



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

This article should help campus planners develop a leadership training workshop that will give students of color the skills they need to run campus organizations and thus become more directly involved in campus life.

Introduction

Research has shown that some of the most effective retention strategies for students of color are those that are initiated by students themselves. It is important that students perceive themselves as agents of change rather than as recipients of top down approaches (Maldonado et al. 2005). The importance of racial identity on psychosocial wellness has been identified by research consistently according to Harper and Quayle (2007).

Based on research conducted with high achieving African American students in leadership positions, the authors found that these students were very comfortable with their racial identities even in predominantly white institutions, and were strong advocates of a social justice agenda. Involving minority students in leadership positions has numerous advantages for campuses and providing leadership training is something that every campus should be engaged in. Here are seven topics that this leadership training should cover:

1. How to Determine Your Leadership Style

Leadership styles have been a core concern of organizational theory for a long time. In the past two decades numerous studies have made 'leadership' the focus of analysis in order to determine what kind of leadership is most effective (Judge and Piccolo, 2004). Among other things, emotional intelligence has emerged as a highly popular measure for identifying good leadership potential. The ability to deal well with one's emotions in any situation makes for better leaders. An effective leadership style has been defined as one that can identify and deal with emotions (Palmer et al., 2000). Following are certain kinds of leadership styles that people may exhibit.

Type #1-Competing

This style is usually uncompromising. An individual pursues his or her own concerns at the expense of the other person. He wants it and he's going to get it and damn anyone that gets in his way. One uses whatever power seems appropriate to win one's own position. There may be times on campus where this style is effective? Very few, I would say only if there's a clear act of racism or violation of someone's human rights, obviously drastic measures may need to be taken.



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

Type # 2- Accommodating

This style is usually operating when a person just goes along with the group even though sometimes she doesn't want to. This person is unassertive and appears cooperative. This person sooner or later feels terrible inside. As a student leader, you will need to be aware of others' true feelings and make sure you understand their real opinions before taking action.

Type # 3-Collaborating

This is the style I prefer to use to resolve conflicts because you're trying to reach an agreement that everyone can live with. This style is both assertive and cooperative. It may take the form of exploring a disagreement to learn from each other's insights, concluding to resolve some condition which would otherwise have you competing for resources. There are probably few situations on campus that can't be resolved using this leadership style.

Type #4-Compromising

This is like when you want soft candles and quite music and your date wants to go out dancing. You end up sending out for Chinese food and watching TV in the dorm. You may not have gotten what you asked for, but you can live with the alternative. Compromising falls on a middle ground between competing and accommodating. It usually means splitting the difference, exchanging concessions. We all compromise but we have to learn to do it in a way that we don't sell ourselves—or the people we're supposed to be representing—out.

Type # 5-Avoiding

This person does not address conflict. The avoidance may take the form of diplomatically side stepping an issue, postponing an issue or simply withdrawing from an uncomfortable situation. You know the best way to get rid of a pest. Lend him/her some money. When he sees you coming he'll cross over on the other side of the street. That's what is meant by avoidance; simply being unwilling to face up to the issue. "There's no racism here!" You know, a complete denial of the problem. This is perhaps the hardest style to deal with because you have to spend a lot of time educating people.

Much leadership research today focuses on the competence of a leader, which incorporates numerous aspects such as knowledge, personal traits, skill, etc. and is not restricted to any single component (Turner and Muller, 2005). Furthermore, it also acknowledges that there is not a single leadership style that is effective under all circumstances. Effective leaders understand which style to adopt depending on the circumstances. At the end of the day a



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

good leader is one with a high level of emotional, intellectual, and behavioral maturity so that they can serve as effective role models for their team members.

2. How to Manage Your Time

A simple but effective exercise I ask students to do is create a daily and weekly schedule by hours. For example list what you do from 7am to 8am, and so on, through bed time. Then monitor your schedule for one week to see when and how you're spending the majority of your time. Old habits are hard to break but if you begin to establish new priorities you'll be amazed at the amount of things you'll be able to accomplish.

