

“How do we get more leaders?”

Increase the Leadership Flow

By Bob Harris, CAE

Not every volunteer wants to give three to nine years to ascend a leadership ladder. Shorten the path. Find positions without the prerequisites of committee service, officer positions, and chairman of the annual convention, for instance. Amend the bylaws to fast-track leadership.

Volunteer leaders are a key element for every nonprofit organization. The challenge by most organizations is “How do we get more leaders?”

Think of leadership development as a pipeline in which interested volunteers enter and knowledgeable leaders exit. To increase the pipeline output, you create funnels (initiatives) to encourage leadership. Broaden the pipe so that an ample number of volunteers enter the stream.

If your leadership development is down to a trickle, consider these initiatives.

Pose the Question – Ask!

Every leader remembers who asked him or her to consider a leadership role. Surveys report that members feel overlooked when they are not asked to serve. Make a list of potential leaders and have respected, experienced leaders make personal contact.

Leadership Academy

Academy is a leadership-training course over several days or months. The results are graduates eager to apply what they’ve learned. The Maryland State Bar Association describes their academy in detail on their website at www.msba.org.

The American School of Health Association offers Future Leaders Academy. Class size is limited to just four or five per year and applicants must be approved. A two-year commitment is expected, said Susan Wooley, Executive Director.

If developing a leadership academy isn’t practical (because of a small number of potential leaders or limited resources), check for organizations already offering leadership classes (chamber, college, and associations). Collaborate with existing programs and fund member scholarships to enroll.

Handbook on Leadership

Draft a booklet on the purpose, benefit and opportunities for leaders. Publish the booklet or save as a PDF and liberally distribute to new members, chapters, and committees. Volunteers will consider the leadership opportunities. It is a proven technique used by the Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association.

Include chapters on goal setting, problem solving, meeting protocols, board opportunities, etc. Past leaders should contribute advice and expertise to create the book.

Board Member Guests

Invite members to observe the board in action. “We strategically invite up to four dentists

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to sit in on board meetings," said Robert Boose, executive director at the Massachusetts Dental Society. To promote diversity the selections include two women dentists, a new dentist with less than ten years in practice, and a non-Caucasian dentist. The seats are non-voting, but the guests may actively participate in discussion.

Shorten the Leadership Ladder

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Organizational Chart

Members want to know how and where they fit in as leaders. An organizational chart depicts the hierarchy, relationships between board and committees, and the flow of information.

Progressive Training

When you identify the skillsets associated with leadership, you can build progressive courses. The Ontario Real Estate Association has developed leadership 100 through 500. Course levels build upon the prior – from serving on a committee to chairing a provincial association. OREA has packaged the content to train Realtors® across Canada.

Transparency

Nobody wants to join a board that appears secretive. Adopt the principle of transparency in the organization. It is characterized by open meetings, access to information, collaborative efforts and respect for new ideas and people.

Leadership Orientation

Board members who receive no orientation will sit quietly for many meetings until they feel that they understand governance expectations. A good leadership orientation increases confidence and understanding of volunteers. Design an

orientation program that benefits volunteers on your board as well as the other organizations on which they serve.

Celebrate Leadership

Those who contribute time to the organization deserve recognition. Do you promote the prestige associated with leadership? From photos on the website ("Meet the Leadership Team") to a printed brochure introducing stakeholders to the leaders. The United States Tennis Association publishes *TeamWork—One Team. One Goal* to highlight the leaders and staff in a pictorial directory.

Board Manual

Give leaders the documents they need to govern. From bylaws and articles of incorporation, to the strategic plan and budget—volunteers are handicapped without the information. Some organizations format the board manual in a notebook, on a thumb-drive, as a CD-ROM or maintain it on a password protected website as a virtual manual. Be sure to include written job descriptions for officers and board so they don't have to learn by trial and error (board job descriptions are available at www.nonprofitcenter.com.)

Leadership Development Committee

A nominating committee traditionally focuses on current year potential leaders. Organizations are expanding the role of the committee to a broader Leadership Development Committee. Duties include identifying the slate of candidates, facilitating a board evaluation process, participating in orientation and updating the board manual.

Schmoozing

Offer an opportunity for prospective leaders to meet the leadership team. Plan an event where guests feel special and discussions focus on leadership. The Louisiana State Bar Association included the concept of speed-dating to acquaint new directors with the officers and staff. Wilford A. Butler, CAE, reports success at a

presidential reception where the theme was "Everything you Wanted to Know About the Association – but Never Asked."

Young Leaders Forum

Young leaders often have more time and energy. They are eager to test their skills. Organize a group of motivated young professionals. Many organizations find the young professionals to be a self-governed council or committee that is willing to undertake fund-raising and special projects. Dennis Yocom, Executive Vice President at the Professional Insurance Agents of Virginia and DC, focuses on drawing young leaders to the board.

Position the Call

In many cases it's all about how you ask for volunteers. The Special Libraries Association (SLA.org) posts "Why Seek a Leadership Position." If the call for volunteers looks the same every year, then you might get the same minimal response.

Helen "HD" Dimsdale, Senior Director, Public Affairs at the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, sends out a message for volunteers, advising them of how leadership opportunities can supplement their career and benefit their resumes, especially in the current economy. For anyone without a job, the volunteer experience may be a stepping stone towards employment.

In closing, to quote Peter Drucker, "Leaders grow – they are not made." The process to develop leaders should be a continuous effort of board and staff (most organizations include it in their strategic plan). Mix and match these strategies to improve the flow of new leaders in your organization. ■

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