

Student Leadership Training Booklet

- *Why Is There a Critical Need for Student Leaders?*
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The Critical Need for Student Leaders

Ask staff from community organizations about what they feel students need to learn in college, and you will hear a common answer: Students need to learn leadership skills. They need to learn leadership skills in college, so that they can help their communities. Surprisingly, this same answer is heard when personnel managers of both big and small companies are asked to identify qualities they look for in hiring recent college graduates. They also rank a job candidate's leadership skills as the main factor in hiring. As we will see later in this booklet, community groups and companies have a definition of leadership that is different from the prevailing definition. Community groups and companies equate leadership with the ability to work well with other people. Later in this booklet, we will see why this expanded understanding of leadership is so significant for our world today.

Sadly, in college classes today, few students learn the leadership skills they need for their future jobs or to serve their communities. In most universities, the development of student leadership skills is not part of the academic curriculum but relegated to “extra-curricular” activities — i.e., it is regarded as part of students' non-academic activities in clubs and organizations.

Of course, at various times in U.S. history, student movements have challenged this narrow definition of college curriculum by demanding an education relevant to their lives and promoting the mission of universities to uphold democracy, social justice, educational equity, and diversity. In the late 1960s, for example, students fought for the creation of Ethnic Studies and Women's Studies, as well as programs like EOP (Educational Opportunity Program) for low-income students who are often the first generation in their family to attend college. More recently, students have led the struggles to create programs and departments in Gay and Lesbian Studies, Environmental Studies, and Peace and Justice Studies. Because all of these initiatives were championed by students, their founding curricula emphasize an innovative approach to education by combining research and teaching with student leadership development, community service, and advocacy.

However, for most students, learning leadership skills in college is not easy because they need to do this in addition to their academic work. This challenge is especially difficult for students who need to work in order to pay for their education. Unlike students who are more well-off, they may not have the time to participate in student groups in order to learn leadership skills.

Moreover, not all student groups in college understand their critical mission for providing students opportunities for leadership development. By their nature, some student groups are simply social clubs, while others are narrowly defined around a particular function.

Given this reality, then, what can a student do to gain the necessary leadership skills that will empower them to serve their communities and prepare for future jobs?

Although there are no simple answers, students need to rethink their understanding of college and the skills they want to acquire from their college education. This rethinking needs to occur on both small and big scales. On the small scale, students need to choose electives carefully; they need to find classes that can provide opportunities for leadership development, especially if classes in their majors do not provide such opportunities. Similarly, within their existing classes, students need to see certain assignments, such as group projects, as opportunities to work on leadership skills. Often, college professors stress group work and small group discussions in their classrooms without explaining to their students the importance of such work. If each professor were to begin a group assignment with a discussion of the importance that personnel managers in both small and large companies place on leadership skills and working well with others in making their hiring discussions, students would gain a new appreciation for group work in classes.

On a big scale, students need to see participation in student organizations during their college years not as something “extra” curricular but as something essential for their work following graduation. Obviously, students need to select the organizations carefully; they need to find groups that are devoted to leadership development among its members and that provide a nurturing environment. They need to avoid groups that counterpose group activities to academics, or even worse, that place group activities above academics.

Finally, students need to help student groups change their understanding of leadership and leadership training. Most student groups approach these questions from the framework of past centuries, not yet recognizing the new leadership models that have emerged in recent times. As we will see in later sections, student groups in college can serve as important venues for training members in the new grassroots model of “Shared Leadership” that is now being practiced by community formations throughout the world.

Two Approaches to Leadership: “Shared Leadership” vs. Traditional Leadership

In a roomful of 30 to 40 college students, how many would consider themselves leaders? If we were to ask them directly, only a handful would answer affirmatively. However, what would happen if we were to ask this same group a slightly different question: “How many of you are able to work well with others and get things done together?” Probably most would raise their hands.

What’s going on here?

Like most other Americans, students today have a stereotyped image of what constitutes a leader, and this stereotype is anchored in a concept of leadership that emerged over the past few centuries mainly in the Western world. According to this traditional approach, a leader is a strong and powerful individual — someone who makes decisions, commands many others, and speaks with charisma. A leader is the rare human being who embodies special qualities only rarely found in one person; in fact, from this very definition, most human beings are seen as followers and not leaders. Almost always, this image of a leader is that of an older male, and usually it is associated with CEOs in corporations, the U.S. President, and generals in the U.S. military. Not surprisingly, leaders in all these institutions are older men and overwhelmingly white. Could this concept of leadership be related to patriarchy, racism, and colonialism that have been among the defining (and often hidden) features of the Western world?

