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HOW YOU CAN BE AN EFFECTIVE LEADER

Agriculture and Rural Division

You've heard the expression "He/She is a born leader." Are all leaders born? Or can leadership be learned?

This Factsheet takes a close look at the concept of leadership. It will give leaders who volunteered, were elected or appointed, a number of guidelines to help them effectively lead their groups.

ARE LEADERS BORN OR MADE?

Leadership can be learned. We all have leadership potential, just as we have some ability to sing or run. Some people may be better than others, but each of us has a starting point to build on with training and practice. You do not have to be officially designated as a leader of a group to be an effective leader.

Leadership is a process that helps a group to achieve its goals. Leaders and group members can mutually influence each other's ideas.

"The person who exhibits leadership is ... someone that makes things happen that would not happen otherwise."

(A. D. Edwards and D. Jones)

WHAT MAKES A LEADER?

Leaders should be well organized and have made time in their lives for their organization. Leadership requires commitment.

Leadership is a mix of knowledge, values, skills, and behaviours. Each of us has beliefs about what characteristics an effective leader should possess. Different groups will also have different beliefs or values about what "makes" an effective leader than other groups have. Your group will assess your leadership, and your success may depend on how well your leadership characteristics match those that they value.

It is important then, for a leader to know his/her own abilities, knowledge and values and how others perceive them. For example, if "trust" is a quality which is highly valued by your group, then it is important for you to be

viewed as a trustworthy person. By knowing your own strengths and weaknesses, you can also develop a plan to work on those areas you may wish to improve.

"Recognizing strengths and compensating for weaknesses represents the first step in achieving positive self regard."

(Warren Bennis & Burt Nanus)

A successful leader makes an effort to learn and practise skills. Some of the more essential components are: the knowledge and understanding of specific tasks; the skills and ability to communicate, build teams, vision, and take risks; and a value for individuals, the group and its responsibilities.

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

General knowledge about the organization, how a meeting is run, and the organization's business is essential.

For example, an effective leader knows the purpose of the group or organization (why it exists), its goals (long-term plan) and objectives (short-term plans).

He/She should understand parliamentary procedure, the role of the chairperson and the purpose and design of an effective agenda.

In addition, an awareness of the subject that the group is involved with is important. If you are a director of the Widget Association, you should know a little bit about widgets.

SKILLS AND ABILITY

Communication

We tend to think of a good communicator as a good speaker. This is only partly true. Good communicators can express themselves clearly and with confidence. However, a key and often forgotten component of effective communication is **listening**.

A good listener hears not only facts but also feelings. Paraphrasing or restating the person's message in shorter

terms is a useful technique. It helps to clarify the message, and it shows the speaker that you have heard what they have said. "So ... you're saying that I should repeat what was just said, only in my own words, eh?"

"Successful leaders, we have found, are great askers, and they do pay attention."

(Warren Bennis & Burt Nanus)

Teamwork

A leader cannot achieve success alone. The old notion that a leader is "the top of the pyramid" is false. An effective leader is involved and in touch with group members. He/she enables them to act by providing technical assistance, emotional support and vision.

Effective leaders insist on the support and assistance of those affected by the project. They think in terms of "we" not "I."

"The few projects in my study that disintegrated did so because the [person] failed to build a coalition of supporters and collaborators."

(R. Moss Kanter)

Visioning

A leader also develops a vision of the organization's future. It is important to communicate this vision to members of the group, allowing them to respond and become part of the visioning process. You should build a vision with others. Visioning is a collaborative effort! Your group will grow and prosper by building commitment to a vision or dream that is shared by all. Telling others outside of the organization about the vision is important to the process of developing your own commitment to it.

"Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world."

(Joel Arthur Baker)

Risk Taking

A leader is a risk taker and an innovator. New ideas may come from yourself, from others in the organization or from the community. A leader should recognize good ideas, actively support them and encourage action. One may call them early adapters of innovation.

"Leaders are pioneers — people who are willing to step out into the unknown."

