

BEST PRACTICES

Best Practices #002: Leadership Heading: Membership



Leadership in Volunteer Woodturning Organizations

Leadership is critical to the success of a chapter. But just because a person is a great woodturner does not mean that person also has the skills to successfully lead a chapter, just as a great woodturner is not necessarily the best teacher (though the mastery of technical skills is a great starting point).

Don't hesitate to assume a position of leadership in your chapter: leadership skills can be acquired – just as you have gained the technical skills to be a good woodturner. And, leadership is about having a lot of common sense. As your chapter considers the selection of future leaders (through whatever means your chapter bylaws designate), having a perspective on the topic of leadership (provided herein) will most certainly aid in the selection process.

A good place to start understanding the role of leadership is to consider the Triple-E model, namely: **Envision**, **Enable**, and **Energize**. **Envision** means that the leadership sets organization direction, which can range from something as simple as an informative monthly meeting to as complex as hosting a regional symposium. **Enable** means to develop people and the skills volunteers will need to carry out their tasks and positions within the chapter. **Energize** means a lot of leading by example. Chapter leaders need to behave in ways that promote the vision of the organization.

In a volunteer organization, **Envisioning** is most important. **Envisioning** includes the development of a direction, both short and long term, for the organization and then articulating that direction to the organization such that others are enrolled to help in delivering the vision. **Envisioning** has to be handled in a way that meets the established protocols of the organization and also leads to a definable future state that is deliverable. If the vision is too general, it will not excite the volunteers. Visionary leadership is where it all begins. The chapter leaders need to be skilled in providing a focus and direction (vision) to others.

To **Enable** the organization to progress, there must be a plan. The ability to develop a plan against any defined objective is the second critical factor for leaders. This is where, we believe, most volunteer organizations succeed or fail and is based mainly upon the planning provided through the leadership. Planning is critical because it connects the individual volunteer to delivering the chapter goals, and therefore, energizes the organization to do even more. As soon as possible after new officers are elected, the entire group of officers (board of directors/executive committee) should hold a planning session

to establish a plan for the next year – 18 months. The plan might include areas such as recruitment, budget, fundraising, shows, demonstrators, or seasonal emphasis (demo tree ornaments in November). The plan established by the chapter leadership will serve to drive the organization forward. The plan should include delegation of responsibilities to other members, and then, the leadership holds them accountable for delivering what they committed to do. An ongoing review (monthly or at least quarterly) of the chapter's status vs. the plan is an important element for success.

To further **Energize** the chapter toward execution of the plan, the leadership must take the initiative and follow-up with the membership on their role. Since members are volunteers, most of them also have real day jobs and everyone has other priorities. Follow-up by the leadership becomes important since there is no other system of reward/motivation. Leading by example will again **Energize** the chapter as others, by nature, seek to follow the norms established by leadership. If the leader is a good role model, the tone is set for the rest of the organization to do all of the right things. The right things include integrity, and all of the little stuff such as showing up to all of the meetings, meeting your own commitments, being on time, paying your dues on time, sharing the workload, recognizing people and providing positive feedback.

All of which brings us to the fourth E in our EEE model (now the EEE+E model): which is **Enrolling** new volunteers into the organization. Membership recruitment is vital to the survival of any volunteer organization. To really highlight the importance of recruiting new members, consider the chapter where the average age of its members was around 70. For a number of years the chapter had staged a big art show as its major fundraiser. In the intervening years, membership recruitment was basically nonexistent and the organization had to cease staging the art show as the number of able-bodied volunteers diminished. Younger people are now hesitant to join because they do not want to get stuck doing all of the work. Obviously, this is a chapter in trouble.

As chapter leaders develop the vision, create the plan, engage the members in the plan, and enroll new talent and resources, the chapter membership becomes energized to take on jobs, which they know they can accomplish, and therefore gain the satisfaction of being an integral part of the chapter. Chapter leaders will have greater satisfaction in their roles as more of the membership becomes active and, importantly, the number of complaints from involved participants diminishes.

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