

FACT SHEET: LEADERSHIP & SELF-ADVOCACY

Q. What is Leadership?

A. Leadership is when a person learns the skills they need to run a group or be a part of a board or committee. It is also speaking up for yourself and helping each other learn how you can work together as a TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More). It is learning new things and sharing what you have learned with others. Leaders also know how to listen to people when they are talking and know when a person might need support. Leadership sometimes is letting other people take over a discussion and have a chance to practice being a leader while they are learning new skills. Being a leader is being a part of the community and knowing what is going on and getting involved. Leadership means a lot of different things to a lot of people so it is important for people to figure out what is best for them. Being a leader is not always easy but it should be fun.

Q. What Are Qualities Of A Good Leader?

A.:

- Assertiveness.
- Self-determination.
- Decision-making skills.
- Being a good listener.
- A desire to share and believe in the common vision of the group.
- A willingness to take the time to learn leadership skills.
- Ability to include all members and not exclude anyone.

Q. How To Learn Leadership Skills?

A. There are many ways a person can learn leadership skills. They can take a class, learn from other people in the group, read materials from other people written about leadership, go to workshops on leadership or to conferences. Another approach is "supported leadership". That is an option that encourages the person to select a partner from the group to help them. The partner then offers tutorials or pre-meetings on issues to be discussed during the meetings, and provides the opportunity to practice parliamentary procedures and other formal and informal rules. People with disabilities can then both assist and serve as role models for other people "in training" or

"considering" leadership roles. Another alternative is to establish co-leadership positions where two people assume the responsibilities normally done by a single position. This helps lessen the fear of a new role or responsibility.

Q. What Kinds Of Supports Might A Self-Advocate Need?

A. There are many kinds of supports a person might need. What is most important is to let that person pick his/her own supports and to figure out what will work best for him/her. Some people may need help before a meeting, for example, going over the written materials so they will understand the information to be discussed at the meeting. Others may need help during the meeting so that they will understand what is happening throughout the meeting.

It is important for people to know the date and time of the meeting so they can make an informed decision if they will need to take time off from work. Many groups who hold meetings during a person's work schedule pay an honorarium for the time they will not be at work. People need to know directions on how to get to the meeting and if they will need any money once they get there. It is sometimes necessary for people to receive money in advance because it is hard for them to wait a long time to be reimbursed. If this is not an option, some people may not be able to afford to be a leader. Before the person joins the group it is often helpful to explain how the meetings are run or to invite them to come to a meeting before they decide to join the group. Most important is for all members to feel welcome.

Q. How Decision-Makers Might Assist Self-Advocates During Meetings?

A. Members of decision making groups need to listen to each other and really try to understand each other's points of view. It is important to treat people with respect and dignity even if it is necessary to wait a long time for the person to answer a question. Patience might be required of all members for each other. Materials that are passed out should be written so that all members can understand it, like not using big or hard to understand words. Frequently asking people if they understand what is being discussed or asking them if they have any questions is helpful. The expectations of a new member should be the same whether they have a disability or not. Ask members at the end of each meeting how they felt the meeting went and if they need any other kinds of supports.

Q. What Is AAMR's Policy Statement On Leadership?

A. AAMR joins people with developmental disabilities in supporting the full expression of citizens with disabilities to speak for themselves in making choices for themselves about their lives. This includes decisions about living arrangements, work, personal relationships and the funding of needed services and supports.

Q. What Are Some Resources To Learn About Leadership?

A.: Bales, J. (1992). Do you really know what is best for me? OR how to help your board of directors become whole: a guide for including people with disabilities on boards. Illinois: Illinois Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Dybwad, G & Bersani, H. (1995)

New Voices: self-advocacy by persons with disabilities. Boston: Brookline Books.

Gobel, S. Not Another Board Meeting! guides to building inclusive decision-making groups. Oregon: Oregon Developmental Disabilities Planning Council.

Hoffman, M. (1992) Leadership Plus. Oklahoma: Oklahoma Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Levitz, M., Nelis, T., & Peterson, M, (1996). Community Advocacy Press: People speaking out for what they believe. Leadership: Vol. 1, Issue 4. Cincinnati: Capabilities Unlimited, Inc., 2495 Erie Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45208

Pederson, E.L. & Chaikin, M.L. (1993) Voices That Count. Making It Happen: a presenter's guide. Rehabilitation Research and Training Center Consortium on Aging and Developmental Disabilities, Cincinnati, OH,

Taking Place: Standing Up and Speaking Out About Living in Our Communities. (1994). Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered. Tulsa, ARC, 1601 South Main Street, Suite 300, Tulsa OK 74119 Voice: (918) 592-8272 Fax: (918) 582-6328

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