

What is needed for youth to develop into leaders?

An environment where:

- Youth feel free to share their opinions and ideas on leadership
- All ideas are ok and valued
- Personal leadership growth is more important than “performance”
- Individual youth differences are welcomed
- Each youth is responsible for own actions
- Few “shoulds” exist
- Clear and flexible rules or boundaries on discussing/learning about leadership exist
- Learning about leadership is fun and enjoyable
- Ways to deal with and work through stress are tailored
- Leadership is seen as a shared journey between the youth and adult mentors
- Youth know they are valued and important
- Adult mentors advocate for youth and the possibilities of their leadership accomplishments
- Personal growth is celebrated, even if mistakes were made along the way
- Energy and excitement about being leaders exist
- Time, energy and resources have been dedicated to develop their leadership skills



References

- Boyd, B. L. (2001). Bringing leadership experiences to inner-city youth. *Journal of Extension*, 39(4).
- Des Marais, J., Yang, Y., & Farzanehkia, F. (2000). Service-learning leadership development for youths. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81(9), 678 - 680
- Fiscus, L. (2003). Youth as equal partners in decision making. *The Education Digest*, 68(7), 58-62.
- MacNeil, C. (2000). *Youth-Adult Collaborative Leadership: Strategies for Fostering Ability and Authority*. Michigan: UMI Dissertation Services.
- Zeldin, S., & Camino, L. (1999). Youth leadership: Linking research and program theory to exemplary practice. *Research and practice: Completing the circle. New Designs for Youth Development*, 15(1), 10-15
- MacGregor, M. (2000). *Designing Student Leadership Programs: Transforming the Leadership Potential of Youth*. Youthleadership.com, 2nd edition

For additional information or to request a copy of this Fact Sheet, please contact:

Eric Killian
Area Extension Specialist
University of Nevada Cooperative Extension
8050 S. Maryland Pkwy., Suite 100, Las Vegas, NV 89123
(702) 222-3130
killiane@unce.unr.edu

The University of Nevada, Reno is an equal opportunity/affirmative action employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, creed, national origin, veteran status, physical or mental disability and sexual orientation in any program or activity it operates. The University of Nevada employs only United States citizens and aliens lawfully authorized to work in the United States.



University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension

Fact Sheet-06-89

Youth Leadership: Challenge and Opportunity

Eric Killian, M.S.
Area Extension Specialist
Children, Youth and Families

Overview

For many years, leadership has been a product and necessity of business and management training. Most leadership training programs apply to the business world or corporate environments. There are many recognizable names associated with the field of business leadership and theory. Stephen Covey, Max DePree, Jack Welch, Peter Drucker, Donald Trump, just to name a few. These individuals are either teaching leadership or



demonstrating leadership through running a large corporation. Many of the theories and practices they teach can easily apply to community-based and education leadership programs. They provide a starting point for developing comprehensive and effective youth leadership programs. Youth leadership is a fast growing interest area in the field of leadership development.





Youth Leadership

With regards to youth leadership, expectations often have been higher than the training provided for youth to succeed in their leadership roles. Youth are often put into leadership roles through popular vote, teacher/staff selection or parental urging. Many youth who are in leadership roles have little in-depth understanding of the significance of their role or the personal development that comes with experience.

“With regards to youth leadership, expectations of youth leaders often have been higher than the training provided for youth to succeed in their leadership roles.”

Many community youth development programs and other youth leadership opportunities often lack consistent and deliberate connection between the leadership experience and the application of these skills to the real world. This often leads to a stagnant or superficial experience that does not promote empowerment and leadership ability. Often youth leaders begin to perceive their leadership experiences as fun and games without connecting them in a meaningful way to their daily life.



Comprehensive leadership education for youth is not something that is generally built into most curricula or training programs. Although many activities of youth contribute to positive leadership development, these

For example, a youth is elected to be president of their grade level in school. The youth begins to recognize the power and status of this new position without realizing how unprepared or capable they are to carry out the roles of the position. Their adult advisor may not have time or resources to provide adequate training to carry out the position but will often expect the youth leader to demonstrate consistent and balanced leadership abilities.



The Challenge

First, adults must recognize that youth need assistance in developing and fine-tuning their leadership skills. Second, adults must recognize that youth leadership development is different than adult (business or corporate) theories of development and third, adults must overcome viewing leadership as qualities which one “either has or doesn’t” and treating youth as such. Every youth has the potential to be a leader. Adults need to understand what their roles and abilities are to help every youth develop their leadership

potential. The challenge for adults is how to dedicate the proper time, energy and resources to develop leadership skills in youth.

What is generally missing for youth leaders?

- Youth leaders are given few opportunities to “make mistakes” without having it held against them or without adults taking over their roles and responsibilities
- Appropriate contemporary social role models
- A sense of being valued for their present experiences rather than wanting them to “grow up”
- Consistent leadership standards from parents, teachers and other close adults
- Leadership development efforts, which reflect how their leadership skills apply in daily life and in the future
- Adult mentors or advisors who are comfortable with empowering youth and allowing youth to take on significant responsibilities and leadership roles
- Consistent, frequent opportunities to take on leadership roles within communities or organizations most influential to youth (e.g. schools, church, youth groups, community centers, etc.)
- Flexibility to learn from spontaneous classroom or group discussion--many efforts are “over-programmed” and “controlled”