Nonis and Hudson (2006) conducted a study to find out the effect of the time spent studying on academic performance. The authors report that generally there has been a steady decline in the amount of time students spend studying and an increase in the amount of time spent working. While they did not find an effect of time spent studying outside of classes on GPA by itself, they did find that students with similar ability will have different outcomes in college based on how much time they spent studying outside of class. Time management in an age where students have to be concerned about hiking tuition rates, and high cost of living, is an important skill to master in order to achieve academic success.

Time management continues to be a widely researched topic in organizational theory. There is little agreement on how to define time management but it is generally considered as a process of setting goals and then managing and prioritizing the activities required to accomplish those goals (Claessens et al., 2007). Research has also indicated a positive effect of time management on academic outcomes and on the general stress level, as people feel that they are more in control of a situation (Claessens et al., 2007).

3. How to Recruit and Retain Members in Your Organization

Try a Personal Approach—There's no other technique that's more effective; not free tickets, door prizes, or other similar gimmicks. Nothing beats you or another member of your organization going in person and inviting people to attend your organization's meetings. You have to take some risks but most people respond positively to a personal invitation.

Make your organization stand for something-Be clear on what your purpose is. We sponsor parties or we raise funds for Africa's hungry is much clearer than saying, "We do different things."



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

Establish Incentives-Black students at the University of Kentucky stressed academics by implementing an incentive plan that provided cash awards to students who excelled academically. They created four categories of awards, Greek, freshman, upper class and most improved.

Use Social Media-With almost everyone on an internet social networking site these days, FACEBOOK, MySpace, etc., take advantage of this new medium to communicate with potential members and keep them informed about your organization's activities. Students are bound to be more interested if there is a list of interesting or exciting group activities that the organization is involved in.

Research indicates that membership in student organizations is of primary importance to student retention. According to Museus (2008) it's important to understand the effect of campus sub cultures on student outcomes. In a study conducted on Black and Asian students' membership in ethnic/cultural organizations, the author found that campus subcultures are specifically important in promoting and facilitating the transition to college for students of color (Museus, 2008). Furthermore, membership provides students with a voice and a place to assert their ethnic identity while at the same time learning to adjust to the college culture.

4. How to Hold Productive and Effective Meetings

Teach Parliamentary Procedure

There are some good books and video on the use and practices of parliamentary procedure. Perhaps the most popular book on parliamentary procedure is Robert's Rules of Order. Too many of us get intimidated by parliamentary procedure. It is simply a way to conduct a meeting in an orderly manner. Students don't need to know a complicated version, but rather an adapted version so that their meetings can proceed in an efficient manner. However if student government or similar bodies require a working knowledge of it, then your leadership training should allow students to become more familiar with it.

Use Rational Decision Making

Leadership must direct and lead. It must do more than agitate, it must advocate. It must do more than point out the problems, it must provide solutions. Campus administrators are no longer interested in rhetoric. They've heard it all before and I guess I get sort of disappointed with student groups who make a lot of noise and have no information to back up their claims. I'm reminded of the old Negro civil rights leader response when the white



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

power broker asked, "Now what do you Nigras want?" He snapped back, "Well what y'all got!" We should be past that stage by now. Do your homework. If you're going after a new center on campus or more faculty or more financial aid, do your homework, because just because you say you want it, doesn't guarantee that you'll get it.

Learning how to make rational decisions is a very important part of leadership training; as is learning how to use data and statistics to your advantage. You have more credibility if you can meet with the president and say, although we make up only 3% of the student body we represent 25% of the dropouts, 15% of those who take longer to graduate, etc., and that's why we need more minority counselors and staff. If you acquire solid rational decision making skills you can learn to be very diplomatic.

