

# Preparing to Lead

## A WORKBOOK

### 3 REASONS TO PREPARE FOR LEADERSHIP

Instead of assuming you're just one of the lucky ones who actually was born to lead. (No, but really, I actually was...)

#### ONE

Set a strong course on the front end. Definitely in larger groups, and frequently in small ones, leadership is a team effort. The clarity with which you convey the direction that the group will take under your guidance determines how well the leadership team can orient their own efforts in the same direction. This thoughtful planning creates a common page for everyone to work from.

#### TWO

Nobody says leading is easy. As a leader, you'll be confronted with problems, and expected to manage them. Some of these problems will involve other people, and some of them will be about you (woo hoo!!). Prepare yourself for this less-anticipated part of leadership by learning the skills to handle them. When you've honestly assessed where you do and don't have strength, you can make a plan to fill those holes, preventing as many difficulties as possible.

#### THREE

Navigate competing interests. Leaders are the first point of contact for other group leaders wanting to collaborate on events, and for team members wanting to bounce ideas about new projects, among many, many others. Preparing a plan for your time in leadership will help you navigate your way through the onslaught of requests and ideas. When you've planned a clear route, you can orient the energies of the group along that path, and offer a gracious explanation for declining the events and activities you can't commit to.

You have  
brains in your head  
and feet in your shoes,  
and you can steer yourself  
any direction you choose.  
You're on your own and you  
know what you know, and  
you are the one who'll  
decide where to go.

Let's start with...  
hmm...  
how about...  
YOU?

Why did you decide to take on this role?

What's in it for you?

No, that's not a selfish question. Leadership involves a major commitment of time and energy, both of which are limited resources. In exchange for your investment, you should expect to get something in return, perhaps experience for your future career, training in new skills, or a push out of your comfort zone.

What you want out of your leadership experience is a personal choice, but a fact you need to know. This information will let you check in throughout the semester, to make sure you're on track with the goals you established for yourself, and help you get through challenging times. So what's in it for you?

What do you want out of your leadership experience?

How do you plan to prioritize your leadership role with your other commitments?

How are you setting yourself up to get the challenges you want?

What do you want to be able to say for yourself when this experience is over?

Honestly assess your schedule. In what ways might you be over-committing?  
What changes do you need to make to give your commitments the time and energy they need?

To know what  
you prefer, instead of  
humbly saying "Amen" to  
what the world tells you  
you ought to prefer,  
is to keep your soul alive.

**Robert Louis Stevenson**

A FEW REFLECTIONS ON

# Using Your Strengths Managing Your Weaknesses *and* Knowing Your Achilles Heel

Let's start with the fun stuff first...

Lucky you! You've got a few natural leadership strengths, which will be with you forever. Before you can start developing these natural strengths into powerful leadership tools though, you need to know what they are. Some of this knowledge can come through experience, but assessments like the Myers Briggs (an adaptation of which is offered through the Student Engagement Center), or the book *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (by Marcus Buckingham and Donald Clifton) can help you make meaning of that experience as well.

Be aggressive about identifying and developing your strengths. These are your own bits of genius, to nurture and shine in.

Can you clearly identify your top three leadership strengths? If so, what are they?

If not, this would be a great time to start looking into them. You can reach Susan Buchanan for the password to the online Myers Briggs assessment at [buchansm@whitman.edu](mailto:buchansm@whitman.edu). A cursory Google search of your Myers Briggs profile code will get you started in finding useful resources, to help you develop self-awareness of your strengths as a leader.

Talking to close friends and people who have worked with you can help you process the results, exploring how these strengths have played out in your past experiences.

When you have a realistic assessment of your leadership strengths, create a plan to work it! This is the “development” part. Natural strengths need to be nurtured and refined into the powerful leadership tools they have the potential to be.





Which strength(s) are you planning to refine in this leadership role?

How will you strategically apply these strengths?  
Are there specific roles or positions that you can take on to best facilitate this growth?

What challenges will you take on to move your current level of proficiency in using these strengths up a step? Think big here...what would be a good shove out of your comfort zone?



