiastic. This can be accomplished by interacting with team members in a variety of situations—in classrooms, retreats, ropes courses, and running events.

Talking about socio-emotional topics when things are going well, provides a better learning environment than when relations are strained and emotions are tense. Often we only resort to these topics in the thick of battle, when there is conflict or a problem.

Consider this a well-check, seeing the doctor when you're healthy; preventative medicine. Counselors use a term, "meta-communication." "Let's talk about how we're communicating with each other. What's working for you and what's not? How could we improve our communication as a team and with others?"

If you know *Star Wars*, then you're familiar with Yoda, the wise character who espouses truth in his own unique way. He does it without being too obvious, to avoid hijacking the process of learning and discovery.

Here are 10 socio-emotional questions that you and your student leadership team can use to assess the environment of your team and use as talking points.

Rate each question on a 1–5 scale: 1 absent, 2 low, 3 modest, 4 strong, 5 excellent

1. Student leaders are free to share their ideas and opinions. _____
2. Student leaders feel free to disagree with each other in meetings. _____
3. Student leaders react well to other team members who seem upset or emotionally disengaged. _____
4. Student leaders work through conflicts well. _____

5. Our team communicates relatively evenly. _____
6. Adult sponsors feel respected by student leaders. _____
7. Adult sponsors provide sufficient guidance, without telling students what to do. _____
8. I feel respected, honored, and heard on this team. _____
9. I believe that I am sensitive to, and respond well to, the emotions of others. _____
10. Overall I'd rate the emotional health of our team as: _____

Several of these questions refer to the group as a whole and may not identify specific individuals who are problematic on a team. But since each member increases or decreases the average, by raising the issues, you allow for more robust conversations to explore how individuals are affecting the team. If you notice much difference in answers of the two personal questions and the six group questions, you may want to dig deeper in these areas. ■

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<LEADERSHIP LESSON —Motivational Moments>

Procedure

Each student gives a podium presentation on something that has motivated or inspired him or her. Students may use any of the following media for the presentation: video clip, song (recorded or live), poem, short story, or personal experience.

The presentation must be a minimum of one minute in length and cannot exceed five minutes. Before or after the presentation the student must explain why or how this motivated or inspired him or her and the circumstances under which this happened.

Students should sign up, two per day, to present a motivational moment. A scoring rubric for might also be helpful for audience members. Students should not duplicate another presentation.

Motivational Moments is not designed as a self-disclosure exercise but it does, on occasion, occur naturally. You may also discuss the process of feedback, and direct teaching occurs

about the defensive behaviors students use when receiving positive and negative feedback.

Objectives

- To identify what is motivating.
- To practice public speaking skills.
- To allow class members to gain deeper insight into who their classmates are.
- To practice good listening skills.
- To offer the class members a chance to give and receive feedback and to practice peer assessment..

Materials

- A podium.
- A tape or CD player, a television with a VCR or DVD player (depending on student presentations).
- A copy of the assignment sheet and rubric for each student.

Time Required

A maximum of five minutes' presenta-

tion time per student and an undetermined follow-up processing time for each presentation.

Processing

Each student receives feedback after his or her presentation. When the class completes all presentations, the students process the assignment with the following questions:

- While you were presenting, did you feel that you were being listened to?
- What did we learn about each other?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- How did you deal with giving or receiving negative feedback?
- Did you agree or disagree with the feedback you received? Why?
- What was easy or difficult about this assignment?

This lesson was developed by Anne Stevenson and appeared in the book *More Leadership Lessons* published by NASSP.