Peer Leadership & Peer Mentoring
Creating a Positive Campus Culture from the Ground Up

Wichita State University
Wichita, KS

Peer Mentor Workshop
Sept. 15th, 2015
3:30 PM

Joe Cuseo
Professor Emeritus, Psychology; Educational Consultant, AVID for Higher Education
(jcuseo@earthlink.net)
**Whys is Peer Leadership So Powerful?**

1. Peer leaders are within a “zone of proximal development”—i.e., both leader and student are at approximately the same stage of life.

2. Peers are particularly influential during life transitions—such as transitioning from high school to college and from dependence to independence.

3. Peer leaders bring a distinctive enthusiasm, energy, and idealistic intensity that cannot be matched by “adult” authority figures.

---

**Key Roles & Functions Performed by Peer Leaders**

*Coach:* provides guidance and feedback for improving personal performance.

*Communicator:* delivers messages in a clear, concise, and convincing manner.

*Community Builder:* promotes cohesion and a sense of belonging among people on campus or in the local community.

*Confidante:* a non-judgmental listener whom students can confide in, and feel comfortable about sharing their personal values, beliefs, concerns and issues.

*Educator:* teaches students to “learn the ropes” and learn how to learn, and serve as a knowledgeable source of accurate and timely information for students about the curriculum, co-curriculum, college policies, and administrative procedures.

*Facilitator:* stimulates interaction, discussion, collaboration and teamwork among group members.

*Guide:* helps students stay on course, navigate the system, and circumvent potential obstacles or stumbling blocks to success that commonly occur at particular stages of the college experience.

*Institutional Catalyst:* mobilizes the campus to make positive changes in practices, procedures, and policies.

*Meaning Maker:* helps students make sense of (find meaning in) the college experience, and enabling them to see the “connection” between their present academic experience and their future life plans.

*Motivator:* challenges students to set personal goals and inspires them to reach their goals.

*Organizer:* plans and designs group functions, projects, and activities.
Problem Solver: helps students recognize and resolve academic and personal problems.

Referral Agent: a connector who refers students to the right resources in a sensitive and timely manner.

Role Model: an example setter who students can identify with, emulate, and aspire to be like—academically and personally.

Troubleshooter: helps students solve problems and resolve issues that cross departmental borders or “fall between the cracks” of the institution’s formal policies, rules, or procedures.

Personal Qualities and Attributes of Effective Leaders

Credible & Authentic—they’re genuine; they “keep it real” by not pretending to be what they’re not.

Accountable & Reliable—they’re dependable and hold themselves accountable to others; they can be counted on and relied upon to follow up and follow through on their commitments.

Knowledgeable & Resourceful—they’re knowledgeable about their position, themselves, the people they lead, and the context in which their leadership takes place; however, they’re also willing to say: “I don’t know, but I’ll found out.” They capitalize on their resources, are open to learn from others, and are willing to receive help from others to become a better leader or mentor.

Dedicated & Committed—they’re driven and determined to be the best leaders they can be. They invest a high level of time, energy, and effort in their work. They are passionate about making a real difference in the individuals, groups, and organizations they lead.

Respectful & Humble—they’re neither pompous nor pretentious; their egos aren’t inflated by the power or prestige of the positions they hold.

Enthusiastic & Optimistic—they’re positive and hopeful, and they maintain these qualities when their efforts seem to be going slowly, nowhere, or backwards.

Ethical & Courageous—they elevate others to higher levels of ethical conduct. Great leaders are not moralistic—they don’t impose narrow values or conventional moral standards on others—but they do raise the bar by encouraging themselves and others to pursue higher ideals than personal gain and self-interest.
The Process of Effective Leadership: Ten Recurrent Themes

1. Leadership may be demonstrated in a variety of contexts and situations, ranging from the micro (one-to-one relationships) to the macro—groups, communities, and organizations.

2. Leadership requires self-awareness—awareness of one’s own leadership strengths, weaknesses, interests, and values.

3. Leadership requires role awareness—awareness of “fit” between one’s leadership strengths/leadership identity and the roles/responsibilities of the leadership position.

4. Leadership is learned. It’s not an inborn trait that someone has or lacks; it’s a skill developed through effort and practice.

5. Leadership is earned. It involves gaining the respect, confidence, and loyalty of others; it doesn’t come automatically with a position title.

6. Leadership is a process of relational process that involves development and deployment of effective social and emotional skills. Effective leadership is grounded in the creation and cultivation of interpersonal relationships.