(Olle Bovin)

Just think of the first time you played baseball. You probably were not perfect at hitting the ball or running the bases. Leaders are learners and must be able to learn from their mistakes as well as their successes. So must they

encourage their group members and support them through their mistakes. Without mistakes, there is no learning or growth.

All changes and innovations involve risk and challenge.

Value in Others: Recognition and Encouragement

An effective leader must take the time to recognize and reward people for what they've done. Individuals may become tired, bored or frustrated with a particular task or goal. They are often tempted to give up. A leader must provide the encouragement to motivate members to carry on.

Recognition comes in many forms; it may be given to individuals or to groups. It may be as simple as a word of encouragement: "You did a great job, thanks." Whatever the method, give credit and praise when and where it is due. And do not forget to reward yourself. Celebrate once a goal or milestone has been reached.

"Good thoughts not delivered mean squat."

(Ken Blanchard)

Showing a genuine concern and respect for your work, your people and your community may be the best strategy in reaching your goal of outstanding leadership.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

A leader may use different styles in carrying out his/her role. Many different theories of leadership have been developed through years of research with groups and organizations. "Situational Leadership" is a very popular "framework" to follow. It explains that the style a leader chooses depends mostly upon the group's level of readiness. That is, how willing and able the members are to take responsibility as a group. Situational leadership recognizes that the leader must be flexible and the group members are the most important factor.

The willingness of a group relates to its attitude. If a group is willing, then it has the confidence, commitment and motivation to accomplish a specific job or activity. A leader who provides support and encouragement to a group is demonstrating a "maintenance" or "relationship" behaviour.

Being able (or having ability) means that the group has the knowledge, skill and experience to accomplish a particular task. When a leader explains what each member is to do, as well as when, where, and how tasks are to be accomplished, he or she is demonstrating task-oriented behaviour.

According to Situational leadership, the appropriate style depends on the combinations of "willingness and ability" in a group. In general, the more willing and able the group, the less directive or task-oriented should be the

leader. The four different styles and most appropriate situation for each are described below.

Style 1— The “Directing/Telling” Leader

Situation: (Group members are — unwilling and unable)

This style is appropriate when the members are new or inexperienced and need a lot of help, direction and encouragement in order to get the job done. The feeling or relationships within the group are not explored to a great extent. This leader provides structure and guidance to the group. The leader defines the role of group members and directs them on what, how, when and where to do various tasks. A supportive role may also be provided to reward and encourage.

Style 2 — The “Coaching/Selling” Leader

Situation: (Group members are — willing but unable)

Here the group is a little more responsible, experienced and willing. The leader's main role is to assist the members in doing a task for which they do not have the skills. The leader coaches the members through the skills of the task. Direction and guidance are necessary. The leader also provides plenty of encouragement and inspiration to maintain the willingness (motivation) of the group.

Style 3 — The “Participating/Supportive” Leader

Situation: (Group members are — unwilling but able)

Leaders using this supportive style know the group has the ability to do the job. However, the group may be unwilling (apprehensive, bored, etc.) to start or complete the task. Therefore, the group members and leader participate in making decisions and carrying them out together. Here, the leader puts more emphasis on relationships and individuals' feelings within the group. Members feel important when the leader provides moral support and encouragement. The leader is a resource person and helper in this role.

Style 4 — The “Delegating/Trusting” Leader

Situation: (Group members are — willing and able)

A leader will choose to be a delegator when the group members are both willing and able to take responsibility for directing their own behaviour. The leader trusts the group to do their own thing and observes from a distance.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE MOST USEFUL SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE

Important: no one style of leadership is appropriate for every occasion or situation! To be a good leader, know your group — “where they are at” in terms of their ability, knowledge, desire and willingness. In addition, you must be

aware of your preferred style and how others perceive you. Be ready to adapt that leadership style to the occasion (see Figure 1). Practise moving from one style to another, depending on the occasion. Use the behaviours appropriate for that style — they're easy to learn!

CONCLUSION

There is no secret recipe or magical formula to become an effective leader overnight. It is a process of trial and error, successes and failures. Never stop learning, and with practice you can increase your success in leadership!

