

Who's Leading Our Student Leaders?

[Leadership for Student Activities](#), [Mar 2001](#) by [Roach, Chuck](#)

Challenging high school and middle level student leaders to achieve high levels of leadership skill development can be a very demanding experience. This is especially true if adult advisers have never received any formal training in the area of student leadership skill development. Teachers often accept the role of adviser of a cocurricular activity group such as student council or National Honor Society because of subtle or even direct pressure from a school administrator. It is difficult to say no under these circumstances, yet advisers may feel unprepared for the role they are assuming. The position of an adult leader requires us to motivate and train students to reach a higher level of leadership skill achievement. The students selected to these cocurricular groups have been identified as leaders of the school. It does not come as any surprise that many advisers struggle with the fact that they do not have adequate formal training to accomplish the high level of expectation to train and motivate student leaders. The truth of the matter is that the way in which schools select advisers and the fact that many advisers have never been formally trained in the area of student leadership may never change. You may be asking yourself, "What should I do as an adviser to see that my student leaders get the best experience possible? On what leadership skills should I concentrate to train my students to become even better leaders?"

Student leaders learn best in an interactive environment. Just as in the classroom, students are captivated with the learning process when lessons are interactive. They remember the learning experience longer, and they are able to relate to the concepts being taught when they learn by doing. As an adviser, you should provide as many opportunities as possible for each of your student leaders to gain firsthand the experience of what it means to be a responsible leader. Delegate a variety of roles and responsibilities to student leaders and let them assume more accountability for student activities created in the school environment. The more responsibility given to student leaders, the more they will learn how to become better leaders.

Concentrate on the following six leadership skills when planning your student leadership development efforts: Confidence. The confidence of student leaders is enhanced when they recognize that certain personal qualities, when used effectively, will contribute to a

high level of individual success. Knowing that they possess these traits can motivate them to positively influence others. Students who possess a high degree of confidence recognize how their actions can affect others and enhance their own student leadership performance. Responsibility. Advisers can also give student leaders the responsibility to determine the magnitude of their leadership role. Students learn to be responsible by being given responsibility. Responsible students have an adeptness in making decisions that is drawn from their ability to separate needs from wants, to consider the immediate and long-term implications, and to have confidence in the use of both process skills and intuition. Responsible students have the ability to redirect temptation, moods, and emotions that could cause negative behavior.

Communication. Teaching student leaders effective communication skills will not only enhance their middle level and high school years but also give them a solid foundation for whatever future endeavors they might pursue. The ability to express one's thoughts, ideas, emotions, and needs is the most critical of all the process skills. Great student leaders are effective communicators and will have learned to speak, listen, write, read, and accurately interpret nonverbal clues.

Risk Taking. Encouraging student leaders to feel comfortable taking risks will open many doors of opportunity. Leaders should be prepared to step outside their comfort zone, organize their thoughts, and prepare a plan of action. Risk taking is the act of taking calculated risks, not foolish or dangerous acts, but acts that will allow a student leader to risk failure and possible criticism. Student leaders must be prepared to set aside the fear of what others might think about them, and they must then be prepared to stand accountable for their actions. Interpersonal Skills. When student leaders have the opportunity to improve their interpersonal skills they will be perceived as likable and caring persons. Student leaders who have the capacity to value the uniqueness in others, to appreciate the beauty of their differences, and to place a high value on that which we all share in common will find many other students willing to follow them. These same student leaders are often interested in the success of other students and will be quick to praise their efforts.

Organizational Skills. Organizational skills that help a student identify priorities, establish the steps that are necessary for attainment, and mobilize resources will make a

good student leader become more effective and productive. When a student leader begins to set goals, dreams become more attainable and vague thoughts become real ideas. The sense of accomplishment is enhanced when goals are fulfilled through solid planning, attention to detail, and commitment to purpose.

The development of a good student leader is an ongoing process. Advisers should never become discouraged if the final product is not an example of "perfect" leadership. After all, we are artists working on a masterpiece in progress. We must make sure that the foundation is solid. If we have succeeded in our efforts to create a solid foundation upon which student leaders can build for the future, who knows what level of success our leaders will achieve?

Who is leading our student leaders? I believe the people leading our student leaders are some of the most dedicated and caring educators we have ever seen in our rewarding profession. Keep up the great work!

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