

20 LESSONS: Your Role as a Student Leader

Work together with your executive board and active members to fulfill your roles as student leaders.

1. **Work on the morale of your organization members.** Unless they feel good about their roles and their contribution, your organization members will not be as cooperative and productive as they could be. It is part of your role to recruit *and* retain your members – remember to recognize all your members’ efforts to let them know they are valued.
2. **Expect any changes to be accepted gradually.** After we have been thinking about new ideas and events for months, sometimes we expect people to accept these changes immediately. Remember that they need time to consider your proposals (no matter how enthusiastic you are) and may want their feedback incorporated into your new ideas.
3. **Be available to help those who want your help.** Some people will need more help than others – but don’t force your help upon those who are quite able and willing to accomplish tasks. You’ll need to observe who needs your help and when to offer. You should try to never turn down an opportunity to respond to someone’s request for help – you just might be developing a future leader of your organization!
4. **Let your organization members determine the group’s purpose.** Everyone likes to feel they are a part of the organization’s success. Unless organization members have a say in what is to happen, their participation will be half-hearted, at best.
5. **Emphasize the process for working through problems rather than the final result.** You will definitely encounter some challenges and even failures in the organization. A real test of an organization’s leadership is how you navigate through those tough times and learn from mistakes. Also, your end result may not be the organization’s original goal – but it could be better! Don’t lose sight of a good result just because it is different than imagined.
6. **Approach change through cooperative appraisal.** We can get a little defensive when we discuss change or altering plans for “a better option”. As a leader, try to base decisions and discussions on what is right rather than *who* is right.
7. **Encourage brainstorming and creativity.** Always provide feedback and support for new ideas and avoid penalizing for mistakes made for the sake of experimentation. Encourage your members to think outside of the box. Sometimes this can create some “crazy” ideas but the organization needs to work through those ideas to see what is possible. If you stop the creative process too soon you might miss out on the best ideas.
8. **Share decisions regarding policies and procedures.** Explain and discuss – don’t dictate. By emphasizing how to solve problems, and involving your members in these decisions, you will create a deeper connection to the organization. The more involved you keep your members, the better the retention of your members.
9. **Recognize criticism as the first step individuals take in assuming responsibility.** You will learn to quickly swallow your pride as a leader for the betterment of the organization. Criticism can be a little “prickly”, especially if you have worked very hard on something that is being criticized.

However, this is a chance to gain suggestions and insight into improvements to make the organization stronger. It's not personal. People usually offer suggestions and criticism because they want to help. When people stop taking notice of what needs improving then they have stopped caring.

10. **Share the glory.** Are you noticing a pattern? To keep members engaged in your organization they need to feel valued. If you take all the credit, or allow a member's contribution to go unnoticed, what message are you sending?
11. **Have faith and confidence in the ability of your group.** People tend to live up to our expectations – high or low.
12. **Be sure your group has a common purpose.** Structure meetings so that issues of common interest are discussed with the whole group. Individual concerns should be addressed at other times.
13. **Trust the motives of all group members.** Similar to working through the group's creativity and brainstorming processes, pay every suggestion a sincere response.
14. **Don't set yourself up as infallible.** Be honest and admit when you lack an answer. Don't be afraid to be human – in fact, you'll earn more respect when you set an example that anyone can make a mistake. How you recover from a mistake or failure is one of the true tests of a leader.
15. **Be specific.** Communicate exactly what you expect and think.
16. **Be socially sensitive.** Don't try to be funny at the expense of other organization members (or non-organization members).
17. **Use the inquiry method.** Use questions to get information and define issues. Give people a chance to provide some answers to questions or issues that come up. When a situation is given to you to solve, pose it back to the organization as a question. You'll be surprised by the number of solutions that exist within the organization.
18. **Be impartial.** Give all organization members a chance to participate in all aspects of the organization. Do not play favorites – you'll quickly alienate members.
19. **Promote organization cohesiveness.** Help all organization members feel as if they belong.
20. **Manage conflict, don't ignore it.** Bring conflict into the open by addressing it directly and with as little personal bias as possible. Concentrate on the issues, behaviors, and facts rather than personalities.