Of course, in reality, even in today’s corporations, the U.S. Presidency, and the military, leadership does not revolve around a single executive. In even these highly patriarchal institutions, leadership is based on teamwork. A general, a CEO, and even a U.S. President become effective leaders only if they are able to work well with others. Crises in leadership in these institutions usually reflect breakdowns in the capacity to work together, and leadership is defined as the ability of people to coordinate their work and meld disparate skills. Thus, within even the most patriarchal institutions in the modern world, the best leaders are those who have the ability to

assemble a team consisting of people with different talents; the days are long past when a leader is seen as one individual embodying multiple qualities associated with leadership.

Why has this shift in thinking about leadership occurred in the most powerful institutions symbolizing Western society? The short answer is that today's world is much more different and complex than the world of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. Corporations and businesses are no longer led by "captains of industry" who manage assembly lines; wars are no longer always fought on battlefields requiring standing armies; and U.S. Presidents and other world leaders cannot simply make individual decisions — they must solicit and weigh the advice of hundreds of people and ponder the consequences of each policy for tens of millions around the world.

There is also a longer answer to our question. For the past several centuries, grassroots movements in every part of the globe have advanced democracy, expanded human rights, and challenged Western ideologies based on patriarchy, racism, and colonialism. In other words, grassroots movements for social justice have also reshaped our thinking about leadership by developing a different model that stands in opposition to the traditional model. We can call this new grassroots model "Shared Leadership." In many ways, it is not new since it draws from the ideas of leadership that have long existed among indigenous peoples around the world, in societies and cultures that have not been dominated by patriarchy, in immigrant communities in Western nations, in national liberation movements across the globe, and from the work of grassroots community groups and NGOs (non-governmental organizations) fighting for social justice. What is new about the model of "Shared Leadership" is the way that innovative thinkers have adapted these historical legacies to respond to the special challenges facing people in the twenty-first century, a world of complexity and interconnectedness and where the very survival of the human species will depend on our capacity to work together and not destroy ourselves.

At the grassroots level of community groups — and increasingly in corporations — the quality of leadership that is most treasured is what we can call "shared leadership." Shared leadership is the ability of a person to work well with others — as part of a team. Shared leadership requires strengths and abilities not normally associated with the patriarchal version of leadership: the capacity for nurturing others and bringing out their best

talents, the ability to mediate conflict, the quality to both express empathy and compassion for others and educate others about the importance of these feelings, and the talent for encouraging different viewpoints while upholding one's core values and principles. Shared leadership is based on a commitment to dignity, equality, democracy, and transformation in human beings. Thus, shared leadership is closely associated with grassroots movements for social justice around the world.

Some have defined shared leadership as the vision of leadership needed for the twenty-first century. In fact, as mentioned at the very beginning of this booklet, both staff at community organizations and personnel managers of both big and small companies now identify shared leadership as the number one quality that they look for in college graduates that they hire. They have come to redefine leadership in terms of the capacity of an individual to work together with others. In other words, even in corporations — the bastion of the Western world — leadership is now conceptualized as embedded in an individual's ability to work well with others to get things done.

Yet, even though thinking about leadership has begun to shift in even the most patriarchal institutions of Western society, the traditional notion of leadership continues to influence popular thinking. Thus, most students today do not consider themselves leaders — even when they possess skills to work well with others. Why is this happening?

It's not unusual for old ideas to continue to influence society even when they have outlived usefulness. But with the concept of leadership, something else is happening that makes acceptance of new ideas difficult. In Western societies, thinking tends to be dualistic — as “either-or” thinking — and people are taught to think dualistically from an early age. A person is either a leader or a follower, and certainly not both. Similarly, it's hard for people raised in Western cultures to conceptualize shared leadership since there has been so much emphasis on seeing only certain qualities (e.g., command functions, decision-making, charisma, etc.) associated with leadership, while other important qualities (e.g., nurturing, mediation of conflict, etc.) are not.

