

4-H Volunteer Leaders' Series

Developing Transformational Leadership in Volunteers

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Extension Volunteers

Volunteers are essential to the Cooperative Extension Service program. Through volunteers, Extension can provide education to more diverse contacts that may not be reached otherwise, assuring Extension professionals of greater program visibility. Volunteers contribute to the educational experiences of both adults and youth involved in Extension programs by donating their time and personal resources.

Because volunteers are utilized extensively in all program areas of the Cooperative Extension Service, Extension agents have the responsibility of volunteer management. This leadership role requires agents to recruit, educate and train volunteers. Training of volunteers is essential to a successful volunteer-led program. Learning about volunteers' motivation, activities, time and values can help increase efficiency and effectiveness of volunteer training.

Transformational Leadership

Volunteers are a critical part of the Extension team. Research shows that transformational teams

are higher performing, and their team members intellectually stimulate and inspire each other, as well as identify with team goals.

Transformational leadership is one of the most popular approaches to leadership and was developed by James MacGregor Burns and further expanded upon by Bernard Bass into the Full Range Leadership Model. This model includes a range of leadership styles with transformational leadership being the most effective and active, transactional leadership being middle of the road, and laissez faire leadership being the most ineffective and passive.

Transformational leadership is concerned with values, standards and goals, as well as the motivation and needs of the followers. This leadership style transforms people and enables followers to accomplish more than what is expected of them.

Training Strategies

A successful training program is one that is relevant to the learner's experiences, is interactive, uses self-directed learning methods and is linked to immediate application.



The beginning of a good training program starts by defining the different leadership styles, describing the specific characteristics of transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leaders, and discussing why transformational leaders are more effective.

Training of volunteers should also consist of scenarios that include possible reactions of each leader type. This encourages volunteers to consider their initial reaction, how it reflects their current leadership style and how they could adjust it to be more transformational.

Defining Leadership Styles

Transformational leadership focuses on team-building, motivation and collaboration to achieve a common goal and accomplish change for the better. Transactional leadership utilizes disciplinary power and an array of incentives to motivate employees to perform at their best. Laissez-Faire leadership is simply defined as a lack of leadership.

Transformational Characteristics

- Considerate of individual's needs.
- Encourages creativity and independence.
- Challenges the status quo.
- Creates a strong sense of purpose.
- Supportive of organization's vision.

Transactional Characteristics

- Clearly states expectation of outcomes.
- Points out mistakes and takes action.
- Exchanges rewards and recognition for accomplishments.
- Strictly enforces rules, dislikes change.

Laissez-Faire Characteristics

- Avoids issues.
- Doesn't recognize results.
- Remains unaware of performance.
- Abstains from leading.

Why Transformational Leadership?

Transformational leadership consists of four defining features that address the variety of motivating factors of volunteers. The four features are individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence.

Individualized consideration describes the compassionate and encouraging leader and allows a volunteer to address the need for recognition and achievement that motivates organization members.

Volunteer leaders who utilize intellectual stimulation encourage members to take risks and think outside the box. This aspect of transformational leadership is vital for members who are motivated by being involved and taking on responsibility.

Inspirational motivation in volunteers shares the vision with members, and with idealized influence, leaders demonstrate their confidence in the vision, which focuses on a member's motivation to be included in a meaningful organization.

Extension Volunteer Scenarios

4-H Volunteer Scenario

A 4-H volunteer leader has a youth member approach her with concerns that she is not getting any benefits from her participation in 4-H. She is ready to quit coming to meetings and activities. How could a volunteer leader handle this situation?

- *Transformational:* Express confidence in goals of the organization, show genuine compassion to 4-H'ers needs, encourage risk taking for personal gain, assist 4-H'er in achieving more than they thought was possible.
- *Transactional:* Criticize 4-H'ers past participation, offer rewards for further participation.
- *Laissez-Faire:* Ignore youth's concerns.

Master Gardener Scenario

A Master Gardener has volunteered to conduct a training for local vegetable growers. When the topic of pesticides comes up, a heated discussion between two growers quickly begins to escalate. The volunteer leader knows he needs to regain control over the conversation. How could a volunteer leader handle this situation?

- *Transformational*: Address each grower's individual needs and concerns, encourage a group discussion on alternative solutions to each problem.
- *Transactional*: Critique the argument of each grower and point out what they are doing wrong, discipline growers for breaking rules of respectable discussion.
- *Laissez-Faire*: Allow growers to continue to argue until finished.

Extension Homemakers Club Scenario

At the county fair, a mistake was made and the wrong type of award ribbons were ordered. The EHC group that is presenting awards is discouraged by the mixup, but know they need to use the ribbons. As EHC President, how could a volunteer leader handle this situation?

- *Transformational*: Address the needs of individuals, encourage creative solutions.
- *Transactional*: Focus on who made the mistake, provide rewards to anyone who can fix the mistake, delegates leadership to another individual.
- *Laissez-Faire*: Avoids the problem.

Strong Women Volunteer Scenario

A Strong Women group has been meeting for a year when they are told their county Extension agent

will be retiring. The two volunteer leaders are nervous to be left completely in charge, and the group members are worried the group will fall apart without leadership from a county agent. How could volunteer leaders handle this situation?

- *Transformational*: Exhibit personal commitment to organization's vision, express confidence in continued success of group and create a strong sense of purpose in participants.
- *Transactional*: Offer rewards for continued participation, strictly enforce rules of group and organization.
- *Laissez-Faire*: Refuse to address the issue, doesn't alter leadership.

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