7. Leadership is a collaborative process that works best when it’s shred or “dispersed” among other leaders and mentors. The process of effective leadership involves creating and capitalizing on linkages with other leaders; no single leader can be all things to all people. Leadership becomes more powerful when it’s not done independently by “the” leader, but interdependently by a team of leaders.

8. Leadership is a process of empowering others. Effective leaders enable those they lead to become leaders—of themselves and others. “Followers” are liberated from dependence on the leader and are transformed into associates, partners or teammates.

9. Leadership is a reflective process that involves ongoing review and revision. It starts with a vision—a thoughtful and well-formulated plan, but after the plan is put into action, it’s regularly monitored and adjusted to continually improve it.

10. Leadership is a transferable and durable skill that, once learned, can be applied to multiple life roles beyond college—e.g., career, family, community, and citizenship. It has enduring, lifelong value; it’s a gift that keeps on giving.
The Practice of Peer Leadership: Making the Key Connections

1. The Student-Leader (Mentor) Connection

2. The Student-Student (Peer-to-Peer) Connection

3. The Student-Campus (University) Connection

4. The Student-Program Connection

I. The Student-Leader (Mentor) Connection

* Igniting the Student-Leader Connection: Establishing Rapport with Your Students at the Start of the Term

1. Knowing Who Your Students Are: Learning Their Names & Affirming Their Individuality

2. Knowing Something About Your Students: Taking a Personal Interest in Them (For a possible strategy See Appendix A, pp. 8-9)

* Sustaining the Student-Leader Connection: Maintaining Rapport with Your Students throughout the Term

1. Share a Little About Yourself (Personal Information & Life Experiences)

2. Share Your Success Strategies, Stumbling Blocks, & Lessons Learned

3. Acknowledge Your Students’ Attitudes & Feelings (e.g., whether they seem bored or enthused)
II. The Student-Student (Peer-to-Peer) Connection

* Initiating the Student-Student Connection: Creating a Sense of Community among Your Students at the Start of the Term

Top Strategy: Icebreakers (a.k.a. “Community Builders”)

Recommendations:

1. Make it non-threatening and culturally sensitive.

2. Make it so that every student meets every other student.

* Sustaining Student-Student Connections: Maintaining Peer Interaction and a Sense of Community throughout the Term

Top Strategies:

1. Create opportunities for small-group interaction (e.g., pairs, trios, or quartets)

2. Transform group work into teamwork by:

   (a) having students complete jointly-created products

   (b) having students take on complementary roles by performing a different function or bringing a different part to the final product

-----------------------------------------------

III. The Student-Campus (University) Connection

Top Strategies:

1. Articulate the positive qualities and unique features of your campus

2. Bring representatives from campus to visit your students

3. Bring your students to key campus resources
IV.
The Student-Program Connection:
Igniting & Sustaining Involvement in Your Program

Top Strategies:

1. Provide an overview and “sneak preview” of exciting things to come

2. Share positive things students have said about your program

3. Allow your students some opportunity for input or choice (e.g., about program activities)

4. Ask discussion-stimulating questions. (For specific strategies, see Appendix B., pp. 10-11)
Appendix A

STUDENT INFORMATION SHEET
Potential Questions

PERSONAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION
1. Your name (as you prefer to be called)?
2. Phone number/E-Mail number (optional)?
3. Place of birth? Places lived? Currently, living on campus (where) or commuting (from where)?
4. What is your class schedule for this term? (Course titles and times)?
5. How many college credits have you completed? (Freshman, sophomore, junior, senior?)
6. Why did you choose this college? (What brought you here?)
7. Have any of your friends or family attended college? Completed college?
8. Have you attended any other colleges? (If yes, where and when?)
9. What jobs or volunteer experiences have you had?
10. Will you be working or volunteering this term? If so, how many hours per week? On or off campus?
11. Will you have family responsibilities this term?
12. Has anyone in your immediate family (parents or siblings) graduated from college?

FUTURE PLANS
13. Intended major (already decided or being considered)? How sure are you about this choice? What led you to it?
14. What are your plans (definite or tentative) after graduating from this college?
15. Intended career? (Already decided or just being considered?) How sure are you about this choice? What led you to choose or consider this career?

