

Leadership and Teaching Techniques

Mary Jo Williams, State 4-H Youth Development Specialist

Missouri 4-H Center for Youth Development

Dear Leader:

A wise teacher once observed, “If a child isn’t interested, you can’t teach him. If he is interested, you can’t keep him from learning.” Most 4-H leaders don’t think of themselves as teachers, but they are. Through volunteer leaders, 4-H members learn skills in their projects and benefit from individual and group experiences that help develop lifelong characteristics such as positive self-esteem, sound decision-making, effective communication, responsibility and cooperation. 4-H leaders can be especially successful teachers because they establish a personal relationship.

The child-centered approach

4-H uses a child-centered approach to learning. This means the program focuses on the needs and interests of the child. For example, when 4-H club members select their projects, they are more likely to choose projects that are of interest to them. They also set individual goals and make plans to reach those goals based on what they want to accomplish in the project.

You, as the 4-H leader, play an important role for members. It’s through your guidance, understanding, encouragement, and recognition that they will learn how to set a goal and reach it. You can help each member set realistic goals. You can provide needed encouragement when



In this letter you'll find:

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- Hundreds of ways to say “very good”
- Helping people learn
- Developmentally speaking
- Leadership styles and how they affect your club
- Techniques of a good leader
- Teaching methods and tools
- What to do about kids who misbehave
- Evaluating your meetings and activities

the going is rough. Best of all, you see the proud smile that says, “I did it,” when you recognize them for a job well done.

Hundreds of ways to say “very good”

People thrive in a climate of love, so give 4-H members plenty of praise, warmth and signs of caring. They need smiles and approval.

Look for good behavior that you want to strengthen, then say “very good.” Did you know that there are at least 100 ways to say “very good?” Here are some suggestions.

- Now that’s what I call a fine job!
- FANTASTIC!
- I knew you could do it.
- Keep it up!
- GREAT!
- Keep working on it; you’re getting better.
- Good for you!
- WOW!
- You are very good at that!
- Nice going!
- GREAT JOB!

Helping people learn

As a leader, you build on the natural curiosity that young people have. Since learning takes place through experience, your role is to provide opportunities for hands-on learning. Together, you and your 4-H members will have fun learning.

Each age group has unique characteristics and different developmental needs. Development level will have an impact on how each member learns. It is important for leaders to keep these differences in mind when working with various age groups. Of course, not all children develop at the same rate, but being aware of the general characteristics of youth at various stages will help you be more effective. You may want to pick up MU Extension guide LG782, *Ages and Stages of 4-H Youth Development*,

that briefly points out the levels of development children pass through and the corresponding considerations for 4-H leaders.

Leadership styles and how they affect your club

The atmosphere during your club's meetings and activities will be greatly influenced by your leadership style. There are several different leadership styles, and no one style is the right one in all situations. Each style can be effective depending upon the circumstances. A good leader will use different leadership styles when appropriate.

Autocratic style

When using the autocratic style of leadership, the leader tends to make decisions for the club without the members' involvement or input. The leader has complete authority and responsibility for the club. This style can be good during the beginning of a new club or with a club of young members who aren't ready to make all the decisions. It can be very efficient. Things will get done, but it can be boring, and it isn't an effective way for members to learn decision-making or independence.

Laissez-faire style

In the *laissez-faire* leadership style, the leader provides little guidance for the group and gives the members complete freedom and responsibility. Good as well as bad decisions, plans and programs are permitted to develop. Members can learn a lot from their decisions, but it can be difficult for the group to reach a consensus. Strong clubs may get stronger under this type of leadership; weak clubs may fall apart.

Democratic style

Using the democratic leadership style, the leader encourages all the members to participate in planning and helps members develop the skills necessary to make decisions. This style is generally the most effective.

It encourages interaction and helps the members learn self-confidence, leadership and decision-making.

Techniques of a good leader

A good leader has many techniques that help establish group rapport. These techniques can facilitate the group's activities and learning; others can hinder it. Your goal as a new leader is to develop techniques, such as those listed under the facilitating category below, that will help your club members grow in self-confidence and learn leadership skills and independence. You can also check if any of the behaviors listed under the not-so-facilitating category are having a negative effect in your club.

