

Exemplary Youth Leadership Series: Inspire a Shared Vision¹

Megan Stein²

Introduction

This publication series is designed to outline strategies and experiences to expose youth to and engage them with leadership concepts. In this publication, students will learn aspects of the second practice of exemplary leaders: inspiring a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). Two low-cost, quick activities are included for implementation with youth and adults working with youth. These activities are best suited for students ages 10–18. However, modifications are included for each of the activities to allow for different group sizes, ages, and abilities of the youth involved.

Inspire a Shared Vision

Leaders can shape the trajectory of their organizations. The skills of creating a unique vision and helping others see exciting possibilities are the key components of inspiring a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

The first commitment of this practice encourages leaders to "envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities" (Kouzes & Posner, 2018, p. 14). The first piece of mastering this concept is the ability to imagine the possibilities. When asked to describe how one has created a vision, it is often challenging. The essence of creating a vision typically includes a feeling, sense, or gut reaction. The abstract nature of imagination and effective brainstorming is best developed through practice. One must reflect on the past, understand the present, and anticipate the future. Beyond the idea stage, leaders must have the ability to help followers buy into a common purpose.

Leaders must also "enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations" (Kouzes & Posner, 2018, p. 14). To put a vision into action, leaders must engage the minds and hearts of their followers. Followers are not willing to change their status quo for ordinary goals. Leaders must show passion for the vision to ensure that followers are willing, ready, and excited to take part in enacting the new vision. Speaking about the meaning and purpose of a vision with passion and imagery creates a vivid image of what the future can look like.

Activities

Innovation Challenge

Students will invent new uses for a common household object.

Materials: Random object (whatever is available, e.g., umbrella, tissue box, or food storage container)

Group Size: Divide a large group into sections of five or six

Instructions:

1. Show students the object.
2. Give students 5 minutes to brainstorm as many alternate uses for the object as possible (e.g., an umbrella can be turned upside down and used as a bowl).
3. Have students count how many uses they came up with and share the number with the large group.
4. Each team will identify, but not share, their best alternate use.

Wrap-up Questions:

1. Team with the most uses: talk us through how your brainstorming process went.
2. For everyone: was it easy or challenging to brainstorm new uses?
3. Was it hard to look past the object for what it was originally made for?
4. We just took part in the first step of creating a vision—imagining the possibilities. Take the next two minutes to brainstorm fundraisers (community service events, etc.) our team can host this year.*

*Modification—If students are working alone, they could use this opportunity to brainstorm potential career options or goals for themselves or their organization.

Share the Vision

Students will practice speaking in a manner with vivid imagery.

Materials: Random objects used in the Innovation Challenge.

Group Size: Same groups from brainstorming exercise.

Instructions:

1. Students will come up with a 30-second infomercial-type pitch to convince the other groups that the alternate use they chose in the previous activity is the best.
2. Give students ten minutes to prepare their pitch.
3. Encourage students to sell their projects in the most effective way they can imagine.
4. Each group presents their pitch.
5. Conduct a vote to find the favorite pitch.

Wrap-up Questions:

1. Let's categorize the pitches we saw. What techniques were used among the pitches (e.g., were they funny, informative, emotional, etc.)?
2. What made the winning pitch the most successful?

3. Does it matter how we present an idea? Why or why not?
4. What are some strategies that are effective when we are trying to persuade others?
5. As leaders, how can we implement these strategies when we are trying to get our followers on board to achieve our vision or goals?

Summary

Students will engage with the second practice of exemplary leaders—inspiring a shared vision. These two activities help students illustrate the idea that leaders must be the visionaries of their organization. Once the vision is created, it is their role to get others on board to move the group forward.

Reference

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2018). *The student leadership challenge: Five practices for becoming an exemplary leader*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.

¹ This document is AEC685, one of a series of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication, UF/IFAS Extension. Original publication date January 2020. Visit the Ask IFAS website at <https://ask.ifas.ufl.edu/> for the currently supported version of this publication.

² Megan S. Cantrell, lecturer, M.S., leadership education, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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