

# The Developing RHA President's Training Manual

An all-purpose guide to help you learn how to run an effective, fun, and successful RHA



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## **Introduction**

One of the most challenging tasks in life is leading others. Whether it is at a job, in a family, or even as president of an organization, being an effective leader takes a lot of effort. There is constant debate over what makes an effective leader, and trends come and go; the following is a compilation of opinions as to what makes an effective RHA President.

## **Theories of Leadership**

Throughout time, there have been numerous trends in leadership techniques. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people primarily used the task-oriented style of leadership. This approach stated that the most effective leaders were those individuals whom were able to accomplish tasks efficiently. The key concept here was achieving organizational goals; thus, a manager was seen as “good” if he could push his “subordinates” above industry standards. Unfortunately, this method had its setbacks; while a leader may have been seen as effective, the needs of others within the organization were not being met. This led to the rise of people-oriented style leadership with the goal of keeping members of the organization happy. But while everyone might have been happy, not as much was being accomplished.

Today, a more integrative approach is being used, combining the task-oriented and the people-oriented styles of leadership. This fusion of styles takes into consideration both the needs of the people and the needs of the organization as a whole so neither efficiency nor morale have to be compromised.

## **Having a Good Character Ethic**

Stephen Covey’s bestseller *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* discusses the different types of ethics involved in leadership; for instance, personality ethics (ways to influence others and motivate them to do things in an organization), character ethics (universally-known truths in life – fairness, respect, sincerity, etc.). Covey explains that character ethics are primary in effective leaders, while personality ethics are secondary. And learning personality ethics is contingent upon the leader’s foundation of character ethics. Meaning, before you can begin to lead others, it is important to analyze yourself and your personal motives. The most effective leaders are fair, respectful, sincere, trustworthy, etc., and without these character ethics, that leader lacks substance. While

you may have quick fixes in your role as a leader, eventually the “followers” will see through your gimmicks and resent you and your techniques.

Once you have built a strong foundation of character ethics, then you can begin to learn the personality ethics and methods of motivation. This way, you won’t simply be influencing others to do things, you will be inspiring them to do great things and thus make a profound difference.

## **How to Keep Everyone Satisfied**

In an RHA, individual board members typically have different needs and motivations – as is true for most organizations. While some may be involved for the idealistic reason of “improving the lives of other residents,” others may have joined simply to meet others with similar interests and just have a good time. A president must balance these differences so all members of the board are satisfied. But, he must also make sure that the needs of the RHA are being met as well (i.e. programs are being planned, residents are being represented to the housing department, office hours are being served, etc.).

Unfortunately, some presidents get so wrapped up in the needs of others that they tend to neglect their own, resulting in burnout and apathy. So when taking everyone into consideration, really take *everyone* into consideration – the board, the residents, the housing department, and yourself.

Remember, nobody is perfect...errrr, nobody is perfect! Everyone will mess up or fail occasionally, and that is okay. Don’t let it get excessive and use these times as learning experiences. Have the endurance and desire, and you will succeed.

Also, respect all of your board members as equals. When you address the board as a whole you should refrain from giving anyone special attention. And put faith in your board by giving them the respect for their job that they deserve.

## **Expectations, Goal-Setting, and a Mission Statement**

One of the main things an executive board needs to do at the start is to list expectations. By setting these together, the entire board understands what others would like to see from them. This can be as simple as stating job specific task (treasurer keeping a ledger of the budget or the secretary having minutes done the night of every meeting). A president might expect his board members to attend all general meetings, executive meetings, and programs. Setting expectations allows all member of your board understand how they can fulfill their duties and help to make things run smoothly. I know this may sound obvious, but get this list in writing and have each member sign it so later, if things go awry, everyone can be reminded of the “agreement” they made.

The next step to starting your year off on the right foot is to have a goal-setting/mission statement session. You can spend anywhere from a half-hour to days doing this; it is all contingent upon the desires of your board. Make sure you hold a session where there will be few distractions (like a secluded board room or an executive retreat). I suggest you have your board prepare in advance for such a session. Have each member prepare several personal, group, and organizational goals. This type of goal setting is called “system thinking,” so named because each member is systematically thinking about what they would like to achieve individually, as a group, and as an organization and thus how they could do such. This way, board members will more effectively be able to meet the needs of the members as well as their own needs, as aforementioned. Some individual goals could include plans to improve their position by taking on a new task or project. For treasurers, this could mean finding a better way to inform residents about budgetary matters, and for publicity directors it could mean developing a newsletter. Organizational goals can include establishing a certain number of programs per semester or increasing involvement with residents through community service projects. Some people prefer to set high, potentially unattainable goals, while others prefer to reach within their own limitations. But, it’s healthy to mix both, because your drive to succeed will be greater if you push yourself, but you don’t want to extend your limits and feel relinquished.