Facilitating techniques

- Guides group through an experience
- Uses different leadership styles when appropriate
- Keeps action going
- Is flexible
- Encourages participation by all
- Is a good listener
- Cares

Not-so-facilitating behaviors

- Takes over leadership and directs others
- Makes decisions for the group
- Ignores suggestions
- Creates a tense environment
- Fails to prepare
- Evades issues
- Gives solutions rather than letting group members come to their own
- Is concerned with results more than people

Teaching methods and tools

4-H encourages a learn-by-doing approach to teaching. The greatest degree of learning occurs in actual experience. The closer to real life a learning activity or experience is, the more effective it will be. Sometimes, though, it isn't practical to learn from the actual experience. In that

case, you want your members to have as meaningful an experience as possible.

Using a variety of methods to teach your members will help keep them interested and enthused about the activities. Each method will also have an effect on how well they learn. The level of involvement is important in how much is learned. Activities that are more like real life experiences and that involve members in listening, seeing and doing usually bring about the most learning. Thus, when possible, use simulations, games, demonstrations or models. Try to avoid telling or asking members to read as primary teaching models.

What to do about kids who misbehave

Sometimes kids will misbehave. An important distinction to make is that the young person is okay, the behavior is not. There are usually reasons why kids misbehave. With patience, a perceptive leader may discover the reasons behind the behavior problem and help solve it.

Some reasons why kids misbehave

They want attention.

If they disrupt a meeting, they get not only your attention but attention from other members as well. Try giving the disruptive members some responsibilities during the meeting. This way, they get needed attention in a positive manner.

They are uncomfortable in the situation.

If members feel uncomfortable, it may be because they don't know what is expected of them or how to participate in the group's activity. By misbehaving, the members don't have to figure out what is expected. A few quiet words to explain what to do will probably solve the problem. If that doesn't work, a quiet talk

How can I use the information in this letter?

1. **New ideas to use in our club:** _____

2. **Other people who could help us and how they might help:** _____

3. **Questions to ask MU Extension staff and other leaders:** _____

while others are occupied might clear the air.

They are afraid of failure.

Fear of failure can also make members feel uncomfortable. It may be less embarrassing to be called a troublemaker than to be called a failure. Try to promote a team spirit in the group where no one ridicules a person who makes a mistake. Also, be sure that everyone knows how to perform his or her role or assignment.

They don't like or aren't interested in what the group is doing.

There could be several reasons for this. The activity or project may be too easy or too difficult. You may

need to make changes in the activity so that it is better suited to your members' abilities. If the activity is suited to the members and your programs were planned by group decision, then you may need to sit down with the disruptive member and explain that, while this may not be the most interesting activity for him or her, the group decided to do it, and it is important to be a team player. You can also make sure that this member has some responsibilities during the activity to make it more relevant. There can be many other reasons why kids misbehave. You, as the leader, need to try to identify the possible reasons and experiment with various approaches

that will deal with the root causes of the behavior problem.

Evaluating your meetings and activities

An important aspect of leadership is evaluating your activity or meeting afterwards. Reflecting on the good and bad points will help you in planning future events.

If the meeting or activity went well, you should look at why it was good. Was it well-planned? Were all necessary supplies available? Did everyone participate? Did everyone appear to understand and to learn? Being able to answer yes to these questions and understanding why will aid in planning future activities.

If the activity or meeting went

poorly, you will need to examine why. As much as possible, let the group be responsible for the outcome of their activities. Help them evaluate any problems. Was there a breakdown in planning or implementation? Did everyone participate? If not, why? If only one or two members seemed dissatisfied, you may need to address the issue with them individually. If the whole club seemed unenthused, you may also want to talk with other leaders or your youth specialist for ideas and inspiration.

Have fun, learn along with your club!

Adapted from Dodd, M.A., L. Hoglum, and M. Robinson. (1998). *Letters to New 4-H Leaders*. Oregon State University Cooperative Extension Service, Corvallis, Ore.

Character is important

Missouri 4-H recognizes the importance of good character in everything that is done. 4-H staff and volunteers, as well as 4-H members and their families, know that a person of character

- is a good person, someone to look up to and admire;
- knows the difference between right and wrong and always tries to do what is right;
- sets a good example;
- makes the world a better place; and
- lives according to the **Six Pillars of Character** — Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship.