LEADERSHIP
SKILLS
for SUCCESS
This book is written for you, the 4-H Youth Leader. Its purpose is to provide you with practical and effective leadership ideas and tools that you can use with your 4-H club. As a 4-H leader, you'll be helping to guide the development of your club members. Don't be worried though if you've never been a youth leader before; all of us use leadership skills informally in our everyday lives.

You can be a successful 4-H leader. All you need is time, practice, and a desire to help youth acquire new skills and develop self-confidence.

How children learn

Planning fun, exciting, and educational projects for children can be difficult. It helps to have an understanding of how children learn so you know what types of activities will stimulate them. Research shows that people learn best by doing. The 4-H motto is "Learn by Doing." Active involvement of the learner is the key, as the following information shows.

Learners retain:

- 10 percent of what they read
- 20 percent of what they hear
- 30 percent of what they see
- 50 percent of what they see and hear
- 70 percent of what they say as they talk
- 90 percent of what they say as they do something

Senses used in learning:

- Seeing ...................... 83 percent
- Hearing .................... 11 percent
- Touching .................... 35 percent
- Smelling .................... 1.5 percent
- Tasting ..................... 1 percent

The message is clear. Youth learn by doing. Challenge yourself to help them learn as effectively as possible. Involve your 4-H'ers in every meeting, from planning, decisionmaking, and project development to evaluation. Active involvement will give your group ownership and a feeling of belonging: "our 4-H club," not "your 4-H club."

You've probably become a 4-H leader because you enjoy working with children and you enjoy the activity you'll be teaching. As a leader, you'll be in a key position to help your club members feel good about themselves as they learn new skills. By giving your club members lots of encouragement and support as you teach them the mechanics of knitting, backpacking, or gardening, you'll be helping them to develop their personalities as well as their skills.

Methods of instruction and ability to recall:

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<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>3 hrs. later</th>
<th>3 days later</th>
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<tr>
<td>Telling (when used alone)</td>
<td>70 percent</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Showing (when used alone)</td>
<td>72 percent</td>
<td>20 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>When a blend of telling and showing is used</td>
<td>85 percent</td>
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What do children need?

Recognition. Everyone seeks status in a group. We need to know that others accept and approve of our work. By giving your 4-H'ers recognition, you'll improve their self-respect and give them feelings of worth.

Provide specific praise:

"Mary, you did an excellent job showing that goat. All that extra time spent practicing really paid off!"

"That omelette looks and tastes great. Nice job, Jim."

"Pat, I'd like you to stay and help me plan the next meeting."

Recognize your 4-H'ers in front of their peers and parents whenever possible. Make them feel important. Encourage them to support and recognize each other. They'll soon find out that by giving, they receive.

Affection. All of us need to know that others care and will give us understanding and support. Our friends act as a stabilizing force when things go wrong and share in our satisfaction when things go well.

Listen to your 4-H members. Watch their verbal and nonverbal actions. Ask questions. Listen to their problems and successes. Let them know that you care about them as individuals.

Power. We all need to master new things and do something well. Your 4-H'ers will earn power by accomplishing what they set out to do. Accomplishment contributes to their feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance.

Help your members select projects they can successfully complete. Some may need to start with projects that can be finished in a day or two so they'll earn instant power and success.

Involve your members in planning, leading, and evaluating group meetings. Provide opportunities for them to make presentations, show their projects, and receive public recognition. Encourage them to enter their projects in 4-H shows and county fairs.

New experiences. Most youngsters crave adventure, excitement, and challenges. New activities may lead to life-long hobbies.

Help your 4-H'ers select new, exciting projects and experiences. Experiment with new ideas and techniques. Help the group plan adventurous field trips. Involve them in interesting community activities.

Security. Knowing we belong is basic to our sense of stability. Love from parents and siblings provides a haven of protection and security for children. Unfortunately, many families are not stable. You can serve an important role in a child's life by providing some of the security that may be missing at home. All of us must feel confident that we belong somewhere to someone; it's important to our emotional security. If your club members feel secure, they'll face activities and projects with optimism and confidence.

To give your 4-H'ers a sense of security about their club, plan regular meetings. Keep in touch with all group members. Call if someone doesn't show up for a meeting. By doing this, you'll let them know that they're all special and important to the group.

What is leadership?

While there are many definitions of leadership, the one that follows is particularly useful in working with young people:

Leadership is the ability to influence people to cooperate in reaching a common goal which they find desirable. The ideal leader is a catalyst who provides an opportunity for everyone to be at their best. The creative leader is the one who dreams, pioneers, invents, acts, and then leads.

