

5 HELPFUL ARTICLES

**FOR TEACHERS
WHO WORK
WITH STUDENT
LEADERS**



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GRIPLEADERSHIP

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WHAT DOES A SUCCESSFUL STUDENT LEADERSHIP TEAM LOOK LIKE?

Every teacher who stands up in front of a classroom wants the students sitting in front of them to be successful. If you are also the staff member who works with the student leadership team then similarly, you would want them to be successful as leaders.

But what does success look like for a student leadership team? It is easier to know what success looks like when you are teaching a maths class or a history class. In the classroom we can look at outcomes, assessments and written work. Leadership however is far less objective. It is a topic that should be approached differently to academic development. However, if we find that setting some success standards in the classroom helps develop students academically, then what success standards can we use to determine whether our student leaders are successful?

Student leaders will often say that the success of the leadership team means things like raising \$1000 for a charity or making changes to some kind of school rule. Maybe there is a time and place

for these things, but surely this is not what we should use to measure the success of our student leadership group?

Impact Leadership has observed that there are five criteria which are helpful in assessing the success of your student leadership team.

These five criteria will help you reflect on whether your student leadership teams have been successful in the past and will provide a guide for your current team. It is important to note that achieving a big tick for each of the indicators discussed would be very difficult. In fact, it may be as impossible as a student scoring 100% for a piece of creative writing. There is always more we can do to improve leadership, so use these indicators as a way of reflecting on your team rather than a way of awarding them a score.

If you think your team is not yet at the 'success' level and would like practical tips that you can implement straight away, then you may benefit from listening to our audio CD that has been recorded especially for teachers called '[10 Ways To Best Support Your Student Leaders](#)'.

Criteria For A Successful Student Leadership Team



Meeting Objectives

Every student leadership team should have some objectives. Good objectives should include projects, events and tasks that are allocated to this team and those decided by the team. The objectives should also be broken down into school terms and be written in such a way that they can be measured. A successful leadership team will be meeting these objectives.



Team Morale

Team morale can be fairly easy to gauge at leadership team meetings. If morale is high you will have almost 100% attendance every time, great participation and contribution and a number of creative ideas will be put forward and discussed in a positive manner. If there is high morale students will also be happy to put their hand up to take on roles and tasks and will follow through on these duties between meetings.



Growth And Development

We know that students who are successful academically grow and develop over time. In the same way, for a leadership team to be successful it should be evident that leadership growth and development is taking place. A successful leadership team should be achieving things that they would not have been able to achieve at the very start of their leadership journey. Students within the team will be developing new skills, seizing new opportunities and conquering new milestones.



Serving Others And The School

As student leaders it is important that the leadership team is making a genuine contribution to the student body. Similarly, the leaders should be contributing to the overall objectives of the school. They should not be too busy running the events or projects that they simply think will be the most enjoyable to organise. The best way to discover whether the student leaders are successful in this area is to ask a variety of students in the broader student body, what it is they feel that the leaders have added to the school so far?



Momentum

One or two successful initiatives does not normally mean that a team is successful. They may very well be on the path to success, but consistency needs to be demonstrated over time. When a team has successfully gained momentum it will help with achieving all of the success indicators already listed. You will know that the team has gained momentum when the leaders do not rely solely on you as the staff member to initiate the next project, the next meeting or the next discussion.

HOW DO YOU SELECT YOUR STUDENT LEADERS?

By Ronan McGinniss

This is one of the most frequent questions that I hear from the conversations that teachers have with each other when they attend our student leadership conference. **“How do you select your student leaders?”** Some people who ask this are simply interested in the topic, whilst others appear to be on a genuine quest to identify the foolproof way of selecting the perfect group of student leaders.

Having been involved in these discussions many times, and working with hundreds of schools, I have come to the realisation that there is no universally perfect answer to this question. It is like asking the question “what is the best way to teach a class?” The answer to this question depends on a variety of factors unique to the school, the leadership structure, the students, and the environment.

I have heard a huge variety of opinions in this discussion of late. Some schools have done away with leadership roles altogether, either because they want to treat a whole year group as a class of leaders or because they want to see the natural leaders rise to the surface and lead, without having to appoint positions. >>




I know of one principal who says that he gives every student in the school an equal vote for their student leaders and he insists that the result should never be tampered with, as the students will follow the people they have elected regardless. Other schools invite nominations and then put students through a very structured selection process involving interviews, candidate speeches and student and staff voting. Different again, some school principals reserve the right to select the student leaders themselves.


