

# EFFECTIVE CHAPTER LEADERSHIP

## THE BASICS

### **Getting to know you. Getting to know all about you.**

Take the time to know your members' names and who they are. You can do this through mnemonics, name games, ice breakers, whatever it takes. The bottom line is that you want your members to know that you are aware of who is in your chapter and that you care enough about them to know their names.

Ice breakers are always a good way to get your members to open up about themselves. One of the funniest, most enjoyable ice breakers I've ever experienced was when members were invited to talk about the scars they had on their body (within good taste, of course!) and how they got them. The members really got a real kick out of it. Don't forget to ask you members why they joined the chapter. That will help you learn about the strengths and talents they can bring to the organization. They'll also see that you are truly interested in them as valued members of the chapter.

A useful tool to help the members get to know each other is to create a photo album. Grab a camera, use any old props that are lying around, and have everyone write on a card or sheet of paper their name and a talent or interest they have that relates directly to the chapter's mission and will lend itself to the group's success. Post the photos on social media with everyone's permission, or even in a blog dedicated to updates and information regarding the organization. This effort can inform the rest of the campus about the organization, generates interest, and creates a record of members to call upon when the time is right.

### **The Same Members Do ALL the Volunteering!**

You know who those members are. They do everything, and they receive pleasure in doing it. Well, that's not such a bad thing after all. Continue to use them. Just be sure to be intentional about which tasks you give them. Focus on their skill sets, interests and abilities. You should then ask them personally to take on a specific task. That personalized approach will help minimize some of the discomfort among the rest of the members who might feel that they've been overlooked by you. Equally important, you don't want to encourage the group to always rely on the same volunteers. That's what's known as "learned helplessness." The more you rely on a select group of people to do things, the more likely the others, who might actually have some interest in volunteering, will feel less than adequate to get the job done. Consequently, they will avoid getting involved. Again, match their interests with the tasks at hand. Do your homework to see what interests they've written down in the photo album you've created for the chapter (see Getting to Know You.) Then call on them personally. Give them a leadership role on that subcommittee. They will rise to the occasion.

### **An Effective Leader Delegates Effectively**

While we're on the subject of learned helplessness, nothing encourages that more than taking on every leadership responsibility yourself. You know your stuff. Otherwise you wouldn't be where you are now. Sure, you could run the show yourself, but what you want is for your chapter to come together in a united front towards the achievement of a common goal. It's not uncommon for leaders to bemoan the fact that no one's

stepping up to the plate but them. You get frustrated because no one's doing anything, so you do it for them! If you do that really well, which you probably will, your members are going to celebrate the night away claiming victory without ever having to lift a finger! Get the picture? All members, including your E-Board, must know that they have a chance to contribute and know their abilities are trusted. Doing everything yourself suggests that you don't. Everyone who is willing to put in hard work deserves to feel a sense of ownership in those achievements. Not to mention, delegating tasks makes you less likely to burn out. That's not good for anyone, especially yourself.

## COMMUNICATION

### What You Say and Do Makes a Big Difference

Nonverbals are as important as verbal communication. If you've set up your meeting room with your E-Board's table apart from and facing members, it can send the unintended message that you are more important than they are. If you're also carrying on conversations with each other and not the members, the message could be misconstrued that you are not interested in them. Body language and physical space speak louder than words, particularly when newer members are developing first impressions. Be aware of how the room is set up for your first meeting. New members should not feel inferior, or that reaching a level of leadership is unattainable. Try these setups:

1. Form a circle with desks or chairs and have leaders spread out around it. This creates a sense of equality in membership and is also most effective in terms of seeing and hearing one another.
2. Lose the chairs entirely. If you can, hold the meeting outside or in an unconventional space, such as an on-campus eatery or in a casual lounge space. Eliminating the traditional meeting setting shows innovation and openness to new ideas.

Keep in mind the impact of verbal communication as well. Just as you like to sit with your friends, it's easy to get off track and reminisce about past experiences. Be sure not to focus on it too much. Each year brings a fresh group of new faces and imaginations. Dwelling on the past limits what you can accomplish now.

And whatever you do, don't open a meeting by saying, "I know you're all busy, so we'll keep this meeting short." Although your intentions may be earnest, what you've just said to them is that Lambda Sigma isn't nearly as important as their other commitments. Once you've said that, it's nearly impossible to reestablish the importance of your chapter and their obligation to it.