The most often overlooked aspect of goal setting is the follow-through. This establishes how exactly the goals can and will be achieved and often includes specific deadlines in a step-by-step format.

Example Goal: To establish an RHA newsletter (goal established Aug. 26<sup>th</sup>)

Procedure:

1. Speak with adviser and housing staff about feasibility of newsletter by Sep. 1<sup>st</sup>
2. Announce idea at RHA meeting and establish committee to provide input and ideas by Sep. 6<sup>th</sup>
3. Meet with committee for brainstorming session and have committee members submit articles and other newsletter contents by Sep. 15<sup>th</sup>
4. Create rough draft of newsletter and show to exec board for feedback by Sep 20<sup>th</sup>
5. Revise newsletter, make copies, distribute first edition by Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>
6. After distribution, obtain feedback from residents on the effectiveness of the newsletter and ways to improve next edition

Establishing this type of procedure leave little room for board members to lose sight of their goals and gives everyone, especially you the president, the ability to constantly evaluate the progress without feeling intrusive.

Once all goals are set, your board can create a mission statement. I suggest everyone think about why they became involved and how they hope the organization will grow in the upcoming year. The statement will act as a “guiding light” for your board members and the organization in general. Whenever members feel unmotivated, apathetic, or unfocused, the mission statement should be a reminder of your desire and passion for your RHA.

Remember: Write everything down. I suggest making a copy of everything for your whole board, including your advisor. Also, it may be a good idea to post copies in your area government offices as well as your RHA office. Goal setting and mission statements are integral to the success of any organization. It allows the executive board members to commit themselves to the same purpose. It also allows you to know the individual goals of each board member, and thus, their individual needs. It is recommended that you re-evaluate the progress and needs of these goals periodically. And help your board members to achieve their personal goals.

## **Running a Meeting**

One of the most visible responsibilities of an RHA president is the running of meetings, which often looks a lot easier than it really is. Most RHAs hold both an executive meeting and a general assembly meeting, each with fundamental differences.

An executive board meeting contains a lot more interaction and discuss than a general assembly, where the executive board should remain impartial. An exec meeting should be flexible with dates and times since some issues may take longer than others, while a general assembly should be at a set time and day of the week to encourage attendance. It is important that you show your board members that you are willing to be flexible; it promotes respect.

It is a good idea to remain impartial on ideas, at first, so others feel their opinions are valued. A president is often the most experienced member on the board and may intimidate others if his opinion is stated first. This may especially discourage new members of the board from voicing their opinions. You should solicit the input of the “quiet” members of your board; just because they remain quiet does not mean they don’t have an opinion on the issue. Ask them directly, without putting them on the spot, how they feel.

Also, search for a consensus on all decisions. It is important to have every board member fully committed to a decision to prevent resentment. Instead of quickly taking a vote, take the time to allow all sides of an issue to be voiced. Respect everyone’s opinion and search for a mutually acceptable conclusion. Obviously, complete satisfaction won’t always occur, but try to accommodate the majority.

At a general assembly meeting, the executive board should appear as a united front on all issues. It is important to give the impression to the general body that all board members are on the same side, which will result with respect. If your board sits in the front of the room, try not to make faces or fidget too much. For instance, if your vice president starts doodling on his agenda, it may give the impression that he is bored and people will respond to that. Essentially, maintain a sense of professionalism. Making jokes and having fun is always encouraged, but board members who get out of control during a meeting may create a sense of chaos. Moreover, don’t be a dictator. Let the body make the decisions, not you or the executive board. Put the power to vote in their hands so you truly are representing your constituents. If you use a gavel, do not hold it all times.

Instead, lay it in front of you. Holding the gavel gives the impression that you are a control-freak and can be intimidating.

An agenda is imperative for all meetings. You should prepare an agenda ahead of time and allow all members to add items to it. A benefit to writing the agenda ahead of time is that you would know if a meeting is going to take longer than possible so members could allot more time for it. It is the president's responsibility to make sure that the meeting remains organized *and* fun. It is easy to have so much fun that little work gets done or that a meeting will get too serious and boring that you'll lose membership interest. So, without letting things get too rowdy, try to keep your members motivated and energized.