Show students how to create an agenda

Every meeting your organization conducts should be guided by an agenda. An agenda adds structure to the meeting. It includes all those items that will be dealt with at the meeting. When possible hand it out in advance. Also set aside an agreed upon date so that any member who wants to add an agenda item can do so. For example, if your meetings are held every Wednesday, then students should have until Monday to put an item on the agenda. It's also a good practice to permit agenda items right before the meeting starts as well, but the preference should be to get items in advance.

I would recommend that your agenda be simplified into two categories. I think you'll find everything that your group discusses can fit under these two categories:

1. Items for Decision and
2. Items of Information

Any item that requires discussion, involves money, and/or requires membership approval would go under category one, while announcements, reports, and similar items would go under category two.

Teach students how to get and maintain feedback from organization members

The technique that is most commonly used to get feedback from members is simply to ask people what they think. Sometimes this technique may not be the most appropriate. What usually happens is that a few people will talk and dominate the conversation. You get a few opinions but you may not know what others in the group really feel. Just because someone is silent doesn't mean they necessarily agree with what's being said. I would recommend



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

that from time to time you try another technique that allows you to find out what others in the group are thinking and to get everyone's opinion.

Try placing these signs in the four corners of the room. (Definitely right, Definitely wrong, Possibly right and Possibly wrong). Then read a statement and have students move behind the sign that more closely matches their true feelings. These statements are just for illustrative purposes only.

Statement # 1

The reason more minorities don't get involved in campus activities is because they feel alienated here.

Statement # 2

The best way to relate to students of color is to treat them the same, like all other students.

Statement # 3

ALANA student organizations should make an effort to involve white students in their activities.

As you can see this technique allows the leader to understand where his/her members are coming from. It also changes his/her role to that of a facilitator. Everyone's opinion can be ascertained. This technique doesn't take long; it prevents a few people from dominating the meeting and it involves everyone in the discussion.

Another technique to get people's feedback is to have them finish a sentence. It goes like this. People should know that Black women face special problems on predominantly white campuses; problems like....

Take Minutes

Minutes are the records of your meeting. They are the official notice of what was done or said at the meeting. Great care should be given to their preparation. Future students should be able to use them to get a historical perspective of the organization as well as learn about the intricacies of the group.

Write them so that anyone who wasn't there could read them and understand clearly what took place. Make sure the minutes follow your agenda. Send them out to people you think might be interested in your group and to people whom you're trying to attract as members.



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

Do this on a regular basis. You'll find this one little practice of sending out minutes will increase your membership and support for your organization greatly in the course of a year.

Finally, research has shown a relationship between productivity and the environment that is occupied by people. People in featureless environments do not perform at par with people in scenic and soothing settings (Young and Cheang, 2009). Things such as lighting in the room, temperature, color of the walls, furniture setting, etc. are all shown to have an effect on the group dynamic (Young and Cheang, 2009). It is therefore a good idea to make sure that meetings are held in a brightly lit area, where there is a lot of natural light. When it is nice outside, it might actually be more conducive to have a meeting out in the open as opposed to somewhere in a drab setting.

5. How to Set Organizational Goals

There are three types of goals that I encourage student groups to establish:

1) educational, 2) political, and 3) social/cultural. These will give purpose and meaning to your organization, establish direction, and increase your overall effectiveness on campus.

- Educational goals

Example: Establish academic incentives that reward students who make the Dean's list.

- Political goals

Example: Get at least one person from your organization elected to student government.

- Social/Cultural goals

Example: Plan cultural activities for the academic year.

According to Locke and Latham (2002) goals have an influence on performance in four ways. The first way is to focus and direct the attention towards a specific task; secondly, goals have an energizing effect on people since they are working towards achieving something tangible which seems more doable as opposed to an abstract idea; thirdly, goals affect the persistence with which people do any task; and finally by setting goals people draw on the repertoire of knowledge about any given task in order to accomplish it. Setting clear goals gives people a set of tangible tasks that they need to accomplish and it increases motivation among group members.