Thus, to embrace the new model of shared leadership, it is not enough to reject old ideas. It is also essential to constantly recognize the ways that many different leadership styles exist within a group and that all members contribute to the leadership of the group. For student groups especially, it is critical for people to hold frequent discussions to build consciousness among

all members of the leadership strengths and styles of each person. As we will see in the next section of this booklet, these discussions are the foundation for leadership development for students during their formative college years.

In this resource booklet, we are exploring the importance of shared leadership and focus on ways that students can develop skills related to this vision, so that they can be of service to others, both on campus and in our communities. Thus, we must ask an important question: How can students learn shared leadership as part of their college education?

Leadership Development Is a Life-long Process — But College Years Are a Critical Period

Most leadership training programs in the Western world are based on the traditional concept of leadership. Thus, young people are trained in command and direction functions: to run meetings, give orders to others, speak in public, etc. These training programs are also based on the assumption that there is a leadership crisis in most communities — that there are not enough leaders.

In reality, the leadership training programs that our communities need are not those built around the traditional model. The leadership crisis facing our communities today is not the absence of leaders but the presence of too many self-proclaimed leaders who have difficulty working together with others. In short, we need new leadership training programs that teach people how to work together, that uncover the leadership skills within each individual, and that help people learn how to fuse the different leadership styles of individuals together to work effectively. In other words, we need leadership training programs based on the concept of shared leadership.

All of us commonly hear that leaders are not born but are made. But how are leaders “made” — i.e., how is leadership developed? Is it necessary for people to go to special leadership training institutes and spend large sums of money? Can they learn leadership skills by listening to inspiring and charismatic people?

The most effective leadership training programs occur in everyday settings — i.e., in the course of a community group planning an event or a student group holding a meeting. These everyday venues potentially can serve as opportunities for leadership development for all members. However, for these everyday venues to be transformed into leadership training sites, a shift in consciousness of the members of the group is essential. This shift requires rejecting not only the old ideas of traditional leadership but also the prevalent thinking that leadership development can only happen on “special” occasions — e.g., at special institutes. Instead, members of the group must transform their consciousness to see the work of the group itself as a

leadership training institute. This also requires moving beyond the dead-weight of Western thinking that counterposes “getting things done” to “training people to get things done.” In Western societies — where people are educated from their early years to see the development of things in stages — it’s difficult for people to conceptualize two different things, in this case, “training” and “getting things done,” as able to happen at the same time.

In an organization based on traditional thinking, when tasks are divided up people who can do things well receive assignments based on their skills. Those individuals striving to develop new leadership skills are encouraged to practice on these skills and to observe existing leaders but not necessarily to take up new tasks requiring these skills. Within traditional organizations — whether these be corporations, the military, clubs, or even gangs — a powerful leader will usually choose one younger individual and serve as a mentor to teach that youth leadership skills. Often, this younger person is defined as the next leader, the “heir apparent,” for the organization.

In contrast, organizations infused with the ethos of shared leadership see task division and leadership training much differently. Rather than counterposing the two things, members see task assignments as an opportunity for leadership development. Usually, this happens by assigning an experienced person to work with a less experienced person and having the two work together to complete the task. Similar to the traditional organization, mentoring occurs at every step. But unlike the traditional organization, *each member* of the group is a mentor for other members since all members have leadership skills that they can help others develop. Thus, organizations where shared leadership prevails are organizations infused with a culture of mentoring. They are tight-knit organizations characterized as a community of mentors.

This “culture of mentoring” helps to explain the process of leadership development in groups promoting shared leadership. A mentor is a trusted advocate, ally, and guide. A mentor nurtures growth, helping the mentee to realize the potential within them. The mentor does this through a combination of methods: by modeling new behavior, by having the mentee assist in a new task (such as through an apprenticeship), or by allowing the mentee to work individually with guidance.