Small schools are in a unique situation. Sometimes selecting leaders is made easier if there are only a handful of senior students who automatically take on this mantle, but other years there may be no senior students at all and the structure needs to be approached differently. For a variety of reasons, some schools find it difficult to find students that are interested in filling leadership positions, which requires a long term strategy of leadership development rather than a short term selection process.

After navigating through this conversation for some time, I am able to recommend some general suggestions and principles to keep in mind when creating the 'selection process' at your school.

1. ASK THE STUDENT BODY FOR THEIR INPUT IN SOME WAY.


 This may or may not involve a traditional 'voting' process. Student input may be in the form of inviting students to nominate others or themselves.

2. AVOID CAMPAIGN SPEECHES.


 Assembling the students to listen to candidate's speeches often results in the election of the candidate who delivers the funniest or wittiest speech. It also results in potential student leaders thinking more about campaigning than about leading. If you do like the idea of speeches, encourage the candidates to lead a charity project in the twelve months leading up to student leader elections. During their project they can deliver a speech to the students focussed on

the project, not on themselves, so that the student body can hear this person speak within a context.

3. REQUIRE SOME ACTION FROM THE POTENTIAL STUDENT LEADERS BEFORE THEY ARE SELECTED.

 It will help reinforce to them that leaders are required to take action and not simply sit back. This could be as simple as asking the students to write a paragraph about ways they feel they can help the school community.

4. COMMUNICATE THE PROCESS CLEARLY TO THE STUDENT BODY.

 If you use a voting system, inform the students how the voting will work. The last thing you want is students feeling that the process is clouded in secrecy or corruption... this sounds extreme but this is often what they think!



Choosing a Charity

One of the big keys to student leadership success

By Ronan McGinniss

At a recent conference I was asked by a student leader whether I could recommend a good charity that they could support through the fundraising project that they were about to embark on. This question took me a little by surprise because it felt to me like they were organising their process in the wrong order.

It turns out that they were very keen to hold a fundraising concert. What would they fundraise for? They didn't know yet. We can therefore assume that holding a concert must be their primary objective. I don't want to sound critical of these students, because I am a firm believer that student leaders should set out to do more than purely raise money. This group obviously had their own reasons for believing that the concert would be beneficial for their students, and knew that it also had potential to raise money for needy people outside their school.

In relation to their specific question about a recommended charity... I thought best not to answer the question by naming a specific charity. Rather I suggested some ways in which the students could identify a suitable charity themselves. Choosing the right charity for your school appears to be essential in gaining maximum participation. Failure to choose the ideal charity can result in very little money being collected and can sadly draw criticism. Through further observation of how many schools choose a charity to support I have identified five things to consider when making this decision for your fundraising projects.

As you go through this list, endeavour to choose a charity that will meet between three and five of these characteristics.

1. A Charity Aligned with School History

Choosing a charity aligned with school history will be a different process for every school, but if you can achieve this it will help the broader student body understand why this charity has been chosen. Things to consider could include; whether your school is named after a patron that is linked to a charity, whether a past staff member or student is significantly involved in a charity or for many private schools finding out whether the school was founded by an organisation that does charitable work.

2. A Charity Aligned with School Values

Choosing a charity aligned with a core school value helps you reinforce this value as part of the culture of the school. Contributing to this charity gives the student body a practical way to be involved in living out this value. Matching a list of core values (or the school motto) to the values or motto of a charity will help you align in this way.

3. A Charity with Inspiring Stories

I am still amazed when I hear some students tell me that they have no idea what their fundraising goes towards. They may have heard the name of the charity but often know little about the impact their money will have on other people's lives. Choose a charity that provides photos, videos and stories that you can share at assemblies with the whole student body. Kingsway Christian College recently told me that they find it effective to support one particular charity through almost all of their fundraisers. Students from the school regularly visit the charity to meet the people involved and be immersed among the success stories that the charity creates every day.

