

Leadership For the Amateur Radio Club

*By Norm Fusaro, W3IZ
ARRL Affiliated Club & Mentor Program Manager
Assistant Manager ARRL MVP Department*

Congratulations! You have just been appointed to a leadership position of your Amateur Radio club. You may be on the board of directors or an officer of the club or you may be chairperson of an event like a hamfest or Field Day. Other positions of leadership may include heading up a team of Volunteer Examiners or organizing a new licensing class. Whatever the responsibility, the fact remains that the members of your organization are now looking to YOU to lead them to accomplish a set of goals.

Leadership is not a popularity contest. During the course of your tenure some people are not going to be happy with some of the decisions that are made. That is unfortunate but a leader has to do what is best for the organization. Trying to please everyone is a losing proposition and will only alienate those that truly have something to offer.

This does not mean that as the leader you get to ride roughshod over everyone. There are always diplomatic ways to affect change. As a leader you are the champion of change. Doing things the same old way is not leading, it is simply repeating the mistakes of others. Not that the way things were previously done were necessarily wrong, but a leader is one who will look at ways to do things better. Finding ways to tweak it, move it up a notch, fine tune it, or whichever cliché that you choose, is what a leader will do.

As a leader you are not going to have all of the solutions so keep an open mind and consider fresh ideas from your members. Rather than doing things "the way that we've always done" look for better ways to do them. It is neither "your way" nor "my way" but the *best way*. Stimulate your members to find new approaches to the challenges at hand. An effective leader is one whose people believe that they did things on their own. Be innovative, not imposing. Be influential, not demanding. Inspire your team to take ownership of the project and do the best that they can do.

Leaders Must Have Integrity

Managers are people who do things right, while leaders are people who do the right thing.

Warren Bennis, Ph.D. "On Becoming a Leader"

In order to be a good leader one has to develop trust from the membership. Trust is inspired by actions. Being open and fair with people is the best way to gain their trust. Nobody will trust someone who lies or doesn't give honest feedback. People will become skeptical of secret or closed meetings. Avoid these behaviors at all cost. They will be the downfall of even the most well intentioned person.

You and your team have made a commitment to the club to accomplish a task. It makes no difference if the position is voluntary or compensated; a promise has been made to do the job. As a leader you will delegate jobs and responsibilities. Be specific about what is expected. You will also have to provide feedback. Be honest in your feedback and don't blame others for things that did not work out.

A good leader will always see the glass half full. Avoid being cynical or negative as this will just undermine your objectives.

Inclusion

Without involvement, there is no commitment. Mark it down, asterisk it, circle it, underline it. No involvement, no commitment.
-- Stephen Covey --

Your radio club is comprised of people. People are individuals and each person has something unique to offer to the group. As the leader of the organization you will be tasked with identifying the talents of the individuals and delegating tasks that will achieve the mission of the club.

The individual members of your club also have needs. We will assume that the basic needs of life are being met -- food, shelter, clothing -- so we will look at people's other needs. All people have a need to belong, to be recognized, to learn, to accomplish something and to express an idea or vision.

By focusing on your people, the goals of the organization will be met. However, if you simply focus on the goals and not the members then you will not have the support of the people needed to accomplish the mission, in which case you will have failed all around.

The members of your club want to be a part of the activities. Deep down even the most introverted person in the club wants to be involved but they are just waiting to be invited to participate.

When looking for people to do jobs for an event, passing around a clipboard with a sign up sheet will net very little. Walk up to people and ask them if they would care to assist by doing a specific job.

"Bob, would you like to help us by putting address labels on the envelopes for the hamfest fliers?" Or "Mary, could you be the contact person to register new hams for the upcoming licensing class?"

These are specific jobs asked of specific people. By asking people to participate you are satisfying their needs to belong, to accomplish something and to perhaps learn something. Even the simple task of mailing labels may teach someone about the process of mail merging and computer generated labels from a data base. You will never know unless you ask.

Furthermore, when recognizing these individuals for their part in the project start with the smallest job first. By putting them in the front of the parade you are making them important and not trivializing their contributions.

Have A Mission Statement

The goals of the club should be communicated to every member. Committees of a club should also have a mission statement. This statement should clearly define the objective and the mission of the group. Your mission statement may only be one sentence, "The mission of this club is to have fun." The Frankford Radio Club in Philadelphia has a very simple statement, "Proficiency through competition." For a contest club that pretty much says it all.

