

Inclusive Leadership

Being an inclusive leader means opening yourself to a variety of people with different strengths and backgrounds. It also means taking a step back and realizing that no one “type” best fits the leadership mold.

Take Stock of Talent

As an inclusive leader, it’s very important that you first review the “raw material” at your disposal. The outgoing, over-involved group members are usually easy to spot. However, have you figured out how the more introverted folks may contribute? Or what about the enthusiastic transfer student who was never involved during his community college days but who you appointed to a position on a hunch?



Taking stock of the talent surrounding you will open up a variety of leadership doors. So, try doing a talent inventory of your group members! There are a number of ways to go about this:

- **Create a Database.** First list your members by name and then choose common words to describe leadership “possibilities” they may possess. For instance, you can use words such as “behind the scenes” or “great group encourager.” List the top 3 leadership possibilities you have seen within each of them, based on observations made during training, the selection process, and beyond. This database will allow you to perform a search when you’re looking for a group of leaders who may best fit a certain task.
- **Make At-a-Glance Cards.** Simply write each member’s name atop an index card and list his leadership traits. When you’re looking for an experienced theater manager during an event, flipping through these cards will help you see who has done this type of thing before. Or, if you need someone to help you implement a recognition program, look at the cards for education majors or for students known to write thank yous regularly. They may be just the people you’re looking for!

- **Institute Peer Feedback Forms.** It could be very helpful to get a variety of perspectives regarding each group member’s leadership traits. During your next meeting, ask members to fill in a simple Peer Feedback Form for each of their fellow group members. This honest feedback doesn’t need to be extensive, yet it may tip you off regarding who has leadership potential in different areas. The peer perspective can be invaluable!

Take Chances

Recognizing talent is one thing. Appreciating it and putting it to use is another. Inclusive leadership requires a true commitment to using all of your group members well rather than just those who are known to you. And this can be tough since many of us have that human tendency to turn to the tried and true folks when things get hectic.

Therefore, you’re going to need to take some chances! By purposefully soliciting the perspectives of quieter students and delegating to emerging leaders rather than those with expertise, you are sending the message that *all* of your members have leadership potential.

Take Time

The differences among your group members are probably very pronounced. The extroverts in your group may jump in regularly whenever discussion ensues while the introverts may make their points more selectively. Some strong female leaders may volunteer for everything, leaving some male leaders to feel unsure about their place in the process. Being aware of differences and putting this awareness into action is a hallmark of an inclusive leader.

The next time you have your members together, be conscious of how the discussion goes. And then allow yourself some quiet, reflective time when it is over to honestly assess your leadership style. For instance, did you allow the dominant people in your group to take over? Were there times you called upon someone who was a known group member rather than the new members because you wanted a quicker response? Do you hesitate to ask the opinion of your member who stutters because others get impatient as he’s trying to formulate his sentences? Mind you, none of these things make you a bad person! It’s just very important