To give the meeting some organization, it is important to establish some type of procedure as to how votes will be taken and decisions will be made. A great set of procedures can be adapted from the *Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure*. "Parli-pro," as it is nicknamed, gives specific details for voting, running a meeting, speaking order, etc. The larger a meeting is, the more necessary parli-pro is; most student governments use *Robert's* guidelines for their meetings. Your particular RHA may only need to use rules for voting as opposed to rules on running the meeting; modify the procedures based on the needs of your particular school and student body.

## **What is Your Role with Area Councils?**

Your campus may be divided into housing areas, which then unite to form your RHA. You may have area governments with their own executive board, serving as your direct link to on-campus residents.

For example, Gary Slossberg described how the University of Florida organizes their RHA (which is a good method for other large schools and can be modified for those smaller):

"Our RHA is structured so that each area government has a certain number of voting seats in our RHA based on the number of residents living in that area. We utilize our area governments to spread information to residents and bring residents to our RHA programs. Since the RHA executive board typically comes from an area government background, we do extensive training and have on-going meetings with them. For example, I also serve as the UF IRHA President, so I will have meetings and retreats a few times a semester with only the area government Presidents. This allows me to understand what issues/problems they are facing, and we try to come up with solutions as a group. It also allows the area government Presidents to get to know their counterparts in other areas, so they can work together on programs and such. At the beginning of the year, I also train them on the duties and responsibilities as an area government President, so they do not feel overwhelmed when they begin their position. We go over many of the same leadership theories that are outlined in this manual, like conflict resolution and goal setting/expectations. The RHA Vice-President does the same with area government Vice-Presidents, and so forth. Since most area government leaders look to the RHA executive board as role models, it is important to support and encourage them as much as possible. I have learned that the stronger relationship is between area governments and

the RHA executive board, the easier it is for the RHA to accomplish its goals and serve the residents.”

## **What is Your Role with the Housing Staff?**

The RHA president is the official spokesperson for the residents, the housing staff, and often campus administration. The president may also be asked to serve on campus-wide committees to represent the on-campus residents.

Each RHA has an adviser, who is usually the Director of Residence Life or the equivalent thereof. The adviser is generally a professional trained in many of the theories and skills mentioned in the manual, such as conflict resolution and motivation. The adviser is your most direct source of help; some were even RHA members during their college years. They can help you plan out the steps for putting on programs, dealing with problems you and/or your RHA may be facing, and are your direct link to the rest of the housing staff. They typically will attend all general assembly and executive board meetings to offer advice but not to be intrusive.

It's a good idea as president to form a strong, cooperative relationship between your RHA and the resident assistants. In some RHAs, RAs are allowed to hold a voting seat and at other schools voting is considered a conflict of interest. It is important to define your relationship with RAs specifically for your university's needs. Even if you are not going to give them a voting seat, do not alienate them because they can bring residents to your programs. Get to know as many of them as possible so they feel comfortable requesting assistance if they ever need funding or support. And if you're supporting them, they'll be more likely to support you. Do something nice for your housing staff periodically just to show your appreciation.

## **Setting a Good Example**

Good leaders lead by example. There is nothing people despise more than a leader who is a “do as I say, not as I do” man. As president, you must live by the same rules as your executive board. And if you screw up or start slacking, reprimand yourself as you would any other officer not doing his job. And remember that mistakes are human.

Furthermore, by setting a good example and working hard, you will motivate others to do their job to the best of their ability. If there is a difficult or tedious task, volunteer to help. But, don't be too overbearing or take over completely. Others will be encouraged to take on hard tasks knowing you or other board members are willing to assist.

## **How Do I Motivate Others?**

People, by nature, are motivated by different motives. Find out the motives of each board member so you can keep their interest all year. Be as direct as asking everyone their motivation for success. Also observe what makes them happy or disappointed and take note for the future. Moreover, find out what else is going on in your board members' lives to assess outside concerns that may interfere with their motivation levels: tests, jobs, significant others, family problems, roommate problems, etc. Be sincere in all that you do and facilitate an open line of communication at all times. Offer reassurance through positive reinforcement: tangibly (thank you notes, gift certificates, baked goods) or more subtly (a pat on the back, a smile, a nod, an applause). Keep in mind that not each member will appreciate the same types of reinforcement. And it is imperative that you remember that each area government member is a *student volunteer*.

## **The Importance of Delegating Responsibility**

Delegation is one of the most important tool of a successful president, especially since trying to do everything in an RHA alone is not only hazardous to your health, but also not very effective.

Delegating accomplishes a number of things: 1) it spreads out the various tasks to ensure that everyone is pulling their weight 2) it puts faith in your fellow board members that they have the responsibility and the skills to accomplish important tasks 3) it keeps your whole board involved 4) most importantly, it takes the burden off yourself.