Let’s take a simple example of how this approach to leadership development would work for a college student in a student organization committed to the

model of shared leadership. Among college students, one commonly identified new leadership skills that many want to develop is public speaking. Since most students only gain experience speaking in public in college classrooms where they are graded and evaluated, many associate public speaking with fear and a heightened sense of self-consciousness. There are also a handful of students who are experienced public speakers; usually they have developed their abilities outside the classroom as teachers in youth clubs and churches and possibly even through family gatherings. In an organization characterized by shared leadership, the more experienced speakers would be paired with the less experienced. However, as mentors the more experienced speakers would not push the less experienced students into situations where they would speak before a crowd of 50 or 100 people. Instead, the more experienced student would watch for opportunities in everyday life to gradually introduce the mentee to public speaking: e.g., to help with an announcement here and there, to take responsibility for a small part of a presentation while the experienced speaker would do the main part, etc.

Student organizations contain many such opportunities for leadership development. In fact, think of what would happen if a student group consciously adopted the shared leadership model and conducted leadership development for members as part of the ongoing work of the group. If each semester members of the group did a leadership training exercise and each member identified one skill to develop in the course of that semester, think how much stronger that group would become by the end of that semester. If that same exercise were conducted each succeeding semester and became part of that organization's ongoing activities, think how many new leadership skills each member would possess by the time he or she graduated from college. And think even more expansively: what would happen if thousands of student groups across the U.S. did the same? What impact would this have on our community and changing society?

On the following page is a leadership training exercise that can easily be done in a class to help members build leadership skills in a class project or within a student organization to help members build leadership skills in the course of a semester. This exercise helps students to recognize their own and others' leadership style. It also helps students to see the importance of melding different leadership styles to make an organization stronger. Finally, it promotes awareness of the power of shared leadership. This exercise takes about an hour.

Leadership Training Workshop

Leadership Styles: Two Different Approaches

The top-down style of leadership—otherwise known as the “command style”

- A) A group is defined by a single, supreme leader who “rules” over all.
- B) The leader’s main responsibility is to direct and command members of a group.
- C) To carry out these command functions, the supreme leader must possess multiple skills:
 - 1) Serving as spokesperson for the group (through speaking and writing)
 - 2) Functioning as the group’s chief negotiator with other forces
 - 3) Serving as military field commander in struggles with the “enemy”
 - 4) Serving as the group’s political strategist
 - 5) Promoting internal group cohesion and motivating the membership (interpersonal skills)
 - 6) Training one “heir apparent”

Alternative concept of leadership: the grassroots approach of Shared Leadership

- A) A group functions collectively—with a large number of leaders, each able to contribute specific skills, such as:
 - 1) Serving as spokesperson (through speaking and writing)
 - 2) Representing the group in negotiations with other forces
 - 3) Serving as military field commander in struggles with the “enemy”
 - 4) Developing political strategy for the group
 - 5) Fostering intra-group harmony and the concept of teamwork
 - 6) Recruiting new members
 - 7) Managing tasks and overseeing group responsibilities
 - 8) Fostering a “culture”—or atmosphere within the group—that promotes learning, membership development, and fun
- B) The group is comfortable with having many styles of leadership; no one style is defined as the most important style.
- C) The group provides a nurturing atmosphere, enabling all members to grow in their leadership skills and to learn new skills

Common Misconceptions about Leadership

- A) “There is one—and only one—style of leadership for a group”
- B) “For any group, there is one—and only one—leader. A few members of the group are ‘developing leaders,’ while the rest are ‘followers.’”
- C) “Leaders are born, and not trained; a person either has leadership ability or does not”
- D) Even when people recognize the existence of different leadership styles, they tend to believe that “one style (usually the ‘command style’) is more important than other styles”

Exercise for Class Members

A) Self-evaluation

- 1) Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not?
- 2) What is (are) your main strength(s) as a leader? What is your “leadership style”?

B) Self-development

- 1) Identify one new facet of leadership that you would like to develop this semester through our class project

C) Group activities (for discussion)

- 1) Based on class tasks for the coming period, how can we assign people to effectively utilize their existing leadership skills and styles, and to help them to develop new leadership skills and styles?

And remember:

- Leadership training is an important part of an organization’s development. Groups that want to grow and succeed will always invest time in leadership training for their members.
- Develop your leadership skills as a youth; it will be much harder to learn about different leadership styles as you get older.
- Leadership training — and organizational activities overall — should always be fun and educational.