Leadership development is experiential. Through trial and error, good times and bad, we gradually become better leaders - but only if we are self-aware enough to notice when and why we falter.



**Scott Belsky**

# *The somewhat less fun* BUT EQUALLY AS IMPORTANT FLIP SIDE...

The flip side is that everyone has a few weaknesses as well. When you're aware of what they are, you can either develop skills to fill the gaps, or manage around them.

The nightmare situation is to have a weakness and not be aware of it. This puts the people around you in the uncomfortable position of having to either accommodate your lack of awareness by acting as if it doesn't exist, or confront you about its impact directly.

Strong leaders know their own weaknesses and have a plan for working with them. If the weakness is a recurring trait, such as micro-managing, some leaders will openly acknowledge it to the group, and ask for feedback from any members who see them expressing it in a way that's not useful. If the weakness is in an area of skill, such as budgeting, it's possible to either learn the skill, or to partner with someone who has complementary talents. Each of these scenarios show that you know your own weak spots and have proactively planned how to keep them from limiting you as a leader or impacting the group.

Granted, weak spots can't be eliminated completely. By becoming aware of your weaknesses and developing a plan to manage them, their impact can be minimized.

What are your top three weaknesses?

Again, tools like the Myers Briggs can shed light on weaknesses you may still be blind to. Since the key to managing weakness is awareness, any resource you can use to help develop this understanding can be invaluable, including your own reflections, honest feedback from others, and assessments.

When do these weaknesses come in to play most frequently?  
Are there situations or emotional cues that trigger them, such as becoming defensive when you're stressed or tired?

How might these weaknesses impact your leadership this year?

What is your plan for managing these weaknesses?

How will you share your weaknesses with other people on the team and ask for feedback?

Reflect on your attitudes about sharing your weaknesses. Are you comfortable with sharing them? Why or why not?

According to Greek mythology, when Achilles was a baby his mother Thetis dipped him in the river Styx, making him invincible. Achilles was a great warrior. Unfortunately, however, his mother forgot to dip the heel from which she held him, and when a stray arrow pricked him there, his long career as the bravest warrior was ended. To this day, a weak point is called an

## *Achilles Heel*

While originally this phrase referred to physical vulnerability, today it metaphorically describes the idea that your greatest strength can also be your downfall.

For example, having a natural talent for collaborating and considering the needs of others can be a strength. It may become a weakness though, if it results in sacrificing your own needs. Efficiently managing time to accomplish tasks is a practical leadership strength, and crosses into a weakness when it comes at the expense of developing your relationships with the people you work with. Strategic planning is a strength, which can become a weakness when “having a plan” results in rigid thinking, or an unwillingness to adapt to new situations.

Like Achilles, your area of greatest strength is oftentimes your greatest weakness too. Fortunately, unlike him you have the option to become aware of this vulnerability. The result of this awareness is choice; you can choose to manage this vulnerability by proactively preventing its more destructive expressions, or ignore it, letting it impact your life by default.

Can you identify your own Achilles heel?



When does your greatest strength become your weakness?

How do you recognize when you're coming close to this line?  
How do you know when you've crossed it?

What will you do to be aware of your Achilles heel in this leadership position?

## WHAT ARE YOUR Point B's?

One of the biggest items on the “leader” job description is having a clear direction in which to lead the group. It looks just like this:

**Have a clear direction in which to lead the group.**

Given its gargantuan size, it can logically be inferred that this is a HUGE deal, not to be trivialized by commentary on “figuring it out as you go,” or “going with the flow”. Not to say that plans don't change. They do. But you have to have a plan first, before it can be reassessed in light of new information.

Now that you've thought about where you are currently (your “Point A”), it's time to be specific about your goals, or the “Point B's” to which you're leading the group. A clear picture of these goals will help you allocate resources and delegate projects appropriately, so the best efforts of your team are bringing everyone closer to the same endpoints.

Make your Point B's as detailed as possible: What impact do you want to have on campus this year? What events do you want to host? Are there trainings that you want the leadership team to experience together?

