Leading Beyond Self Crucial to Becoming a Great Volunteer Leader

By Jeff Davis

I'm sure you've heard the expression, "You must learn to lead yourself before you can lead others." As a volunteer student leader, it's crucial that you know how to motivate, encourage and take care of yourself if you are to be effective as a leader. But is it possible to lead others beyond the point you have reached yourself?
There is much wisdom in the first statement. Leadership is a quality that comes from within. Think about the professionals and volunteers with whom you work on a daily basis, especially those you admire as great leaders. They might be faculty members, mentors or advisors. What are the characteristics that make them powerful leaders? They are likely to be charismatic, trustworthy, dynamic, energetic and passionate. These are all great qualities, but when you look deep within, it's their ability to lead themselves that makes them great leaders of others.

So, as a volunteer student leader, you must identify and develop those qualities within that make you a great leader. The further you lead yourself, the farther you can lead others. But can you lead beyond the point you have reached in your own leadership development?

Invest in your peers and future leaders, helping them develop into great leaders and encouraging them to exceed your own accomplishments.

**Further vs. Farther**

To answer that question, let's start with the word further.

Often we confuse this term with farther. When we use farther, we are referring to linear distance. For instance, the sun is farther from the earth than the moon. If we were to apply farther to a leadership model, it would probably look like a scout leader taking a group along a trail. The group follows behind the leader, going only the distance the leader is willing to take them. Thus, it is a very linear, distance-related, model of leadership.

But the word further refers to a greater degree or extent in concept or thought. If we apply further to leadership, we are not talking about a distance metaphor, but rather the idea of “going beyond.” Can you lead others beyond, or further, than you yourself have come? Can you get others to dig deeper than you yourself have dug? Can you get others to inspire others more than you yourself have inspired? Can you get your fellow students to go beyond the point you have reached?

Of course you can! In fact, this is the primary characteristic separating good leaders from truly great leaders. Consider leaders you have known or admired. Those who stand out as great are likely to be remembered for the leaders they produce. They invest themselves in their followers, inspiring them to become better than they are.

lead others beyond, or further, than you yourself have come?
get others to dig deeper than you yourself have dug?
get others to inspire others more than you yourself have inspired?
get your fellow students to go beyond the point you have reached?

**Wise Investment**

Always remember that you can, indeed, lead beyond yourself. In fact, if you want to become a great leader on campus, you must lead beyond yourself. In your volunteer leadership role, your focus should not be on yourself, but on how you can help others be as good a leader, if not better, than you are. You do not always have to lead a project, hold the microphone or be in the spotlight. And recognition of your leadership does not have to be immediate. But if you really want to be considered a great student leader, invest in your peers and future leaders, helping them develop into great leaders and encouraging them to exceed your own accomplishments.

**About the Author**

Jeff Davis served as coordinator of New Media and Programs at Texas A&M University-Commerce before recently leaving to pursue a career in corporate training. In NACA, he served as Convention services coordinator for the 2005 NACA National Convention and as Closing Night event coordinator for the 2003 NACA National Convention. For NACA Central, he served as security coordinator for the 2002 regional conference and as CAMP coordinator for the 2004 regional conference. He has presented educational sessions on publicity on the national and regional levels. He holds a bachelor’s degree in radio-TV and counseling and a master’s degree in higher education administration, both from Texas A&M University-Commerce.