“The future will require those of us in such positions to keep our eyes, ears and minds open. It will require us to listen and to involve, to coach and to develop, to enrich and to motivate, to risk and to credit, to care and to express concern, and to laugh — especially at ourselves.”

(John H. Anthony)

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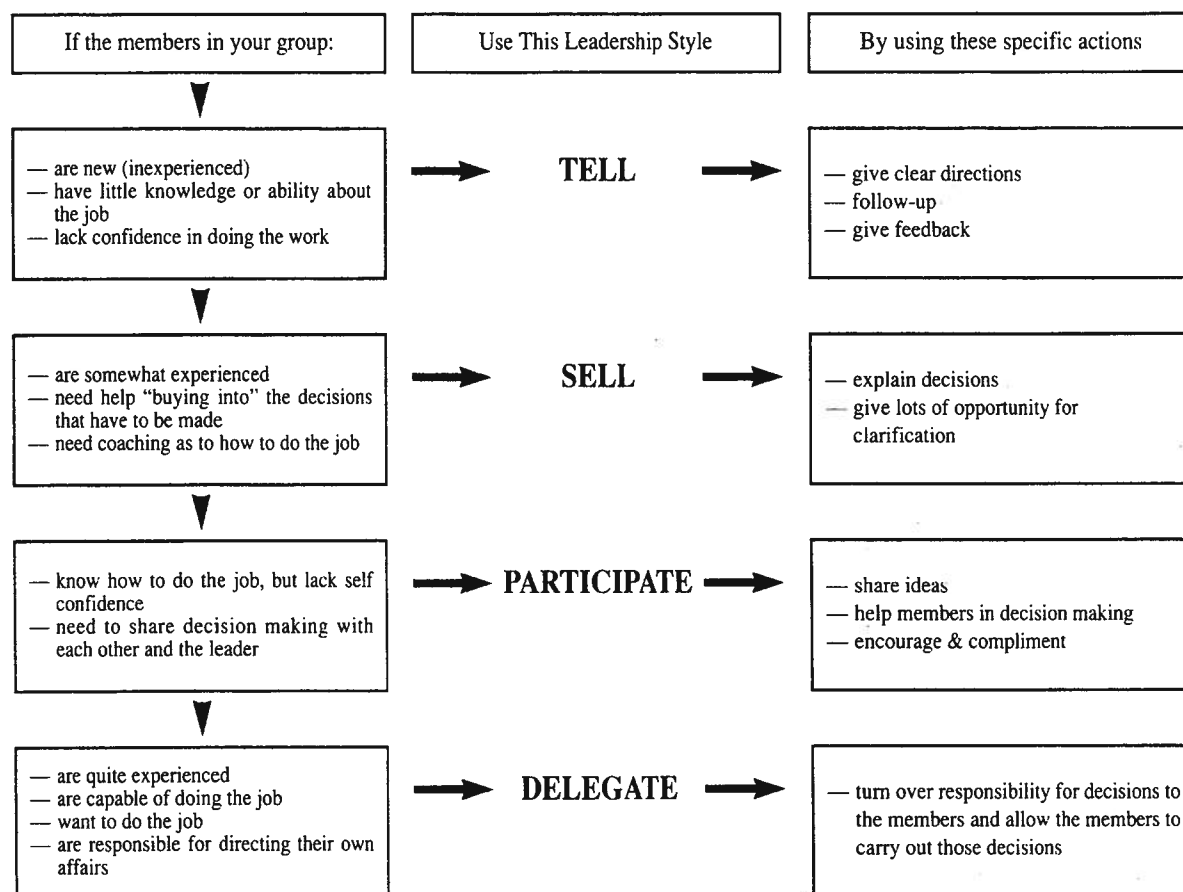
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RELEVANT OMAFRA FACTSHEETS

How to Be an Effective Leader.

This Factsheet was authored by **Kim DeKlein** and **Meg Penstone**, Rural Community Advisors.

Figure 1 — How to Choose the Most Useful Situational Leadership Style



This chart appeared in Ruth Marcou's Factsheet *How to be an Effective Leader*, 1988