The ideal youth leader grows constantly, through learning, developing, and working at self-improvement. It's a continual process that never stops; good leaders constantly search for new information to improve their leadership skills.

Leadership is a performing art which requires preparation, practice, and evaluation to perfect. All leaders fall at times. The successful leader rises from each fall and learns from the experience.
The way a group functions depends on the leader's qualities and style, the makeup of the group, and the type of activity the group is involved in. The three basic leadership styles are autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Very few leaders practice one style only. Most switch from one style to another, depending on the group and the situation.

Autocratic leadership centers around one person. An autocratic leader takes complete responsibility and exercises full authority over the group. Through domination and discipline, the autocratic leader commands compliance from members. The leader makes all rules and expects members to follow them without question.

Laissez-faire leadership occurs when the leader gives complete freedom to the group for the solution of problems. The leader provides resources and materials to do the job, and participates only when asked. The aim is to give club members free rein in making decisions and reaching goals.

Democratic leadership is the most common leadership style. It's also the most difficult style to develop and the most effective with young people. A democratic leader helps youth develop the tools to make
decisions. The leader encourages interaction, which builds a sense of security and self-confidence. A democratic leader is people-oriented, helping others achieve their potential.

To be an effective group leader, you should use the democratic style of leadership whenever possible. It's a leadership style that's never perfected. You'll need patience, practice, and more practice. Democracy demands a leader who is open-minded, humanistic, and flexible. Assess the group situation and use a combination of autocratic, laissez-faire, and democratic styles of leadership as appropriate.

Your attitude will be extremely important in determining the success of your club. Even though society is bombarded with negative input, you must be an eternal optimist and a positive thinker. You'll be able to conquer many problems by remaining positive and seeing opportunity in crisis, not crisis in opportunity. Be a catalyst; motivate and help your 4-H'ers to perform to their fullest potential.

One way you can encourage your club members to feel good about themselves and their goals is to use the self-fulfilling prophecy (a positive attitude brings about positive results). The attitudes that your 4-H'ers bring to a situation play a major role in determining its outcome. Help your members develop positive self-fulfilling prophecies by making them aware of what they say to themselves, helping them to develop skills and confidence, and acting as a positive role model.

### Autocratic leadership:
- is time-efficient
- is effective when transmitting a lot of information in a short time
- is a good way to start with a group before working into other styles
- is excellent in situations where physical danger is possible
- is excellent when a naive group must complete many specific tasks
- is effective with large groups
- is often boring to the group
- can make the leader appear too aggressive
- reduces the active involvement of group members
- is not the most effective way for children to learn
- can create bad feelings, revolt, and the dissolution of the group.

### Laissez-faire leadership:
- depends on club members to make decisions
- requires minimal control and direction from the leader
- requires minimal leader preparation time
- lays complete responsibility for decisions and actions with the group
- is time-consuming
- provides a greater chance for indecision and groping within the group
- can make it difficult to reach consensus
- can result in safety problems

### Democratic leadership:
- increases opportunities for leadership experiences for all members
- involves the group in decision-making processes and learning
- results in a better product because of combined group and leader input
- develops a sense of contribution and power in club members
- provides a greater chance for individual success in developing skills and personal development
- is the most difficult style to use
- can be time-consuming because decision-making may be slow
Many people have difficulty accepting themselves. Self-acceptance involves becoming familiar with yourself—both positive and negative qualities—and accepting yourself as you are at the moment. Once you've accepted yourself, you can develop a sense of worth, like, or esteem for that self. Self-acceptance does not, however, necessarily mean liking. We generally don't like the negative, though changeable features in ourselves, but unless we acknowledge these negatives, we can't work to change them.

People often belittle themselves as a matter of habit. They say, "Oh, it was nothing!" in a reflex action to turn aside a compliment. They forget their accomplishments and keep saying that what they've done or worked for is "nothing." Soon they begin to believe this. But, if you don't think your accomplishments are worth anything—who will?

Anytime someone gives you feedback about yourself, you have the ability to accept and/or reject it. Your 4-H'ers are especially vulnerable to feedback—give them plenty of (deserved) compliments so they'll learn to accept them with pleasure.

However you feel about yourself—good, bad, indifferent, positive, negative—that's self-image. Your 4-H'ers are still molding their self-images. They'll need all the encouragement and positive feedback you can give to help them feel good about themselves.

