



Things to keep in mind as an inclusive leader



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Things to Keep in Mind as an Inclusive General Leader

One of the most important things to keep in mind as a general leader, is to keep an open mind. Often times, when we have been a part of something for a long time, we forget what it was like to be unfamiliar with how things work. Sometimes new ideas help meet new needs, and sometimes they just help keep things fresh and fun! Things do not have to change dramatically, but do not be afraid to try something new.

One of the most helpful things you can do for yourself is to be aware. Remember that many new families don't know things that seem like common sense to veteran 4-Hers. You may need to spend some extra time explaining things or you may even have to adjust how you talk at meetings, so you aren't talking over the heads of new members. Put together a packet that highlights club rules, expectations, important dates and guidelines on completing things like record books, and includes a copy of the 4-H Pledge with motions (most new families do not know it, and the first few times it is said can be awkward and intimidating). Get to know members and families, so you know their interests, needs and talents.

Families may have changed over the past few decades, and their needs certainly have. Families and youth have very busy schedules, which often causes scheduling conflicts. Youth may come from single-parent or split-custody households, which can create communication and attendance irregularities. These challenges can definitely be frustrating, but there are certainly steps you can take to work with youth and families to minimize conflicts. Try to be understanding and flexible when scheduling meetings and activities. Some clubs even rotate what days things are held on. Most importantly, communicate with families. If things aren't working well in your club, suggest a club that may better fit their schedules and needs. Make sure information is getting to all of the necessary adults. Also, ask that parents inform you ahead of time if they will be late, absent or need a ride. It is much easier to be understanding if you are informed.

One of the most important things you can do for families is to be proactive. New families have a responsibility to ask if they have questions, but they might not even know what questions they should be asking. Likewise, families are not likely to share that they are struggling financially, but your club can still make considerations that help families out without singling them out. Some ideas to help you proactively address these challenges are on the following pages.

Underlying Principles of Diversity

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All of these human characteristics do not make people mean-spirited or cruel. It just makes us humans. However, they do make dealing with diversity a challenge.

Diversity is an inside job, meaning that diversity is not about “them,” it’s about all of us.

It is about each person coming to terms with his or her attitudes, beliefs, and experiences, learning about others’ attitudes, beliefs, and experiences and gaining comfort with difference.

Diversity goes beyond race and gender. The diversity tent is big enough to include everyone... young and old, homeless and affluent, immigrant and native, white and black, rural and urban, gang member and corporate professional.

No one is the target of blame for current or past inequalities. All human beings have been socialized to act in certain ways, and all of us are at times both offenders and victims of discrimination and stereotypes. The idea is to move forward in creating more opportunities to have positive interactions.

Human beings see the world through their own narrow view. They judge the world by their own familiar yardstick. This is not necessarily bad, but it can be a source of conflict if other ways of viewing the world are not recognized and valued.

Humans resist change. This makes the constant adaptation required by diversity difficult for people already overwhelmed by all of the changes in today’s communities and organizations.

Human beings find comfort and trust in likeness. There is a tendency to seek the company of those most similar to us in a variety of ways...age, gender and ethnicity being just several of many.

It is difficult for people to share power. History shows us that people rarely volunteer to share power. Understanding this last reality helps us understand why there is sometimes a backlash associated with diversity. This is partly because people may believe they are losing power.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Do all of members participate in discussions?

Do they all feel equally able to participate? Do the Principles of Diversity have a role in participation? Are assumptions being made about members' desires to participate?

If not, what might encourage more inclusive participation?

Do members perceive me as:

- Treating them equally?

- Suspending judgment?

- Welcoming and encouraging all points of view?

- Encouraging active participation, serious discussion and honest disclosure of their most important concerns, such as harassment, bullying and discrimination?

- Carefully listening to gain deep understanding?

Why do I believe members perceive me in these ways?



Club Financial Assistance Policy

Consider creating a financial policy or by-law that specifically state's the club's guidelines for providing assistance to members.

Include what assistance is provided for, i.e. camps, club activities and excursions, national trips, donations in times of hardship.

Include how much is provided: a percentage of the cost, dollar amount.

Include how the club decides to provide financial assistance, i.e. everyone doing "x," application for funds, club vote.

Having a clear policy shows that your club is aware of financial hardship and how it can impact a member's ability to fully participate in 4-H opportunities. It also shows that you are actively working to address the obstacle and provide a chance for all members to participate to a greater degree in club, county and national 4-H activities. Not only this, but it is much easier to offer and/or deny assistance if the club has a written policy provision.

New Member Mentors

Several clubs in the county have formal or informal mentorship programs in place for new families. Some families join a club because they know a family already involved in 4-H.

Sometimes their connection to the club may help them adjust to the culture and expectations of the club, but this should not be expected or assumed. There are families that join 4-H that have no prior experience with 4-H and no connections to the club. It can be very difficult for these families to keep track of all of the rules, deadlines, and expectations. It can even be difficult to know what questions to ask! The general leader and club officers definitely do have a role in making sure that new families feel welcomed and informed, but it doesn't have to be their sole responsibility. Try having club "veterans" pair with "new families." Families can pair with families or older members can pair with younger members. It will give veteran members a sense of pride and responsibility and help the new family navigate their 4-H beginnings AND feel welcomed and included.

Being a mentor is not difficult! Have the partners sit together at meetings or lead an ice breaker or activity at a meeting together. Have the mentor help their partner look for projects, work on record books and explain things about your meetings, club and 4-H. Make sure the mentor reminds their partner of upcoming meetings and activities and contacts their partner at least once a month outside of meeting times. The most important thing for a mentor to remember is that YOU have to be proactive. Don't wait for your partner to call you and ask you questions. Take the first step! Those new families who had a mentor in their club reported that they felt more informed and more included. This is an easy step your club can take to welcome in and retain new members.