The most important thing to remember is that new members want to help. Being aware of how you're communicating and, in turn, welcoming members, will create opportunities for new friendships, as well as growth for individuals and the group as a whole.

## **INCLUSION**

### **I'm Not Feeling That I'm Contributing Anything**

Every member of an organization may feel underused at some point. There are going to be times during the year when little needs to be done. If your chapter is large, you know that it is often difficult for everyone to be doing something. The most important thing to remember is to be transparent. There is nothing wrong with being honest about simply not having much work to do. Don't create busy work. Communicate your expected timeline for future plans and be sure to follow through. When opportunity for action arises, get everyone involved.

Members are present because they are interested, and they want to be involved. Just as delegation is important in productivity, inclusion is essential to positive morale and retention. Be sure to express gratitude for their willingness to help and recognition for hard work and progress, and you will be pleased with how many people stick around.

There are many methods for recognizing and retaining members of your student organization. Every group will find success through different techniques like the "Point System" which is used very successfully by many Lambda Sigma chapters.

Reward systems won't always work, though. If the reward systems feel competitive or exclusionary to members, switch to good, old-fashioned verbal praise or thank-you notes. The most important thing is for leaders to be aware of and grateful for members' hard work.

## **PURPOSE**

### **Remember Why You're Doing What You're Doing**

Try to frame the things you do in terms of purpose. The reason you're doing something can easily get lost in how you're accomplishing it. As part of your first meeting of the year, or in a retreat or similar setting, try an activity like this to remind your members about the purpose underlying the nuts and bolts in getting things done:

Have everyone write themselves a letter about what they are most excited about for the organization. Times like these are when people are most energized and positive. Later in the semester, ask everyone to read the letters. This will remind them how excited they were about what they could accomplish before the hustle and bustle of the school year began to take its toll.

We all have an off day every now and then. Especially for student leaders like you, it's easy to spread yourself thin when you're splitting time between coursework, a social life and co-curricular activities. When you're stressed or aggravated, people notice. It's important to lead by example. Your positive energy keeps up group morale. If you get burned out, your committee might, too. Learn your patterns of productivity, and when you feel yourself losing focus, take a step back to do whatever you need to relax and recharge. Reenergizing means being able to put adequate effort and energy into your commitments.

Don't forget to share with your members the accomplishments of the prior year's chapter as a foundation for, and challenge to them for the coming year. If the chapter was awarded Honor Chapter status last year, you've got a bar to meet or surpass. If they didn't, you know where to set your chapter's sights.

## **OWNERSHIP**

### **Emphasize the Transferability of Acquired Skills and Abilities**

Find a way to communicate to members that they are doing more than just planning events, and that they, too, are benefitting in more ways than they realize. Productivity doesn't include only those tasks that need to get done. Through your chapter's activities your members gain skills they would not necessarily learn in the classroom that can translate to future careers and life in general, such as managing a budget, working through conflict effectively, managing time, and learning to speak publicly.

Spend time with your E-Board making a log of something positive every member has done to contribute to the team. Turn this list of accomplishments into a list of superlatives or awards to be announced to the group. Be as specific as you can about the skills they exhibited. Members will be surprised to learn that someone noticed their hard work, while understanding that they were developing a transferable skill.

## **FINALLY**

Remember to lead by example, communicate effectively and often, include everyone, constantly remind yourself of the group's purpose, and allow every member to join in the sense of ownership. College is a special time with endless opportunities for growth. Take advantage of the chance to engage with an entire group with a similar passion, and constantly challenge yourself to recognize all the positive outcomes that are possible. There is nothing quite like the camaraderie and interpersonal relationships developed during this time of life, so work hard, have fun, and be a strong leader!

# Conducting Effective Meetings

A meeting is not an end in itself, but a vehicle to help you reach a goal. Meetings help a group determine courses of action. If the facilitator starts with a careful plan and finishes with a thorough follow-up, the meeting will run smoothly.

The following are some tips to help you make your meetings successful, productive and fun:

## Purposes of a Meeting

- Give members a chance to discuss and evaluate goals and objectives and develop courses of action
- Keep members updated on current events
- Provide opportunities for the group to communicate and promote group cohesion
- Allow the organization to pull resources together for decision making and plan implementation
- Ensure members are aware of their importance to the group. Ask for opinions and ideas
- Solve problems

## Meeting Preparation

Before you call a meeting, you must ask yourself whether you have to call it at all. Sometimes a group-wide e-mail or a few simple conversations can accomplish the same thing more easily. If you decide you need to have a meeting, then you must plan carefully. This is your most important step as a meeting leader.