You can change a child's self-image either positively or negatively. Research indicates that learning increases as self-image improves.

Try to imagine each child's self image as a stack of poker chips. Some young people will start the learning game, as it were, with a lot of poker chips; others with very few. Those with the greatest number of chips have a great advantage.

The youth with a hundred chips can sustain 20 losses of five chips each. The young person with only 15 chips can sustain only three losses of five chips each and will approach new activities with caution.

However, youngsters who've had a lot of success in the past will risk success again; if they should fail, their self-images can "afford" it. A young person with a history of failure doesn't want to risk failure again; a poor self-image cannot afford it. Similar to someone living on a limited income, the insecure child shops cautiously and looks for bargains.
To help your 4-H’ers find bargains, make each learning step small enough so that each youth is asked to risk only one chip at a time instead of five. More importantly, help your members to build up their supply of poker chips so that they’ll have a surplus of chips to risk. Viewed this way, self-image building can be seen as making sure every young person has enough chips to stay in the game.

Self-acceptance starts with you, the leader. Through your self-confidence and positive self-image, you act as a role model for club members. Your actions are your most valuable teaching tools. Help your 4-H’ers to focus on strengths and successes—building on strengths and viewing weaknesses as opportunities for growth.

To be an effective youth leader, you should be constantly aware of two main factors—task and people—that exist in every youth group. Task is the educational purpose of the group, such as woodworking, baseball, camping, or newspaper production. People are the interpersonal communications and relationships that occur in the group.

As a leader, your challenge is to maintain a balance between the task and people functions of your group. To do this, help each member develop as a person, help the group work together cooperatively, and help each member develop skills through informal education. At times, you may have to sacrifice the educational task to help personal development, as the following situation shows:

You’re supervising Nathan’s soccer team on the playing field as the players run through passing drills. Although Nathan is trying very hard to pass the ball properly to his teammates, he is failing while the other boys and girls are doing very well. The team is teasing Nathan because of his inability to pass the ball well.

You can help Nathan salvage his self-image by changing the drill from passing (which Nathan does very poorly) to goal kicking (which Nathan does very well). Then, follow through by giving Nathan individual attention on his passing skills after other team members have gone home.

Your most important leadership role is to help boys and girls develop to their fullest potential. The boys and girls of today will be the leaders of tomorrow and the interpersonal skills that they learn will be used over and over throughout their lives as leaders, employees, citizens, and parents.

Preparation prior to a meeting, especially the first meeting of a youth group, is essential. You should know the background and interests of the group and plan fun, stimulating activities to meet those interests. Always overplan for a group meeting. Know the members, the activities to be led, and the facility where the activities will be conducted. Key points to remember in preparation are:

- Group size. Keep the group small. A good ratio is one leader to 10 members. Make sure all members receive individual attention. If you need more help, ask parents or older 4-H’ers.
- Safety. Have a definite purpose and plan for each activity. Locate the nearest phone, fire exit, and hospital. Check the room for potential barriers and safety problems.
- Planning. Plan 150 percent for each meeting. If you want a two-hour meeting, plan for a three-hour meeting. The extra activities will be needed if some activities are not well received or if some activities do not take as long as expected.
- Atmosphere. The atmosphere of the meeting is extremely important. Group meetings should be informal and nonthreatening. A great way to start a meeting after school is to provide snacks. Snacks help children feel comfortable and are an excellent cure for the munchies that most of them have after school. You can also use these refreshment periods to introduce good foods and basic points about nutrition.
enthusiasm

Keep the following points in mind when leading activities. They make up the framework of all group meetings.

Attention. Always get the group's attention before starting an activity. Activities can easily flop if the leader fails to get the group's attention at the start. Good methods of getting the group's attention include:

- Having the group sit on the floor while you stand
- Using an imaginative device to get the group's attention. For example, if it's a woodworking activity, begin working on a project. If it's basketball, demonstrate dribbling.
- Elevating yourself on a chair
- Having the group raise their right hand as you raise yours
- Using a loud noise-making device, such as a horn
- Using creative musical sound

Come to the meeting dressed in an unusual manner that sets the mood for the activity:

- Golf (carry your clubs)
- Mechanical Science (start playing a space game on the computer)
- Art (bring an easel and paints; wear a beret)
- Dance (come in full costume; begin with a skit)

When you have the group's attention, start the activity quickly. Delay may prove deadly.

Formation. It's extremely important to arrange the group in a formation which gives you good verbal and nonverbal contact. With a small group, a circle is an excellent way to be heard and to maintain eye contact.

