

Overview: Leading Volunteers

Now, more than ever, volunteer leaders are called upon to strengthen their approaches to leading volunteers and others. The ability to inspire and influence — whether it be volunteers, community partners, or peers — is at the very core of the task and critical to its success.

Much of the information and training available for volunteer coordinators, however, focuses on developing management skills rather than strengthening leadership competencies. Fortunately, what makes a good leader across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors doesn't differ that much.

Objectives

- Create higher-performing teams
- Foster loyalty and greater commitment to action
- Increase performance results and engagement levels
- Increase retention and reduce turnover
- Positively influence recruitment

7 Pieces of Advice for Volunteer Leaders (via Dr. Peter Fuda)

1. **Set a higher standard for ourselves** — be a role model first, a preacher second (if at all). We judge ourselves by our intentions and others by their actions. If balancing personal time commitments is important for our volunteers, and us, how are we demonstrating that we are managing our own time? Over-committing resources leads to burnout.
2. **Eliminate frustration** — Often we are frustrated by our expectations which are often unvoiced and uncommitted to meeting on the part of others. Let go of misplaced expectations or obtain commitments to act to meet them. Expectations involve being clear about what you want done, with timeframes, and standards of performance. Commitments are agreements to meet the established parameters of those expectations. Accountability is the mutually shared management of the evolving expectations and commitments over time. Circumstances change. Expectations and commitments will change as the circumstances do.
3. **Always assume a noble intention** — A noble intent doesn't mean people are effective. Often their intent is misaligned with their actions. Calling attention to that is wise. Identify what is helpful or unhelpful about a behavior. Don't call out or label the person. Before providing behavioral feedback, signal that you are going to offer feedback and check to see if the person is willing to receive it. Feedback falling on unreceptive ears is useless and often counterproductive.
4. **Create the gap** — If something is not working, don't assign blame. People will tolerate the conclusions of others, but will only act on their own conclusions. Help people see the gap between what is going on and what is needed. Don't sell a path of action - create the gap that helps people see the value of a path that they might choose for themselves.
5. **Ignite the fire** — engage people's values and beliefs - keep the "Why" of FDPA top of mind. Fair Districts, for all. Try to learn what is attracting people to FDPA and your local group. What keeps

them engaged? Why do they volunteer with FDPA when there are so many other worthy causes to which they could apply their efforts? Seek to create an environment in which those needs are met.

6. **Shift from agreement to alignment** — A nodding head doesn't mean appropriate action will be taken. Alignment means clearly expressed objectives and a shared commitment to act to meet them. Alignment means everyone is clear about FDPA's goals, how those goals are being pursued at the Regional and Local Group level, how those goals play out in specific events and calls-to-action, and how they matter to individuals. With only agreement we have the appearance of alignment and little of the meaningful forward motion we need for our success.
7. **Inspire hope not fear** — Hope is not an emotion it is a path to meaningful action. Fear might get us moving but it is hope that keeps us going. Providing hope means articulating clear goals, offering a way to achieve those goals, and providing the resources to our volunteers to pursue them. What we are seeking to do is nothing short of extraordinary. Changing the Pennsylvania State Constitution is a massive undertaking that requires many pieces to be in place over time and the appropriate actions of many key stakeholders. If we lose sight of the big picture: fair districts, free of gerrymandering, for all citizens, it would be easy to be overtaken by the despair fostered by entrenched interests. Keeping each other focused and energized requires meaningful action every day in the right direction.

Additional Resources

This site has an excellent set of resources and a fantastic bibliography if you want to dive into this topic: <http://www.leadershipchallenge.com/Research-section-Others-Research-Detail/not-for-profitcommunity-based.aspx>