

Notes on Developing Leadership

Healthcare-NOW's Notes on "Developing Leadership," Chapter 6 in the Midwest Academy's *Organizing for Social Change* manual, third edition.

Interesting note in the opening paragraph that some organizations see leadership development as their primary goal, but for all organizations it's a core function of organizing.

How do you know who is a good potential leader? "The basic guideline is that leaders have followers, people they can bring to events" (i.e. they already have leadership roles in some type of community, and a network of people).

When starting a new organization (a couple of tips):

1. "If you want racial, ethnic, gender, and class integration, the leadership must reflect this from the very start."
2. **Don't rush the leadership process:** "it is wise for a new group to delay its first elections for six months or even a year... in the meantime operate with a temporary steering committee open to all." Midwest Academy says they have seen many examples where new groups spend too much time initially on writing bylaws and internal wrangling, which can tend to drive away folks who care more about organizing. "Start with action and stay flexible" they advise.

Seek Qualities and Develop Skills

Midwest Academy suggests identifying potential leaders who have the personal qualities you're looking for and don't worry so much about their skill set, since they can learn the skills they'll need (whereas qualities are harder to address and develop).

MA offers a **list of qualities** to look for in potential leaders:

- Honesty
- Positive Outlook
- Confidence/Self-Assurance
- Trust in People
- Mistrust of Unaccountable Institutions

Then a **list of skills** that all leaders need to develop:

- Listening
- Diplomacy
- Recruitment
- Personal Organization
- Goal Setting

The Leadership Development Process

Create Positions in Which Leaders Can Develop

This is an important piece: Midwest Academy starts with an example of a Mayoral campaign that **invented the position of "corner captain,"** and then invited regular volunteers to become corner captains. The position had clear responsibilities: set up tabling operations in their part of the city and instruct volunteers on how to man the table (giving out literature, selling buttons, talking about issues, etc).

Equally important: the campaign held **special training sessions for corner captains** so they could learn how to carry out the role.

Interestingly: as time went on, the paid staff on the campaign started **adding additional responsibilities to the role of "corner captain,"** such as having corner captains call volunteer lists in their area, asking volunteers to sign up for tabling duties. This let the staff focus on other things.

Moral of the story: **"corner captains" are a good example of creating a role in which leaders can develop.** Midwest Academy lists a few crucial criteria for this to succeed:

- "A strong motivation was provided by the candidate and the issues"
- "There was a title"
- "a short list of time-limited responsibilities"
- "other people to help" (more: formal training sessions)
- "and someone higher in the group to step in if problems occurred"

Using a committee structure for leadership development: "In many organizations, the same type of niche is provided by a committee structure." Midwest Academy notes that committee structures aren't always the most efficient way to do things, but they are a way to develop leaders.

An extreme example of creating roles to develop leadership: Midwest Academy tells the story of a dinner organized to honor a civil rights leader. A committee was created for planning every aspect of the dinner: a committee for floral arrangements at the head table; a committee for floral arrangements at the other tables; a committee to print the program for the event; etc. Over 100 people were listed in the program book for having a role in planning the dinner.

Moral of the story: by creating lots of leadership roles, a large number of volunteers gained "ownership" over the dinner - they would all definitely show up and invite their friends.

Guidelines for Leadership Maintenance and Growth

- **Practice Evaluations:** regular group evaluations at meetings with positive and growth-producing feedback.
- **Institute the Rotation of Roles, and Develop Systems for Training People for New Roles**
- **Make Sure Leaders Are Enjoying Their Positions**
- **Use Strong, Skilled Leaders to Train Others**
- **Ask Leaders to Set Personal Leadership Development Goals as Part of Your Annual Goal-Setting Session**

Leaders and Organizers

This section focuses on how important it is for the organization that organizers not do everything themselves, but rather to create roles and develop leaders to fill those roles. "Every time the paid staff is interviewed on TV, an opportunity is lost to strengthen the leadership."

Key lesson: **never do anything for leaders that they can do for themselves.** Often, the opposite happens and organizers take away roles from leaders and members - the focus of the organizer should be *building the organization.*

Organizers should (quoting from the Midwest Academy):

- Make proposals for action
- Develop workplans based on board decisions
- Identify leadership roles and training needed
- Help recruit new leaders
- Ensure honest evaluations
- Help people assume leadership tasks
- Coordinate information flow between boards and committees

Leaders should:

- Represent the constituency, which means speaking in public forums and providing interviews for the media
- Take the lead in actions or confrontations with decision makers
- Maintain the organization by forming a board that is responsible for raising money, setting policies, hiring and evaluating the Executive Director (or firing if need be)
- Do as much of the actual physical work of the organization as possible

Interesting note from Midwest Academy that leaders who move into organizer roles often have a hard time adjusting: they are used to doing the work, instead of focusing on enabling others to do the work (i.e. leadership development!).

Another frequent problem is when someone in an organizer role lacks the skills or experience to provide support to others (to develop leaders that is). In these situations the organizer will sometimes be left

doing all the work that the leaders don't do or don't want to do - which is unsatisfying work, and not what they should be focused on.

Here's the punchline: "Volunteer leadership development is about the most important job an organizer has. If you are not developing leaders, then you are not building your organization."