Take a position as part of the circle. Avoid standing in the middle of the circle as one half of the group faces your back. For larger groups, use a semi-circle. Avoid lining the group up against a wall or in a straight line. For younger members, make a game of getting in the correct formation.

Interest. Because one of the basic needs of youth is adventure, you should conduct activities so that there's an air of expectancy. Motivate your group through enthusiasm and surprise. Ask appropriate questions about what is going to happen. Suspense and mystery are keys to building interest.

Remember to:

- Have a high energy level
- Maintain good eye contact with the group (to read nonverbal behavior)
- Use interesting gimmicks such as puppets, charades, and other discussion initiators
- Challenge the group's abilities, and stimulate their imagination

Avoid the following behaviors:

- Apologizing for an activity. A
leader should never apologize for an activity either directly or indirectly.

- Naming the activity. This takes away from the activity's suspense and could open it up to the inevitable comment, "I don't want to do that."
- Being overenthusiastic and talking down to the group

One of the best ways to insure high interest and relevant activities is to involve the group in activity decisions. With your guidance, club members can decide what to do themselves.

**Direction.** Give clear, to-the-point directions for all activities. Use examples and demonstrate; one example may save ten minutes of explanations and frustration.

When doing complex activities, break down rules into simple steps. Ask questions to make sure that the group understands each step. Sometimes it's possible to start the activity before all the rules are explained and explain them as the activity progresses. Be aware of the child who is hesitant to become involved; perhaps he or she doesn't understand and is afraid to ask questions.

Things to avoid in giving directions include:
- Explaining an activity from the middle of a circle

**KISSR**

Keep
It
Short
Simple
and Relevant

The following situations illustrate how you can give clear directions:

You want to introduce a folk dance but you're worried about teaching its many complex steps. Instead of confusing your club members by running through several steps at once, isolate each step and practice it until everyone feels comfortable moving on to the next one. This helps build confidence and ensures the group will understand your directions for each step.

You want to teach your club how to make puppets but you think some of your 4-H'ers will think it's too difficult. To give your 4-H'ers confidence, run through the different stages of puppet-making, using visual examples of each stage. This will help them visualize how to complete the puppets and will reduce their fear of failure.

- Using too many words. This will kill an activity faster than any other technique
- Giving too short an explanation with no follow-up

Stress safety when giving directions. Always consider the group, the activity, and the facility in planning and giving directions for an activity. One of your responsibilities is to make sure that the group understands all of the directions related to safety.

**Discipline.** Discipline should focus and channel, rather than restrict, energies. Practice the following techniques in applying discipline to your 4-H club.

- Know individuals. Know the name, background, interests, and needs of each of your club members. Often, discipline problems result from earlier crises at school and at home. If you know the background, interests, and needs of each individual, you can handle problems effectively before they become disruptive to the group.
- Set guidelines. The single most important technique you can use in maintaining discipline is to set guidelines for behavior. Involve your group in setting these guidelines. After you develop guidelines, be consistent in enforcing them with firmness and objectivity. Watch for the natural leadership in the group to assist in reinforcing guidelines. Remember to be autocratic when appropriate and democratic whenever possible.
- Testing. As a group leader, you'll undergo a testing period which is the most apparent during the first few meetings. Youth test guidelines to see which ones will be consistently upheld. You can create an atmosphere of mutual respect by explaining the reasons behind guidelines and having the group help enforce them.

Demand responsibility for all actions and call your members when they begin testing. Often times, minor behavior problems are used to gain attention and you should ignore them. When there is a major problem, try to address that problem directly with the child and not in front of the group. This way a child will receive a minimum of group attention, and you can find out the reason behind the behavior problem. Remember to be a positive role model at all times.
preparation

• Humor. Humor, not ridicule, can be used in handling behavior problems. Humor is an effective tension relief you can use when tensions are building between group members.

• Ownership. You can eliminate some behavior problems by giving your members responsibilities. This involves them and creates a group ownership feeling within the club. No child wants to be part of a sinking ship. If given proper authority and ownership, he or she will not sink that ship.

• Nonverbal sensitivity. You can stop potential behavior problems before they disrupt the group by being a careful observer of nonverbal communication within the group. See which children are involved and which are not. Actively involve the youth who are not participating before they start causing problems.

• Group size. The size of the group is very important in dealing with behavior problems. Keep the group small enough for each member to have individual attention and for you to feel comfortable controlling the group. Discipline problems can often be attributed to a group that is too large. An ideal size group for a new leader is six to eight children.

