

Exemplary Youth Leadership Series: Encourage the Heart¹

Megan Stein²

Introduction

This publication series is designed to outline strategies and experiences to expose youth to and engage them with leadership concepts. In this publication, students will try on aspects of the final practice of exemplary leaders: encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2018). Two quick, low-cost activities are included for implementation with youth and adults working with youth. These activities are best suited for students ages 10–18. However, modifications are included for each of the activities to allow for different group sizes, ages, and abilities of the youth participating.

Encourage the Heart

Leaders celebrate a job well done. Recognizing contributions and celebrating victories are key components of encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

The first commitment of this practice has leaders “recognize contributions by showing appreciation for individual excellence” (Kouzes & Posner, 2018, p. 14). Holding teammates to high standards creates an environment of excellence. Leaders must have a clear vision and expectations for everyone on their team to uphold. As a leader, it is important to offer constructive feedback and to be open to receiving feedback from those you are working with. Showing others that you are committed to growth creates a more productive atmosphere.

Leaders must also “celebrate the values and victories by creating a spirit of community” (Kouzes & Posner, 2018, p. 14). Having a spirit of community among your group enhances morale. Publicly celebrating accomplishments and being personally invested in your teammates is beneficial for team effectiveness. As a leader, it is important to balance work and fun while integrating celebration into the group’s culture.

Activities

Thank-You Notes

Students will demonstrate gratitude.

Materials: Paper or greeting cards and pens

Group Size: Any

Instructions:

1. Instruct students to write a thank-you note to a person who has helped them in the past year. Students can write to teachers, volunteers, or others.
2. Teach students the basics of handwritten thank-you notes:
 - Only write on the bottom or right half of a greeting card.
 - Use a salutation.

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2. Megan Stein, lecturer, Department of Agricultural Education and Communication; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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- Include a date.
- Do not use “tweet-talk” or abbreviations.
- Practice writing or typing out the message before transferring it to the final greeting card.
- Sign your name.

Wrap-Up Questions:

1. How do you feel after writing that thank-you note?
2. Why is it important for us to thank those who help us?
3. What are other ways we can demonstrate gratitude?

Rock Paper Scissors Posse

Students will celebrate small wins.

Materials: None

Group Size: 8–300 people

Instructions:

1. Students will walk around until they find an opponent for a rock paper scissors game.*
2. Pairs of students will play one round of rock paper scissors.
3. Once the game is played, the person who lost will become the champion of the winner. They will no longer play rock paper scissors but will follow the winner around as their cheering section, encouraging them to win. This should form large trains of peoples behind active players.
4. The winner with their one-person cheering section will play another match. Then the process repeats with the loser and cheering section joining the cheering section of the winner of each match.
5. At the end of the activity, there should be two final players with cheering sections. The winner of the final match wins the activity.

Mobility Modifications: Students can play seated or virtually and support those closest to them after their win.

Wrap-Up Questions:

1. Winner—how did it feel having a large cheering section?
2. For the cheering section, how did it feel supporting someone else?
3. How can we offer this type of support to those around us?
4. Why is it important for us as leaders to encourage our teammates?

Summary

Students will engage with the final practice of exemplary leaders—encouraging the heart. Being able to show gratitude and creating an atmosphere of celebration helps leaders build stronger relationships among their teams.

Reference

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2018). *The student leadership challenge: Five practices for becoming an exemplary leader*. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.