

STELLAR SUMMER LEADERSHIP

Follow the three Bs for a productive summer session.

ALAN E. NELSON



Summer is a great time to launch leadership workshops for student leaders, and incorporating the three Bs—build, bond, and blueprint—is a formula for success.

Build

Perhaps the most overlooked element of any student leadership program is skill development. If you want students to lead, you need to train them. *Harvard Business Review* states that the average age at which a person first receives formal leadership training is 42, which is long after the formative years. Building is about helping students understand what it really means to lead and explicitly learning the skills they need to do so. It is not about observing someone, working a snack bar, or making a poster. Leading requires social acumen and organizational skills that help people accomplish together what they couldn't do as individuals. Leaders are those who get others going.

In a two-day workshop, plan on investing at least two to three hours for exercises and activities that build leadership skills. These skills require active learning methods, not just sitting and talking about them. Try to use mini-experiential exercises to let individuals take turns leading and then debriefing the group. Many things that people call leadership really aren't about leading. They confuse team building, public speaking, and being a good person with leadership, but leading is more than these things. If you're not a strong leader, then invite one to come in and talk about leading or use executive-oriented training resources.

Bond

Consider the chemistry of your team members. If your students are not familiar with each other, spend some time and energy on group bonding. In a two-day workshop, invest two to three hours on bonding activities. If students are somewhat familiar with each other, then one to two hours will be

sufficient. Include team-building activities such as mixers, ice breakers, ropes courses, and simple fun and games. Some of this can be designed to feel unplanned and organic, such as meals and entertainment, but still be intentional. Plan who sits next to whom, how students are assigned to teams, and what they're to accomplish on breaks. Bonding involves developing trust, creating rapport, and connecting on an emotional level. It's best to do a bonding activity at the beginning and at the end of the workshop. If you're able to hold an offsite workshop, you can schedule additional bonding activities after dinner.

Blueprint

A blueprint is about planning. In a two-day workshop, invest about half of the time (five to six hours) outlining the school year events. If you're meeting a week or two before the start of school, planning for some of the bigger events will already be underway. Focus more on details for larger and upcoming events and less for smaller and more distant ones. Try to avoid spending too much time and energy on any one item. This is the planning, not the construction, phase.

A good blueprint will save you a lot of time during the rush of the school year, and it's also a great stress reducer because it removes some of the angst caused by uncertainty. The goal of the group is to serve as an executive team in which everyone has established responsibilities to oversee tasks, not just do the tasks themselves.

The three Bs are powerful tools to help your student leaders get a jump on the school year. Teaching and reviewing them once or twice a year will not only reduce stress but will become a memory-making opportunity your members will look forward to and talk about for years to come. ■

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