

Now That You're a Leader in 2010— Let's Talk About Building Your Team

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Some people strive for leadership positions; others simply find that circumstances have helped them to arrive at that point, whether or not it was planned. It is important to note that being a leader within an organization, such as your GWRRA Chapter, does not necessarily mean that you are *the* leader with *the* title. It just means that your position, your experiences, or your personality has led others to look to you for direction.

A leader's challenge is to bring members of an organization together to work as a team. That collective energy of your Members is what brings out the success in an organization and helps your organization with its continued growth. The leadership team of an organization needs to give direction and to offer organizational management to the group. In simplest terms, leadership is doing the right things, and management is doing things the *right way*. A good leader is able to offer direction while allowing the members of his or her team to participate in developing a mission so

that everyone has ownership of what is going on within the group.

Many years ago—on my first day as a career firefighter—the Fire Chief took me down to the apparatus floor. He pushed the button and the door went up. He pushed the button again and the door went down. Then he told me, “Always remember that the doors have gone up and down long before you and I were here, and they will go up and down long after we are gone.” I always found that statement very profound. Within any organization, our motorcycle Chapters included, there are people who were there molding the organization before we arrived, and people who will come after. Even the appointed leader of the group needs to realize that the group's success is not from one person. It is also important to realize that, while in a position of leadership, we take very serious the need for each of us to prepare our replacement. The Members and leaders that are to follow us need mentors and teachers to make them the

next generation of good leaders to continue the mission of our organization.

Whether we are leaders in an organization because of our vocation, our avocation, or our passion for a cause or a group, a good leader keeps his feet grounded in the realization that being a leader does not mean you are the Omni-knowing individual with every answer and all the energy. It is also unfortunate to see Members of an organization fade away after his or her time as a formal leader draws to a close. So, throughout our time in the formal leadership position, one of the keys to success is to keep focused on the mission of the organization and to place our efforts in team building. That way, the transition from being a leader to being a member is not a culture shock when we are no longer the person holding the gavel. When that time occurs, we have prepared ourselves to pass the leadership roles and responsibilities on to the next prepared and mentored individual. We are prepared because we have been working throughout our

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term to help prepare individuals who are ready to step up and lend their talents to the organization.

Afterward, we have the opportunity to become part of the membership's foundation, bringing experience and knowledge with us for the successful continuation of the organization. Our value does *not* diminish just because we are no longer the formal leader; it is equally as important as it was, just in a different role. Now, we are assisting in the growth of new leaders from within the ranks of the membership.

That cycle of shared knowledge should be continuous. The formal leadership team manages and leads the organization with the participation of the Members. The formal and informal leadership teams help mentor future group leaders. With that in mind, why not offer Members projects to work on, rides to lead, Chapter plans to develop in work groups, and more? This "preparation of the next generation of leaders" should be ingrained in the culture. If so, it will help make your organization stronger—both today and in the future.

A good leader always remembers that success is "us" and "we." Leadership in an organization is a stewardship that is entrusted to you. The direction that the group is headed is not yours alone to determine. It should be supported with ideas and participation from the group as a whole. This participation helps keep good morale within the group. As the leader, it may sometimes appear that it's easier to make decisions on your own, without soliciting input. That "I'll do it myself" mentality is a pitfall, but it is avoidable. While

the "one man show" may be quicker and sometimes less complicated, it will begin to alienate Members. And if that "one man show" continues, there will be a time when the leader realizes, "This is a lot of work...why isn't anyone helping?" The answer is simple—you didn't ask, or you didn't trust your Members to share the reins with you.

To help avoid heading down the path away from team participation, keep three concepts in mind. These three words help tie together a team building axiom: Communication – Motivation – Delegation.

Communicate with your Members. What are we doing? Who has some ideas? What are some different ways in which we can accomplish our goals? A leader should never hear, "I didn't know we were doing that." In this day of high speed communications, most people have email access and other electronic capabilities like texting. Use these media to share information regularly and routinely. Tell them what's going on with the organization and the Members. Think of it as a weekly mini-newsletter to share your Chapter's events, news, and Member information. But also, don't forget those Members who don't have the electronic bug. Print out hard copies of the correspondence for those Members and drop them by their homes or send them via the U.S. Mail.



Motivate your Members. Ask for their participation. Acknowledge your

appreciation for their being part of the group. Thank them for their efforts, their membership, their knowledge, and their support of the organization. Recognize their efforts to the rest of the group—and to the rest of the world! If a group of Members has been working on a project, take pictures; share the information in your newsletter, the local newspaper, your web page. When was the last time you wrote a handwritten thank-you note and dropped it in the mail? Any time your Members do something special for the group, they should receive a personal note from you. That is something that will be remembered the next time you ask them to take on a responsibility for the group.

Delegate leadership responsibilities. By decentralizing the duties of the leaders, there are more people who become comfortable in the tasks. If only a few Members assume the leadership roles and no one is offered the opportunity to learn, then the future leaders will have to learn from the "school of hard knocks" rather than by the mentoring of a current leader. Delegation builds trust. Delegation builds confidence. Delegation builds respect. And delegation builds leaders.



If we can develop a group of leaders that is competent in their roles and offers input and participation for the success of the organization, then the formal leaders do not have to feel overwhelmed in their roles. In every organization, there is a band of Members that is ready, willing, enthusiastic, and eager to offer their support and participation in the leadership and management of the organization.

The difference between organizations that are successful and ones that are not is that those that continue to grow and prosper are the ones that allow Members to use their skills to help in the organization's leadership.

As Henry Ford said, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success." So let's all work together for the success of our Chapters, Districts, Regions, and GWRRA!

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