4. A Charity with a Connection to a Recent Situation

Whether it be a recent international disaster or a current local issue, it seems that students are more willing to participate in fundraising that goes toward an immediate need. On a more personal level, is there a member of the school community that has recently suffered a tragedy, difficulty or serious illness of some kind? Choosing a charity that helps people in similar situations will tap into the personal connection that students might have developed toward that cause.

5. A Charity of which Students are Already Aware

I am not suggesting that the primary consideration is to support the large charities that also enjoy support from countless other donors. There is much to like about the idea of using the previous four suggestions to select a small but important charity in which your school can become a significant part of their work. However, in observing the charities chosen by many schools it seems that students respond positively to charities that I like to call 'celebrity charities.' These are the charities that are on television, billboards and have become household names, much like a

celebrity. It appears that when fundraising for these charities is undertaken at school there is always a proportion of students that immediately flock towards the initiative much like they might to a celebrity.

I expect that many people reading this will be able to use these five points as a checklist to somewhat reinforce that the charities you already support are indeed excellent choices. For others, I hope that this helps you in your fundraising efforts and in drawing out the very best in the students you lead.

Choosing the right charity for your school appears to be essential in gaining maximum participation.

Fostering Creative Leaders

By Karl Brown

GRIP Team Member

Creativity, by nature, can be a very mysterious creature. At times it can feel elusive and fleeting, nebulous or vague – sometimes even downright foreign – but the power of creativity is undeniable. It is something that is prized in the workplace, and it is a key factor in the advancement of society as a whole. It is one of the essential ingredients in the design of beautiful and bold new architectural structures; in environmental conservation and development; advancements in the arts and sciences...in short, creativity is a fundamental and highly desirable human quality.

Those of us who work with student leaders have an amazing opportunity to foster creativity within their specific context. Through being mindful about our preparation, engagement, and the opportunities we provide, we can build an enjoyable and creative leadership experience for our students. In this article, we have provided six suggestions to get you thinking of ways to integrate creativity into your student leadership team.

1. Reinforce that everyone has the capacity to be creative

By virtue of being human, we are creative beings. Our ideas, initiatives, and brainstorming are all creative acts. Creativity should be seen as a skill to be developed, rather than the mindset of 'I'm not the creative type. You either have it or you don't.' Sometimes all that creativity needs is an opportunity to imagine. Creativity often comes about when people feel as though anything is possible; when anything and everything could happen. Now, there is a time and place for being realistic, and scaling grand projects back to an appropriate size, etc – but during the dreaming and brainstorming part, the sky's the limit! With this in mind, deliberately encourage your students to be creative, to think big, and remind them that being creative is inside all of us!

2. View failure as part of the process

Students (and teachers, for that matter) need regular reminders that it's OK to fail when you try something new. We need to create safe environments for students to try all sorts of undertakings as leaders, confident that any failures along the way won't be permanent, and won't be judged too harshly. Encourage your leaders to take appropriate risks, and not to focus on the fear of failure, but rather on the possibility of success.

3. Lead by example

Educators are often reminded of the power of modelling behaviours, values, etc. to their students. When it's time to dream and brainstorm in your student leadership team, rather than running the meetings at a distance, roll up your sleeves and pitch ideas in as well. Don't get me wrong, there is great wisdom in leaving space to allow the students to grab hold of the reins and take responsibility in meetings – but modelling creativity is an excellent way to foster it. It sends a message to students that “This is what we do here. We are in this together. Do as I do.” Let them see you leading in a hands-on way at their level. Through many conversations with students and staff, as well as from my personal experience as a student leader, these types of meetings can be very special environments with a unique and interactive dynamic shared between staff and students.

4. Use direct and indirect approaches

Creativity is something that can be explicitly developed directly or facilitated indirectly. You can encourage creativity directly through intentional creative exercises at the beginning of meetings, and though things that the students are aware are designed to get them thinking. Indirect creative development, on the other hand, might be developed through showing them what others have done, fostering creativity through exposure. Having an awareness of these two approaches can help you to be creative and intentional in building the creativity of your leaders.

5. Utilise external inspiration

Following on from the aforementioned indirect approach – find the best student leadership team(s) that you can, and learn from them. Show your students what's possible, and expand their thinking through success stories, pictures, and video examples. You may even be able to arrange a visit with another school's leadership team to learn from them directly – or better still, collaborate on a community project! Seeing what's possible is a wonderful kick-start for the creative process, and can catapult your students beyond safe, 'inside-the-box' thinking.