## **Conflict Resolution**

Conflict is inevitable. Arising when least expected, conflicts can seriously impact the functioning of an area government. The easiest (and most obvious) way to ensure that conflicts don't become a problem is to stop them from occurring in the first place. Setting expectations is one way; another is by using a "preventative message" (as coined by Slossberg). Preventative messages warn others in advance of situations that might be conflict prone. For instance, if you have a test in a few days, you may get easily agitated if your fellow board members come to you with petty concerns while you're trying to study. Warn your fellow board members about your heavy stress load this upcoming week and that you won't be able to deal with RHA stuff. I suggest posting a monthly calendar in the office for everyone to write down their schedules and times of heightened stress. Another example is to warn officers that a meeting will take blank time longer than usual so they are not frustrated when they were supposed to be somewhere else.

Another means of conflict prevention is by maintaining an open line of communication with your board at all times. Having an open-door policy can invite other members to discuss potential problems with you before they escalate. If you feel a board member has been acting weird or simply looks distraught, ask them if everything is okay. Be a good listener and respect all opinions.

Nevertheless, conflicts will occur and resolving them effectively is part of being an effective leader. As aforementioned, effective leaders can balance the goals of the organization and of the individual members. Sometimes the two sides can come into conflict and it is your duty to help with a resolution. Conflicts can be viewed as problems and thus can be resolved by using the steps of problem solving:

1. Identify the problem
2. Generate potential solutions
3. Analyze benefits and drawbacks of possible solutions
4. Choose a solution
5. Evaluate a solution

These steps are fairly self-explanatory. Remember, not all problems are as easy as they appear. For instance, your secretary might not be taking minutes in a manner that benefits the area residents. Come to find out, they are slacking because they do not feel they are getting the respect they deserve. Also, you may need the intervention of your advisor if you feel the situation is beyond your capacity. If you have any questions about any of the steps or need some mentoring, please feel free to contact any of the FARH SBD.

## **Getting Caught up in the Power of Your Position**

We have all met that egomaniac or power-hungry leader and hopefully see the problems with such a strong personality. Effective leaders understand, and try to avoid getting caught up in the power of the position. Granted, you have authority and power, but if you let it get to your head you will have no board members left to support you. Remember, you are an equal vote as compared with your other board members. And, at the same time, let go of the belief that as president you always have to be right. Typically, you will be the most knowledgeable in a situation, but not always. Maintaining that you're always right can cause resentment.

## **Traditions**

Each RHA has its own unique set of traditions and rituals. Throughout the year, you may come across ones you didn't even know existed. And don't be afraid to create new ones. If you have the time, research the history and traditions of your area governments, or (better yet) delegate the responsibility to someone on your board. Of course, if you have just established your RHA, then you have the huge and fun responsibility of creating them all from scratch.

Traditions and history hold an organization together and keep it connected to its past. Documenting the history of your RHA through photos, scrapbooks, or paperwork is helpful and fun to look back on down the line. UF's RHA has a list of almost all of the

officers from their executive board and area government presidents dating back to the late seventies.

## **Stress and Time Management**

The position of RHA president is definitely a tough one. You often have too many things to do and not enough time to do it. As far as stress is concerned, always remember that this is only RHA. Granted, you should take your job seriously, but don't let your job take over your life. Try to keep everything in perspective (sometimes talking to others allows you to get an outside opinion – or some sense knocked back into you). If you don't view a situation as stressful, you will be able to manage it better.

Time management can become a big issue and I encourage you to buy a planner. Get or make one that suits your individual needs. Once you have this planner, write down everything you need to do (“TO DO LIST”) including meetings, programs, tests, doctor appointments, etc. I always feel more accomplished when I can cross things off my list.

Remember to keep academics your main priority at all times. As the saying goes, “student” comes first in “student leader.”

## **“HELP, I Need Somebody”**

There are numerous resources available to you as RHA president. For instance, you can contact your adviser, past and current RHA board members, professional housing members, etc. There are probably also some campus organizations dedicated to facilitating student leaders. I have also enclosed contact information for other RHAs in Florida. And don't forget your buddy school! Finally, there's us, your FARH SBD, we are all here for you to help with anything. If you'd like some reading materials, there are also plenty of leadership hand guides out there (i.e. *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff...And it's All Small Stuff*, Dr. Richard Carlson; *Leadership Effectiveness Training*, Dr. Thomas Gordon; *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey).

Again, congratulations on your becoming RHA president. Best of luck!