

4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series

Leadership Styles

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Different styles of leadership are appropriate at different times. When a new group forms, it usually depends on the leaders for structure and guidance. After the initial organizing, a leader can work to increase total group involvement in decision making. As group members gain experience, the leader needs to be more group-centered to allow for maximum development of the members. Group decision making is essential in a program that is centered around the needs and total development of youth. As the leader you need to be involved and participate with the members.

The diagram below illustrates the changing role of the leader in working with different age groups. With pre-teens, the leader plays a major role in suggesting the kinds of things they might do. Moving on to the early teen group, the leader usually plays a lesser role, first getting the members' ideas before contributing ideas of his or her own. With older teens, the leader's role is mainly one of consulting or advising since the members themselves are capable of planning and carrying out the program.

No one relationship is the "right" one. In fact, any one could be "right" depending on the situation. The important task for you, the leader, is to find what works best with your group at any given time. As interests and experiences change, relationships will change.

What you do and what results you get depend a great deal on how you and the group members relate. Four of the many possible relationships are described below. Which do you feel will work best with your group?

"Our Club" Leadership

Here the leader is successful when he/she knows the individual members well, is interested in them and in what they do. This leader believes that the club belongs to the young people and that it is most successful when it exists for the members' benefit. The leader says, "Let's go," "Let's find out," "How shall we best do this?" He/she takes an active part in club affairs but does not control them.



*18 U.S.C. 707

Preteens	Early Teens	Older Teens
Leader-centered		
Leader makes most decisions	Leader and group share decision making	Group makes most decisions

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Leader Alongside

Here you move along beside the group and with it. You watch the progress, offer suggestions and help with some work. You are genuinely interested, enjoy being a leader, but do not have a feeling of owning the group. You see that the job is done.

Leader Out Front

The leader is out in front and draws the club behind. Soon the leader speaks of “my club,” which may make it appear to others that the club belongs to him/her. Programs may be planned, but they only reflect the leader’s wishes.

Hands-Off Leader

Here the leader sits back, makes no decisions for the group, thereby forcing the group and the individuals to chart their own course. Good as well as bad decisions, plans and programs are permitted to develop. Strong clubs often get stronger under this type of leadership. Weak clubs may fall apart.

Involving Young People

As a leader, it will not always be easy to involve members who have many different interests. When the leader makes all the decisions, there is little conflict, but the members are not likely to be very involved. If members have a chance to “invest” their time and ideas in the program, they also have a chance to get involved with 4-H. The more members invest, the more involved and interested they will be.

What If . . .

The outdoor meals project group is meeting for the first time this summer. These are all new members between the ages of 9 and 11. Some plans must be made about what to do this summer in the outdoor meals group.

What Would You Do?

1. Make an outline of things you think have to be done. At the meeting, tell the members what will be happening in outdoor meals for the summer and what their part will be.
2. At the meeting ask the members, “What do you want to do?” After listening to all suggestions, the group can decide what to do.
3. Before the meeting, make a list of some things you think would be fun and interesting for the members (and you) to learn. At the meeting, share your list and encourage the members to add to it. Then, when all ideas are presented, the group votes on which goals to work toward.

What Might Happen If You Did . . .

Choose 1. You, as the leader, have a lot to offer, but kids may not like what you like to do. To make sure the members’ needs are being met, it usually is a good practice to let the members have a part in the decision-making process. In some situations, the most efficient way to make decisions is for the leader to do it; but, generally, the more the members are involved, the higher their interest will be.

Choose 2. All too often the question, “What do you want to do” is answered by silence. Sometimes the members do not know what they want to do or what can be done. You may have to turn the crank to get the engine running. On the other hand, with experienced or imaginative members, just asking “What do you want to do” may be all you have to say.

Choose 3. Though this method may take more time if one person made all decisions, it would let the members have a hand in making their own program. At the same time, the members would have a chance to consider some of your ideas. This method also encourages youth to initiate ideas and make decisions on their own.

What If . . .

You believe the bicycle group should learn the basic concepts of bicycle safety. All the members are concerned about planning bike hikes. When you present your plans on safety, they are voted down.

What Would You Do?

1. Use your veto power. Explain that unless they know the basics of bike safety, it would be too dangerous to go on any bike hike. So, if they want to go on bike hikes, first they will have to learn about bicycle safety.
2. If they don't want it, it may mean they don't need it now. Maybe they already know about bicycle safety. Just let it go, and if it becomes obvious that they don't ride their bikes safely, then present your plans on safety again.
3. Think of a new, fun way to include bicycle safety into the activities of the group. Maybe have a

bicycle safety rodeo, where the members compete in performing the skills used in safety. Or maybe a bike treasure hunt hike would be fun (and educational). Each clue could be a principle of bicycle safety with the last clue leading to "the treasure."

What Might Happen If You Did . . .

Choose 1. By bringing an idea up for a vote, you are saying, "You have a choice." When there really is no choice, explain the way it is and do not ask for a vote because members will soon lose faith that their votes are really valuable.

Choose 2. Letting the members do as they think best is letting them make decisions. The second part of that is that they also live with consequences. In this case, perhaps the consequences could be tragic.

Choose 3. The member's vote has been "gotten around" with this solution. Perhaps the members would not learn much about decision making, but they might see that learning can be fun.

Some of this material was adapted from "Focus on Leadership," Michigan State University. This guide is a reprint of LG 781, Extension Division, University of Missouri-Columbia.

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