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

6. How to Handle Conflicts Within Your Organization

Perhaps the area that causes the greatest conflict in many organizations is how decisions are made. What turns people off the most is for some members to treat the organization like a private club. Everyone's input is important and should be valued. Everyone's vote is equal. Of course you should have an agreement in your bylaws whereby the majority vote rules. Allow for ample discussion before the vote is taken. Make it clear that after all the arguments have been made pro or con about an issue, and the vote has been cast, that everyone is expected to support the majority's decision. If people are allowed to participate then it's unfair for them to bad mouth the group, just because they didn't win the vote. However, if they are not allowed to participate, then the group is fair game for bad mouthing.

Student leaders must also recognize and remember that responses to conflict are very much a function of cultural training. People from different cultural backgrounds might respond differently to conflicts and therefore it places a burden on the mediator to respond to and tackle intra group conflicts with cultural sensitivity. Lack of cultural sensitivity has been shown to lead to misunderstanding in organizations.

7. How to Evaluate Your Organization

I'm going to share with you a process that you can use to improve your organization. It's called a quality circle. The concept was popularized by the Japanese. It involves group participation. It works like this: You divide your student organization into small working groups, no more than five people per group. Every group discusses the same problem using the same procedures.

You can use "Quality Circles," to not only evaluate your organization but to address almost any issue that your organization has to deal with. It is not a process of fault-finding, but rather a well rounded analysis of what works and what needs improvement.

Quality Circle—The Process

Develop a list of problems/issues you want to resolve or discuss. For example:

- What problems need to be resolved before the purpose of the organization can be accepted by all of the membership?



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

- What problems need to be resolved before communication can be noticeably improved between and among members of the organization?
- What problems need to be resolved before the organization can conduct effective meetings and establish clear priorities?

Instructions

Divide the participants into working groups comprised of 3-5 members, to address the problems listed above or ones similar. Have each group select a spokesperson and someone to record the groups' decisions. When discussing the problems identified above, each quality circle is to follow the same format as follows: Brainstorm answers to each of the problems by:

- a. Not judging ideas
- b. Requiring each person to add input
- c. Welcoming a variety in thinking/responses
- d. Energizing the group with creative thoughts

It works like this. Each person in the quality circle is asked to identify a problem. If someone doesn't have an answer when it's his/her turn to respond, he should say "I pass." An answer is sought from each person until everyone says I pass. During the brainstorming there are no interruptions for discussion, clarity or debate.

After all the ideas have been recorded, the circle's spokesperson calls for a discussion of any of the problems listed. This is the time to seek clarification on any of the problems listed. Next combine into one, any ideas that are the same.

(Combine only if they are the same).

1) Next vote on the ideas to get a rank order (priority). The highest votes get ranked first and so on. Rank only the top 5 to 7 problems.

2) As you rank them, keep track on a separate sheet of paper the number of people who voted for a particular idea. (See example below)



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

Problem	How many members feel this way	Total
A. Chairperson not supported	XXXXX	5
B. Poor communication among members	XXXX	4
C. Poor attendance at meetings	XXXXX	5
D. Meetings poorly planned	XXX	3
E. Feel my input is ignored	XXXX	4

3) After the top 5-7 problems have been identified, the next step is to determine cause and effect. For example you can discuss why members feel the chairperson is not being supported. You will need to brainstorm again and list what each person feels is the cause of the problem being discussed. This time only rank the top three causes. See the following example:

Example
Chairperson not supported=belittles membership
 Effect Cause

Chairperson not supported=Committee roles unclear
 Effect Cause

Chairperson not supported=lazy members
 Effect Cause

4) Next your quality circle is to recommend one solution to resolve the causes identified above. Brainstorm your decisions and then vote on only one solution for each cause.

5) After you have completed the process above, bring all the groups together for their report. All group reports should follow the same format:

- Mention the problems your quality circle has identified in rank order. (the top five to seven)
- List and explain the causes and effects of the problems you've identified.
- Next list your quality circle's solutions to resolving the problems.