Resources for Student Leadership Development

Books and Articles

Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999)

Wheatley believes that our thinking about leadership, organizational structures and the process of change is mired in the “old science” of Newtonian physics — e.g., concepts of critical mass, entropy, equilibrium, hierarchy, incremental change, etc. She proposes a new paradigm based on the “new science,” i.e., drawing from the insights of quantum physics and the study of complex systems, where “critical connections are more important than critical mass” and where dynamic disequilibrium, bifurcations in systems, and chaos are not only natural processes in organizations but opportunities for changes in human consciousness. She proposes a new model of leadership to respond to the new conditions around us.

Renate Nummela Caine and Geoffrey Caine, *Making Connections: Teaching and the Human Brain* (Menlo Park, California: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1991)

According to the authors, the U.S. educational system is based on an “industrial model” of education which met the needs of the twentieth century but now needs to undergo a paradigm shift to meet the challenges of the new “information age.” For their new paradigm, they emphasize a brain-based approach to learning and teaching, focusing on the need for educators to help students “make connections” between existing knowledge and new knowledge and to facilitate the discovery of meaning and relevance. This new educational approach also has intriguing ramifications for leadership development in youth.

David Werner and Bill Bowers, *Helping Health Workers Learn: A Book of Methods, Aids and Ideas for Instructors at the Village Level* (Berkeley: Hesperian Foundation, 1982)

The authors use the framework of Paulo Freire and critical pedagogy as their approach to training health workers in the Third World, while cautioning people to adopt Freire’s approach but not his dense language in their work with others. This book is filled with practical advice, stories, and instructional aids such as drawings and puppet shows to help educators (and mentors) “start at the level where people are at,” to value existing knowledge in their students, and to help advance critical thinking skills. This important book can serve as the foundation for student leadership training and for student activism in communities.

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1971)

This classic volume analyzes the relationship between knowing the world and changing it. Freire emphasizes the relationship between critical awareness and social action and the process that each person goes through to attain this insight.

Sharif M. Abdullah, *The Power of One: Authentic Leadership in Turbulent Times* (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 1995)

This small book contains great wisdom. Abdullah argues that the leadership models of the past are inadequate for dealing with what he calls the “mega-crises” of the current world. He explores the relationship between the political consciousness of individuals (“the power of one”) and the communities that they serve.

Bruce Kokopeli and George Lakey, *Leadership for Change: Toward a Feminist Model* (Gabriola Island, British Columbia: New Society Publishers, 1983)

This small pamphlet contrasts patriarchal (hierarchy and domination) and feminist (sharing and nurturing) leadership models and provides practical suggestions for training people in the concept of shared leadership. The authors focus on the importance of group processes and group culture as cornerstones for political change.

Sotsisowah, "Thoughts of Peace: The Great Law," in *Basic Call to Consciousness*, edited by Akwesasne Notes (Summertown, Tennessee: Native Voices, 1978)

Sotsisowah traces the contributions of indigenous peoples thinking in America to questions of peace, justice and leadership in American society by focusing on the teachings of the great Hau de nau see leader who helped found what is known as the Iroquois Federation. This formation lasted for hundreds of years, and many of its ideas relating to peace, justice, and democracy were incorporated into the U.S. Constitution. In this essay, Sotsisowah examines the expanded concept of peace that Hau de nau see leaders developed which, in contrast to the current western concept, is embedded in justice, power, and education.

Websites

Grace Lee Boggs, writings on Freedom Schooling
James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership
<http://www.boggscenter.org/>

Glenn Omatsu, "Freedom Schooling"
<http://www.boggscenter.org/omatsu.htm>

Hate Free Zone, Campaign of Washington
<http://www.hatefreezone.org/>

Yes! The Magazine of Positive Alternatives
<http://www.futurenet.org/>

Activism in Schools: K-12 and Within Communities
<http://www.teachingforchange.org>

Peace Studies Programs in Universities
<http://csf.colorado.edu/peace/academic.html>

Student Activist Resource Handbook
<http://www.csun.edu/eop/htdocs/studentactivismbook.pdf>

Peer Mentoring Resource Handbook
<http://www.csun.edu/eop/htdocs/peermentoring.pdf>

UCLA class: "Mobilizing for Peace and Justice"
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aasc/classweb/winter03/aas116/>

Overcoming “White Supremacist Culture” and Its Impact on Our Work in Groups (by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun)

<http://www.prisonactivist.org/cws/dr-culture.html>