

20 Leading Actions

Let's scan twenty pragmatic pictures of change that may take place through the leadership of a support person. You will find that this action list emphasizes thinking far ahead, seizing the opportunity, being the first to take a risk, working with others in a less hierarchical manner, expressing enthusiasm, and being clear about what you want. You will be able to picture the changes I describe taking place, and in picturing them you are more likely to adapt them, coming up with changes that might work where you work. The twenty actions vary in impact, but all are alternatives that people like us have taken to help our organizations move toward better futures.

1. Write a "white paper" about what you want your organization to be five years from now. What contribution would you like it to be making to the campus? What would the organization be doing? With whom? What would others be saying about it? And what would your role be? This action is not just an option for support officers; individual members can pursue it as well. Whether you share this white paper with anyone is your choice; you don't have to, for this action to be worthwhile to you. However, sharing it would provide another example of leading.
2. Involve members of your organization in a discussion about "what we would really like to accomplish around here." You could use your white paper from the first action listed, or you could pursue this as a separate action. Choose one accomplishment or goal for the semester that is aligned with what you really want to accomplish and that is quite different from what you have been doing recently.
3. Ask another group on campus what they think your function should be in your organization, and then tell them what you think you should be doing. Using your combination of answers, together choose something you will jointly pursue that involves using your abilities differently. Then do it.
4. Never let a month go by without pursuing at least one innovative project or possibility that is connected to the kind of group you are trying to create.
5. If you have people who report to you, ask each of them to come up with one creative objective for the coming planning period that they would like to do and that has the possibility of benefiting the organization.
6. Ask other members to assess you as a leader of change. Just how good are you at bringing about change in the organization? What do you do well? What could you do differently or better? You may wish to sit in on this discussion or ask them to talk about it without you or ask someone else to gather the information for you. However you do it, act on what you learn.
7. Ask your president or someone higher in the organization to assess you as a leader of change as part of a performance discussion. Get guidance from that person as to what you could do, lead or change that would help him/her to do his/her job better.
8. Isolate one leadership behavior you believe you need to develop further and publicly commit to doing it differently. Get ideas from other members about what it might be most useful for you to do.
9. Get yourself put on the next meeting's agenda to lead a discussion of one of the organization's nagging problems. Approach the problem in a less traditional way. For example, just generate ideas at the meeting and intentionally do not come to a resolution.

Let those ideas incubate and return to them at the next meeting, when you will choose an action.

10. Talk with other members about why they participate in this organization. Try to get a sense of how their presence here ties in with the larger purposes in their lives. Also, see how their motivation relates to your own.
11. Tell a new member why you joined, what's in it for you, and how this group fits in with your life. Set up the moment to do this and do it enthusiastically. Then ask the other person why they joined.
12. Gather a group of people for dinner who have been working together on a project. Tell them how you appreciate what they have been doing. No, you don't have to be an officer to do this. Encourage them to talk about what this project has meant to them. Resist the temptation to keep quiet and to avoid mention of what you have done together.
13. If you manage a committee, give a short but intentionally inspirational talk about the importance of this group in your life. Talk about the good points and the bad points. Reveal some of your life purpose in the process.
14. When the next great change in your organization is announced, greet it with enthusiasm. Look for opportunities to apply it to your function. Be the first to embrace efforts aimed at making the organization more responsive, more creative, and more effective.
15. Review the training you have in place for new members. Look for ways of turning more control over to the new members, releasing them from their dependence on you.
16. What was the last important idea that didn't get accepted that you took to the officers of the group? Discuss with those who were involved why it didn't work. Learn from this, and if the idea is still worthy, take it back for another try using a different approach.
17. Look seriously and closely at your organization's purpose. How could you improve on it? What could you do to ensure that you use your resources for the betterment of your members and the campus as a whole?
18. Set up a collaborative effort with another member that you have felt competitive with in the past. Work together toward the accomplishment of shared organization goals.
19. Decide with which member you are having the most trouble in communicating. Resolve to change this situation. Develop an approach that requires you to behave differently toward that person than you have in the past. Check with them on your success.
20. Find a book or article that you think would be valuable for members in the organization to read. Ask them to read it, and then discuss together what you learned from it and what actions you can take based on its suggestions.

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