PERSONAL ABILITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS, & DISTINCTIVE QUALITIES
16. What are you really good at? What comes easily or naturally to you?
17. What would you say are your most well-developed skills or talents?
18. How do you think you learn best?
19. Thus far in your life, what is a personal accomplishment, achievement, or success story you’re most proud of? What strategy or personal quality enabled you to make it happen?
20. What three words do you think best describe you?
21. What would your best friend(s) say is your most likable quality?
22. What would you say are your personal strengths right now? What personal areas you would like to work on or improve?

PERSONAL INTERESTS
23. What sorts of things do you look forward to, and get excited about?
24. What sorts of things capture and hold your interest?
25. What would you say have been your most enjoyable & least enjoyable learning experiences?
26. What are your hobbies? Fun activities?
27. If you had a day, week, or year to go anywhere you wanted to go, and do anything you wanted to do, where would you go and what would you do?
28. What do you like to read?
29. When you open a newspaper, what section of it do you turn to first?
30. What’s your favorite movie and/or TV program (if any)?
31. What’s your favorite music or musical artist(s)?
32. Is there anyone dead or alive, real or imaginary, whom you’ve never met but would like to meet and have a conversation with? (Why?)

PERSONAL VALUES
33. What’s very important to you?")(What matters most to you?)(What is something you really care about?)
34. When you have free time, what do you usually find yourself doing?
35. When you have extra spending money, what do you usually find yourself spending it on?
36. Is there a motto, quote, song, symbol, or bumper sticker that represents something you stand for or believe in?
37. If there is one thing in this world you could change, what would it be?)
38. How would you define success? (What does “being successful” mean to you?)
39. When your mind drifts off and you begin to daydream, do you tend to daydream about anything in particular?
40. Do you have any heroes? Is there anyone you admire, look up to, or believe has set an example worth following? Why?
41. Who or what would you say has had the greatest influence on your life thus far? (In what way?)
42. If your house contained everything you own, and it caught fire, but you had time to rush in and retrieve one item, what would you retrieve? Why?”
43. If there were something in your life you could change or do over again, what would it be? Why?
44. If you were asked to sum up who you are in just one sentence, what would that sentence be?
45. What would you like to be said about you in your obituary or at your eulogy?

* Is there anything else about yourself, that I haven’t asked, but you think would be interesting or useful for me to know?
Appendix B

ASKING DISCUSSION-STIMULATING QUESTIONS

The way in which a discussion question is framed or posed can affect whether you receive many (or any) responses from the group. All questions are not created equally; some are more effective at stimulating involvement than others. Careful forethought should be given to the art of questioning because studies show that how a question is framed or phrased will affect whether or not it triggers discussion. Research indicates that the following types of questions are those that are most likely to trigger student responses.

- **Open-ended** questions. These are questions that open-up the floor to a variety of different responses and encourage divergent thinking—i.e., thinking that goes off in different directions rather than converging on one (and only one) “correct” answer. Open-ended questions contain a plural noun that sends the message that a variety of answers are welcomed and expected—e.g., “What options (plural) do we have for reaching our goal?”

- **Focused** questions. These are questions that are tied to a particular concept or issue. Here’s an example of a focused question: “What do you think accounts for the fact that there are consistent more females than males participating in our student clubs and campus organizations?” In contrast, here’s an unfocused question: “Does anybody have any questions or comments at this time?”

- **Conditionally-phrased** questions (e.g., “What might be . . . ?” “What could be . . . ?” “What may be . . . ?”), Such tentative phrasing sends a signal to group members that a diversity of answers is possible, encourages their creativity, and reduces their fear or embarrassment about not providing “the” correct answer you’re looking for.

- Questions that call for **nonverbal responses**. Questions that ask students to respond with body language rather than spoken language can generate responses from all group members simultaneously. For example, students can respond by a show of hands to a question like: “How many of you agree with the following statement . . . ?” or “How many of you had an experience similar to . . . ?”

  Other ways in which students can become engaged nonverbally are by: (a) having them take a position represented by one of four corners in the room with each corner representing one of four choices: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree; or (b) asking them to move to either side of the room, depending on where they stand on an issue or debate. For example, “The center aisle represents middle ground, the far right side of the room represents extreme agreement and the far left side represents extreme disagreement. Where do you stand (literally) on the issue of ______?”

  Questions that call for such nonverbal responses involve all students, not just those who are the most verbally assertive or outspoken. Nonverbal responses can also be used as a stepping stone to subsequent verbal discussion. For instance,
students could be asked why they chose to occupy their particular position (the space they occupied). Or, they could be given the opportunity to changes places after hearing other members’ ideas and then asked why they decided to change.

GO SHOCKERS!