Someone should record all of the circle's reports. An analysis should be prepared of all the reports. What normally happens is that groups find similarities in their reports which make the analysis easy to accomplish.



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

All the problems should be grouped as well as the causes and effects. The entire group should then vote on the top 3-5 problems, their related causes and effects, and finally vote on the solution for each of the 3-5 problems.

Now the organization has some specific solutions to work on for the academic year, the entire membership was involved in reaching consensus, everyone's input was solicited and members can claim ownership of the solutions. Although this tends to be a timely drawn out process, the benefits can be tremendous.

Although quality circles first appeared in an industrial setting, they can be extended to any organizational setting in order to solve problems. In a study conducted on students of Trakya University School of Medicine in the 2000-01 academic year, it was demonstrated that quality circles proved beneficial for students in numerous ways (Akturk et al., 2002). Some of the benefits cited by the authors were greater motivation among the participants to learn and greater involvement in issues pertaining to the quality of education. These findings indicate that quality circles can be highly beneficial by promoting an interest among group members in their organizational goals, and foster enhanced participation and innovative ideas by creating an environment that allows everyone to participate.

Conclusion

Today's student leaders will be tomorrow's societal leaders. Leadership skills can be learned by effective training and encouragement. Leadership training should form a core focus of educational training, since one purpose of higher education is to create leaders for the society (Freeman and Goldin, 2008). While leadership can be learned both through a formal process and informal methods, there is a need for campuses to provide structured opportunities to acquire leadership skills particularly because racial and ethnic minorities might find it harder to come by leadership opportunities in informal settings.

References

Akturk, Z., Dagdeviren, N., Sahin, E. M., & Ozer, C. (2002). Use of quality circles among first year medical students and impact on student satisfaction. *Swiss Med Weekly*, (132), 143-147.

Claessens, B. J. C., van Eerde, W., & Rutte, C. G. (2007). A review of the time management literature. *Personnel Review*, 36(2), 255-276.



Seven Topics Your Minority Student Leadership Training Should Cover

by Dr. Charles Taylor

Freeman, J. P., & Goldin, A. (2008). The increasing importance of student leadership development programs in higher education. *NASPA Net Results Critical Issues for Student Affairs Practitioners*, 219. Retrieved from <http://www.naspa.org/pubs/mags/nr/default.cfm>

Harper, S. R., & Quaye, S. J. (2007). Student organizations as venues for black identity expression and development among African American male student leaders. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(2), 127-144.

Judge, T. A. & Piccolo, R. F. (2004). Transformational and transactional leadership: a meta analytic test of their relative validity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(5), 755-768.

Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2002). Building a practically useful theory of goal setting and task motivation. *American Psychologist*, 57(9), 705-717.

Maldonado, D. E., Rhoads, R., & Buenavista, T. L. (2005). The student-initiated retention project: theoretical contributions and the role of self-empowerment. *American Educational Research Journal*, 42(4), 605-638.

Museus, S. D. (2008). The role of ethnic student organizations in fostering African American and Asian American students' cultural adjustment and membership at predominantly white Institutions. *Journal of College Student Development*, 49(6), 568-586.

Nonis, S. A., & Hudson, G. I. (2006). Academic performance of college students: influence of time spent studying and working. *Journal of Education for business*, 81(3), 151-159.

Palmer, B., Walls, M., Burgess, Z., & Stough, C. (2000). Emotional intelligence and effective leadership. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 22(1), 5-10.

Turner, J. R., & Muller, R. (2005). The project manager's leadership style as a success factor on projects: a literature review. *Project Management Journal*, 36(1), 49-61.

Young, J. and Cheang, M. (2009). Staging for success: Preparing environments for productive meetings, trainings and workshops. University of Hawaii at Manoa, College of Tropical Agricultural and Human Resources. Retrieved from <http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/ET-9.pdf>