

Understanding Leadership: Build a Better Leader

Facilitator Guide

Purpose: The purpose of this exercise is to teach students to evaluate the leadership needs of a particular situation and shape their own leadership to those needs.

Method: Students will evaluate three very different situations and develop a list of leadership characteristics that would be priorities in each situation. They will complete the project individually, and then discuss it in small groups.

As facilitator, it is your responsibility to introduce the exercise, to supervise during the individual work period and the small-group discussion period, and to lead a concluding discussion.

Goal: The goal of this exercise is to prepare students to identify appropriate leaders and/or to become appropriate leaders in the varied circumstances of their own lives.

Timeline

Individual reading and response: Five (5) minutes

Small group discussion and response: Twenty (20) minutes

Large group discussion of leadership: Five (5) minutes

Introduction (in your own words): You will never meet a perfect leader. You will never be a perfect leader. When choosing a leader, you will always have imperfect choices. Leadership—the leader you are, the leader you choose, the leader you train—will always involve setting priorities and determining which areas are most important in a given situation.

This exercise is composed of three scenarios. In each scenario, you are given a set of facts and then asked to select the leadership qualities you believe are most important for a leader in that situation, a person in that role. You will do this first individually, because leaders need to buckle down and do hard work themselves, not coast on their teammates.

After everyone is finished—about five minutes, probably—I will ask you to move to the second part of this exercise, where as a group, you will discuss each scenario and reach an agreement on the top eight leadership characteristics for each situation. As a group, you will need to select a leader to guide you in the selection process; the leader should, in turn, select someone else to record your group answers.

As you select your group answers, you should consider also the process that you use to come to your conclusions. Should you vote on each characteristic? Ask everyone to rank the characteristics and then compare rankings, like voting for a sports award? Should you compare each person's individual list and see which characteristics were most popular? Should you discuss, weigh, balance, and see consensus? Regardless of how you go about it, leadership is not just the topic of your discussion; it is also the way in which you discuss and work together.

Discussion

After five minutes, announce that small-group discussion may begin.

After twenty minutes of small-group discussion, give group representatives an opportunity to stand up and tell the larger group about the leadership characteristics they selected for each scenario and the process they used in their selection of those characteristics.

Conclusion (in your own words): As we discussed at the beginning, leaders are never perfect. No leader will have every quality that he or she should. When you vote in an election—for student body president or for the president of the United States—you are selecting from imperfect people who are more likely to make super-mistakes than be superheroes. And when you are that leader—in your family, in your school, or (someday) as president—if will be important for you to determine what a leader should look like in the situation you find yourself and what your priorities should be. Ask yourself: what type of leader am I today? And what type of leader will I need to be tomorrow?