

From Volunteer To Visionary: Leading A Thriving Chapter



Most dedicated volunteers work tirelessly for their chapters, ready to jump in and take on what needs to be done. They're the chapter backbone, ensuring that the chapter stays on track and grows, events run smoothly and members stay engaged. But when it comes to stepping into leadership roles, these same people hesitate. They see the potential of the chapter, but fears like added responsibility, resistance to change and concerns about upsetting the status quo hold them back.



Here's the truth: leadership is not about doing everything yourself. It's about strategic thinking, empowerment and creating a sustainable future for the chapter. Making the transition from being a doer to becoming a visionary leader is not only possible — it's essential for the long-term success of association chapters.

If you have volunteers who are nervous about taking a leadership role, the following three areas can help them see chapter leadership differently and set them and the chapter up for success.

4 ways to make being a chapter leader an enticing role

1. **Delegating is key.** One of the biggest misconceptions about leadership is that the only way for things to get done is if the leader does everything themselves. Strong leaders know how to



delegate effectively and motivate others. The role of a leader isn't to take on every task but to empower others to take ownership and contribute in meaningful ways. Leaders become effective delegators by:

- Trusting the other board members and volunteers. Give them chances to step up and take on responsibilities, both they know how to execute and new tasks. This may even involve letting the person fail and helping them learn how to make it go as it should the next time.
- Providing clear direction and support. Set expectations and offer guidance, but don't micromanage. Be sure the other volunteers know they can come to you with questions.
- Encouraging autonomy and leadership growth. Empowering others not only lightens the load of the leader, but it also strengthens the entire chapter, by creating another group who is skilled and will be ready to move into future leadership roles.

By shifting from a doer to strategic thinker mindset, people can realize that leadership is much more about inspiring and guiding rather than executing every single detail.

2. Think in terms of the big picture, not about the individual tasks. Volunteers often hesitate to move into board roles because they worry they'll end up with an overwhelming amount of work. However, leadership isn't about managing every detail — it's about setting the vision. Leaders see the big picture more clearly by:

- Focusing on the mission and goals. Instead of getting caught up in the minute tasks, leaders need to think about where the chapter is headed and how to get there.
- Encouraging innovation. Just because something has always been done a certain way doesn't mean it's the best way. Great leaders aren't afraid to ask questions and introduce new ideas.
- Leading the charge with strategy. A successful leader sets priorities and ensures that board members and volunteers are aligned with the chapter's bigger objectives.

When your volunteers begin thinking like leaders and not workers, their influence extends far beyond individual tasks. Their vision shapes the future of the chapter.

3. Cultivate stronger relationships. Being an effective leader isn't about having all the answers — it's about engaging with others, building trust and knowing where to go to figure out or get an answer. A thriving chapter depends on collaboration and open communication. Leaders strengthen their relationship-building by:



- Building trust with board members and volunteers. When people feel valued and heard, they're more likely to stay engaged and contribute at a higher level.
- Engaging with members and soliciting feedback. Understanding what members need and want from the chapter ensures that leadership decisions are aligned with the broader community.
- Creating an environment of inclusivity. It isn't just about making executive decisions; it's about bringing people together and fostering a sense of ownership among all members.

By prioritizing relationships, leaders create a culture where people feel connected, inspired and motivated to contribute their best.

4. Create a legacy and build for the future. Good leaders set up future leaders for success. Many volunteers hesitate to take on leadership roles because they worry that once they say yes, they'll be stuck in that role forever. A strong leader plans for succession and ensures the chapter remains sustainable beyond their tenure. Leaders build for the future by:

- Documenting progress and key learnings. Keeping clear records of what works and what wasn't successful makes the transition smoother for future leaders.
- Creating a succession plan. Encourage promising volunteers to get involved early, so when the time comes, they're ready to step up.
- Building a culture of sustainability and growth. Leadership shouldn't be a revolving door of overwhelmed individuals; it should be a pipeline of engaged, motivated members ready to lead.

When leadership is viewed as an opportunity to leave a lasting impact rather than just another responsibility, it becomes an exciting and rewarding endeavor, not a chore.

Leadership Is more attainable than most think

Stepping into a leadership role doesn't have to be intimidating. Even as the chapter president or a board member, that role isn't about doing all the work — it's about guiding strategy, fostering relationships and setting the vision.

If your members hesitate to take on a leadership position because they're afraid of the commitment or the workload, remind them that:



- Leadership isn't about taking on more work; it's about empowering others to share the load.
- A board position doesn't have to be all-consuming; it can be as manageable and rewarding as you make it.
- The chapter needs forward-thinking individuals who can help shape its future.

If your members see your leadership as an overwhelming, never-ending job, maybe it's time to reframe that vision. Instead of a burden, turn the view of your chapter leadership into one of opportunity — to innovate, inspire and leave a lasting impact. The transition from volunteer to visionary will become about leading smarter and not working harder.