Whatever the mission of the group is, write it down and communicate it to everyone. Keep it handy and visit it often. Don't lose sight of what it is that all of you are there for. Effective leaders will continually find new ways to communicate this vision.

Commit To Excellence

The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.

- Vincent T. Lombardi

Always do things to the best of your ability and accept nothing less than the best that anyone can do. The key to this is to empower your people. Don't micromanage your team. Set goals and guidelines and your people will find ingenious ways to accomplish them. Good enough is never good enough.

Accept Responsibility

No man will make a great leader who wants to do it all himself, or to get all the credit for doing it.

- Andrew Carnegie

Own the project. It is not what "they" want or what "the board" or somebody else wants. It is what needs to be done and we are going to do it. Own it and do it. Nobody wants to listen to a wishy-washy person. A leader is going to take command of a situation and gather input from the team and then make a decision on how to accomplish the goals. If things fail, a leader takes responsibility and doesn't blame others. Leaders don't take credit for successes, leaders acknowledge the entire team.

Create Excitement

You will do foolish things, but do them with enthusiasm.
- Colette

Lead by example. Your excitement about the project should be contagious. "This is going to be the best event ever." Say it and mean it. Avoid sarcasm or negative comments. You were not drafted or bamboozled into doing this job. You volunteered to do this job because you wanted it to be successful.

Remember the first part of this exercise where we said that you are not going to be able to please everyone? This may be true, but if you have a naysayer that is trying to undermine the operation so that should it fail they can say "I told you so." perhaps you may need to talk to that individual and find out specifically what it is that he or she sees wrong with the project. You will have to try to create the excitement on a personal level. Surely you won't expect this person to jump up with bells and balloons but you may just be able to neutralize their negative outlook.

Always Remain Positive

Celebrate the victories, no matter how small, and never dwell on the negative. If something didn't work this time, look at it as an opportunity to improve upon it next time. We learn from our mistakes as well as our successes. A good leader has the humility to admit that something didn't work but also takes a lesson from it.

Be proactive and anticipate changes. Always have a "Plan B" in case something should happen that wasn't part of the initial plan.

Build Relationships

Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with the important matters.
- Albert Einstein

Everything we do in life is interdependent upon the relationships that we develop with other people. We said earlier that clubs are comprised of people. As a leader you will have to build relationships with everyone in your club. Everyone has something to offer. Avoid playing favorites or developing a click. Leaders do not seek hero worship.

As a new leader you may be called upon to mend broken relationships. This may require some tact and in most cases may not happen overnight. Time really does heal all wounds. The first step in these types of situations is to extend a hand in friendship and acknowledge that, though not intentional, things did not turn out exactly for the best. Make a concerted effort to go forward and apologize for anything that may have happened in the past. Take this lesson from the ancient Chinese who used gold to fill the cracks in a broken vase making it more valuable than the original.

It is the uniqueness of every individual that makes your club work. If everybody was exactly the same the group would be dysfunctional. Celebrate diversity and utilize the many points of view that everyone has to offer.

People are not objects that can be shelved and returned to at a later date. We must continually work at the relationships in our lives and in our club. This means that we must be mindful of other commitments to family and work and other organizations that we are involved in and respect other's prior commitments. Balance is the key.

Have Fun

*Lead and inspire people. Don't try to manage and manipulate people.
Inventories can be managed but people must be lead.
- Ross Perot*

As a leader you are going to take risks and challenge the status quo. You are going to upset some people sometime. As long as you continue to build strong relationships with your club members you will not alienate anyone.

The idea of a club is to have fun. Even the most serious of people enjoy a break and some fun. Maintain a sense of humor and learn to laugh at your own mistakes. Leaders are not gods. They are human beings just like everyone else in the club. So, don't take yourself too seriously.

The reward for any good leader is being asked to tackle the next challenge.

Summary

- Respect people - Earn trust

- Set goals
- Communicate effectively
- Strive for excellence -- Accept responsibility
- Celebrate victories -- learn from mistakes
- Create excitement -- stay positive
- Be proactive
- Build and maintain relationships

The six most important words: "I admit I made a mistake."

The five most important words: "You did a good job."

The four most important words: "What is your opinion?"

The three most important words: "If you please."

The two most important words: "Thank you,"

The one most important word: "We"

The least most important word: "I"

- Author unknown