Typically, the most powerful goals grow out of the mission of your group, and are anchored in the shared values. Review the mission and values of your group to make sure your goals match them. If your group doesn't have a written mission and values, make solidifying these essential points a goal in itself.

## Where are you going? Which five goals best define your Point B?

ONE

DATE OF COMPLETION:

TWO

DATE OF COMPLETION:

THREE

DATE OF COMPLETION:

FOUR

DATE OF COMPLETION:

FIVE

DATE OF COMPLETION:

### *Bonus Points*

## FOR ALL THOSE SELF-IDENTIFIED OVER-ACHIEVERS WHO WANT TO MAKE THEIR POINT B'S SMART-ER

Sometimes, pies-in-the-sky masquerade as "goals." These imposters are often written so abstractly that they're irrelevant, or are so monstrously grandiose that they're unachievable. Here are some examples of pies-in-the-sky-pretending-to-be-goals:

My goal is to be famous.  
My other goal is to go to every coffee shop in the world.  
And my last goal is to end suffering. All of it. Period.

With a bit of practice, you can identify the charlatans quite quickly, using this simple little acronym: SMART(ER). It works like this: The first five letters represent a quality of a well-composed goal. Revise your own goals until they have these qualities, or toss it out as an imposter!

**S** Specific: Is the goal clearly defined?

**M** Measureable: Does the goal have defined mile markers and an endpoint, to help you track progress?

**A** Achievable: Is this goal a stretch, but still something that can be accomplished within the time constraints you're working under?

**R** Results-oriented: Does the goal convey the results you expect to achieve? (As opposed to just the activities you'll engage in?)

**T** Time-bound: Does this goal have a specific deadline that's well-communicated to the people who will help achieve it?

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**E** Evaluate: Plan regular check-ins with your team to evaluate progress and adjust course, if necessary.

**R** Reward: What can members look forward to as a reward to celebrate the goal being accomplished? If this is known up front, the reward can help to motivate your team.

# Plan your route from **A** to **B**

## Method One

involves firmly planting your butt on a fluffy couch, cracking open a pint of Ben & Jerry's, and waiting patiently for a fairy godmother to make a magical appearance, waving her wand and making everything work out at the eleventh hour.

## Method Two

involves doing some research to plot out your trail, talking to the leadership team to solicit feedback and input, delegating tasks, getting everyone on the same page about goals, and clarifying the roles each person will take to see the goals achieved.

**Think through the steps between A and B for each of your goals. How will you get started on each one?**

Despite the popularity of Method One, it rarely works. Method Two, however, has been known to work quite effectively. It's also known as "having a game plan," which is another gigantic bullet point on the leadership job description.

Once your Point B has been established, a game plan clarifies how you'll get there. If other team members are participating, the game plan details each of their roles, so all members understand what they need to contribute in order to achieve Point B on time and in style.

When reviewing the game plan, make sure team members are set up for success: Does everyone have the supplies they need to fulfill their role? The training? The relevant skills? Set yourself up for success, too. Consider talking to your predecessor about the position you're about to take on. Do they have any advice for you? If they left any resources for you, be sure to read

“



Go and be awesome.

”





First Step

Next Step

And Then...

Potential Obstacles

How to Overcome Them

Deadline

# Share the Love!

## GET THE TEAM INVOLVED

The best-laid plans mean nothing if the rest of the leadership team doesn't know they exist. Get everyone on the same page by facilitating a conversation about plans for the coming year or semester. What does the big picture look like? A conversation with the leadership team can be used to set the tone for the year or semester, bounce ideas, and make sure everyone is headed in the same direction.

Additionally, you can use this dialogue to troubleshoot concerns. Team leaders and highly committed members can be an invaluable second set of eyes. They can add input about potential problems and bring up issues within the group that you hadn't considered.

Instead of an "input free-for-all," ask your team members to be prepared to contribute on key issues. You may want to select a specific question or subject, such as "what can we do to take our fundraising plans, as they stand now, up a step?" or "how can we best work together this semester?" to serve as the theme of your discussion.

**Give your team leaders a heads up:**

**What three critical questions should they be prepared to answer at your first meeting?**

1

2

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