6. Encourage students to take ownership

There is nothing that has made a more significant difference in my personal journey of leadership than the concept of responsibility. Students taking ownership (i.e. This is my school, and participating in our leadership team is a great opportunity for me to make a difference) can foster a highly creative environment. At first blush, these may seem to be unrelated ideas – but those who feel responsible for, for example, the condition of their school grounds, are far more likely to engage creatively to ensure that the problem is solved. Building a sense of ownership and responsibility in your students is an excellent way of indirectly developing creative thinking and problem solving. Once you're invested, then challenges become your challenges to solve, in the same way that successes and wins become your wins.

These six suggestions are just the tip of the iceberg, but hopefully they have got you thinking. When you're planning your next student leadership meeting, think creatively, and see if you can include a few of the ideas listed above in order to build an exciting environment that fosters and encourages creativity and possibility.



4 Quick Ways to Review the Effectiveness of Your Student Leaders This Year

With the school year coming to a close, it may be valuable to do a quick review of the effectiveness of your student leaders. This process will hopefully reinforce the successes of the year and also reveal anything that could be tweaked for next year. Whether your school has a small or large group of student leaders, there are four quick indicators of effective student leadership.

1. Needs have been met.

Throughout the past year, did the student leaders at your school focus on meeting the needs of others and the school? Or did they simply do only what they personally found interesting or entertaining? Student leaders that make a difference are those who turn their attention to the needs of the students, the school and the community, not just their own. A simple way to determine how effective the student leaders at your school were this year is to determine whether they focussed on things that were really needed. Did they take time to identify these? Some might have gone under the radar, and may never truly be revealed until later. Many of the people that have had the biggest influence haven't done it out in the open, but diligently focussed on improving the well being of others.





2. Students have been involved.

Running events and projects is a common function of student leaders. From idea generation to the outworking of those ideas, student leaders are tasked with finding new and creative ways to get more students involved. A simple way to determine whether or not they were successful in this area is to ask, “Were there more students involved than last year?” If more students participated in the various events run throughout the year, then this suggests that they were effective. If not, one possible reason is that they may not have focussed on the first point of meeting the needs of others.

3. Student leaders have taken initiative and ownership of their role.

Whenever the student leaders were asked to run an event, get involved with projects or build relationships with other students, did a teacher continually need to remind them of their responsibilities? Did a teacher continually have to complete the various tasks that the student leaders should have been doing? If you answered yes to either of these questions, perhaps there is some improvement that you can try and encourage in next year’s student leaders.

Student leaders who take initiative are those who use their own creativity and work with others to come up with new and innovative ideas. They don’t simply perform odd jobs and wait to be asked to volunteer; they continually look for ways to meet the needs of others. Were the student leaders at your school proactive or reactive? Students who take ownership of their role at school are those who put their ideas into practice, instead of waiting for someone else to do it for them. This is a great sign of effective leadership.

4. A legacy has been left.

Have the student leaders contributed to the school or community in one significant way that has changed the way people do things or view things? If so, it could be said that the leadership team has left a legacy. If you cannot determine one major contribution the student leaders have made throughout the year, it does not necessarily mean that they were ineffective.

One way that student leaders continue to leave a legacy at school is in the area of school culture. The different views, attitudes, customs and overall language towards the school determine the culture. “The way we do things around here” is a common saying for helping describe culture. If the student leaders at your school influenced the school culture in a positive way, whether by changing something small or creating it from scratch, that is a great legacy for future students to continue to build in the following years.

If you can tick the box for all four of these areas, then the student leaders at your school have definitely been effective this year. If the student leaders were not particularly successful in one or all of these areas, then perhaps use these four areas as a starting point for the student leaders when developing goals for the 2014 school year.

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GRIPLEADERSHIP

GRIP Leadership is an independent organisation that exists to train and develop leaders with a special focus on school students and the educational sector. Most known for the 'GRIP Student Leadership Conferences,' the team also presents tailored seminars and presentations for schools. GRIP Leadership programs are fresh, practical, interactive and enjoyed by tens of thousands of students each year. GRIP Leadership is endorsed by leaders, educators, politicians and business people around Australia and New Zealand.