You can eliminate 90 percent of discipline problems in your 4-H group by providing activities that satisfy the interests and needs of the members. Give group members a positive experience and they will help you to discipline a member who acts up.

Positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement is the single most effective tool in motivating young people. It is not easy to practice or maintain. You must have a good self-image and confidence in order to be positive in group meetings. Positive reinforcement needs to be practiced and shared equally among all group members.

It is difficult for most leaders to be good positive reinforcers. Society is often very negative; therefore negative statements are often much easier to make than positive ones. To overcome this, focus on strengths and successes (even small ones). Help your 4-H’ers accept themselves so that they can accept others in the group on positive terms.

Other factors that will make your 4-H meetings successful and rewarding include:

• A good beginning. Have the activity well-planned and practiced. The activity should attract the attention and interest of the group. The group should be stimulated and eager to begin.

• Flow. Try to match individual skills with group activities. When activities and skills match, meetings flow well and learning is high. At times, it’s impossible to match all of the individual skills within the group to a single activity. In that case, assist the club member whose skills are not matching the activity. Be sensitive to the youngster who is struggling; make sure that he or she can succeed at some activity in the near future.

• Flexibility. Remain flexible. No activity, no matter how well it’s led, will work well with every group. Be ready to drop an unsuccessful or poorly received activity and move on to another one.
- Change of activities at peak interest. If you switch activities at peak interest, the members will be more stimulated. Remember to kill an activity before it dies.
- Voice projection. Be aware of differences in voice projection. Some people have naturally soft voices. If your voice is soft, amplify it by standing up and having the group sit down or move the group into a tight formation so all can hear.
- Group sensitivity. You should always be aware of the group, balancing the task at hand with the process of personal development in each member. Sometimes leaders try to give too much information and lose sight of how the group feels about the activity, how individuals are progressing, and how the relationships within the group are developing.
- Consistency. Be consistent with the group. Treat everyone equally. Some youth are easy to work with; others are more difficult. Be aware of your feelings towards your club members and try to equalize them as much as possible through your actions.
- Immediate gratification. Be aware that young people, especially 9-to-11 year-olds, need to have some sense of immediate success in order to feel good about themselves. Beginning activities in any group should be short, with success just around the corner. For example, try making a cutting board that can be completed in one session or plant sprouting seeds that yield results quickly.
- Novelty, diversity, craziness. Use new and creative approaches to leadership activities. Plan new experiences for your 4-H'ers. Encourage challenge and adventure. Always highlight important points by making their presentation creative and novel. Encourage your 4-H'ers to plan meetings that are highlighted by novelty and diversity.
- Appeal to all senses. Most activities appeal to the sense of sight. Try to plan activities that involve all of the senses (hearing, sight, touch, smell, and feel). Assess your activities and balance them so all of the senses are involved whenever possible.
- Safety. This is one of the most important parts of any 4-H club. Nothing will destroy a youth group faster than a serious accident. You can avoid accidents by practicing risk management.
- Be aware of the group’s abilities and interests, dangerous aspects of the activity, and the potentially dangerous problems with a facility. Safety means not taking risks that endanger the group. Proper safety takes careful planning. Know the location of the nearest phone, first aid kit, fire exit, and hospital. Keep a list of parents’ phone numbers handy.
- Balance of activities. Mix passive and active activities to keep group energy high. Separate activities that have similar goals and purposes and alternate them to provide variety.
- A good ending. Always end on a positive note. Create interest and anticipation for the next meeting by giving the group “a sneak preview” of future activities and involving them in planning the meeting.
- Evaluation. Always evaluate an activity and a group meeting after it’s completed. Involve the group in the evaluation process. Ask members of the group what they liked least and best. Review the positive and negative comments and make notes to improve future meetings.
- Shared leadership opportunities. Train your 4-H’ers in basic leadership skills. They should have opportunities to be leaders. Share the topics discussed in this book with your 4-H’ers. A goal of every youth group is to have the members teach each other different things. Your job is to be the orchestra conductor—pulling all the elements together into a semblance of harmony.

What do children expect from a leader?
- To be easy to approach, friendly, and agreeable
- To be strict, but not unbearably so
- To understand their behavior patterns and be sympathetic
- To participate enthusiastically in an activity
- To be fair and impartial (we all have our partialities, but when leading, they should not be evident)
- To be cooperative, rather than competitive
- To work efficiently and effectively
- To be tactful, gentle, and kind
- To have a sense of humor
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