Physical Setting - Remember to reserve a room, arrange for any special equipment and have a plan for putting the room back in order after the meeting is finished.

Agenda - Defines the purpose of the meeting. The agenda should not be overly ambitious but should address all items necessary for the meeting. Agendas may include: Approval of Agenda with any additions or retractions, Correction and Approval of Minutes; Announcements; Treasurer's Report; Committee Reports; Unfinished Business; New Business; Special Issues/Concerns; Adjournment. Communicate with your advisor prior to the meeting to see if they have any additions to the agenda.

Distribution - Distribute the agenda and any other pertinent other information (e.g., articles or relevant policies) to members prior to the meeting (perhaps by e-mail) so they can review and be prepared to discuss items. Also, make sure members know where and when the meeting is to take place.

## During the Meeting

- Greet members and make them feel welcome.
- Get people excited about the meeting! Show your enthusiasm. Make it fun and enjoyable.
- As a leader, be a role model. Listen, show interest, appreciation and confidence in members. Respect people's feelings and acknowledge constructive contributions. Head off private conversations that are irrelevant to the topic at hand.
- Be professional and courteous. Allow everyone the chance to contribute.

## **Atmosphere**

- When possible, have light refreshments, even if it's just candy. This helps people relax and breaks the ice.
- Encourage group discussion and feedback on all discussion topics. You will have better decisions and highly motivated members that help shape the organization and the activities if they have participated in the process.
- Keep conversations focused. As gently and tactfully as possible, end discussions when they are unproductive or becoming detrimental.
- Recognize, recognize, recognize - Congratulate members who have done something great in the organization, on campus or elsewhere. Celebrate significant holidays, birthdays, organizational accomplishments, etc. Be creative and have fun with recognizing your members.

## **Agenda**

- Appoint someone to keep minutes of the meeting for future reference.
- Start on time and end on time. Be mindful of other people's time.
- Review the agenda, and then stick to it.
- Accomplishments
- Get done what you need to get done. The average person's attention span is 23 minutes, so it's a challenge.
- Work for consensus.
- Summarize agreements reached and end the meeting on a positive note by asking members to express things they thought were good or successful.
- Adjourn
- Conduct and collect a meeting assessment/evaluation (if you have one).
- Set a date, time and place for the next meeting.
- Collect any sign-in or sign-up sheets.
- Close the meeting with a strong positive statement. Thank the group and acknowledge their efforts.

## **After the Meeting**

- Write up and distribute minutes within the next few days.
- Discuss any problems from the meeting or the assessments/evaluations with other officers and your advisor. Work on solutions and implement them at future meetings.
- Follow-up on delegated tasks and ensure members understand and fulfill their responsibilities. Give recognition and appreciation to excellent and timely progress.
- Put unfinished business on the agenda for the next meeting.

## Checklist to Use When Planning Meetings

### BEFORE THE MEETING

- Reserve meeting room
- Arrange room to accommodate group
- Prepare and send out a meeting agenda
- Contact committee members and advisor for reports
- Prepare handouts/print copies of agendas and previous minutes
- Prepare necessary visual aids
- Reserve audio/visual equipment
- Pick up snacks (if desired)
- Invite guests/Confirm attendance
- Confirm Advisor attendance

### AT THE MEETING

- Greet all members by name
- Sign-in Sheet
- Start the meeting on time
- Introduce guests/new members
- Conduct meeting
- Stick to the agenda
- Who will greet latecomers?
- Keep order
- Hand out materials
- Announce time/place of next meeting
- Other announcements
- Track assignments

### WHEN YOU ARE THE ATTENDEE AT A MEETING

- Confirm location and time the day before the meeting
- Review the agenda and prepare any questions or concerns
- Be on time and prepared
- Stay focused on the discussion

### IF YOU HAVE A SPEAKER

- Be sure to give the speaker directions and parking information
- Select a well-qualified speaker
- Brief speaker ahead of time as to the audience, subject, time limit
- Speaker should provide a biographical outline ahead of time for their introduction

### AFTER THE MEETING

- Clean up
- Collect unused material
- Return equipment
- Follow up on committee assignments.