



Landcare Notes

Effective leadership

If your group is to be effective, its best chance is with a leader who enthuses, guides and directs you all.

Every member is a volunteer and volunteers are not compelled to do anything. They do because they are inspired. Initially, that inspiration is because they want to make a difference but it needs to be encouraged and directed – and that's where good leadership is important.

This Landcare Note should help improve the leadership skills in your group.

What is effective leadership?

Everyone has a different definition of a good leader but most would agree it is about a person's ability to work with people and motivate them to achieve a goal or action.

A true leader inspires and gains respect while setting and achieving goals, or as former Australian of the Year (2000), Sir Gustav Nossal says:

Community leadership is the courage, creativity and capacity to inspire participation, development and sustainability for strong communities

Everyone has leadership potential, not just 'high achievers', but sometimes leadership needs active support and encouragement. Everyone in your group has potential.

How to build effective leaders?

Setting goals and priorities will help determine what your group wants to achieve. It may be up to the leader to start this process, but it's easier to lead when you know where people want to go! (See Landcare Notes: 2.1 Planning; 2.2 Strategic Planning).

Encourage communication

Leaders should get to know group members as well as possible. Start a conversation and then *listen*. By listening, you will learn about the interests of members and be able to suggest ways that people can be more involved. Encourage feedback on local issues and projects of the group before and after they happen.

At meetings or gatherings

Greet everyone personally and introduce members who have not previously met, or who have common interests. Wear a nametag and encourage others to do the same, especially if it's a large group or there are a lot of new members.

Make new members feel welcome by asking an experienced member to explain to them the group's procedures, terminology, history and local contacts. Check Landcare Note 6.1: Effective Communication in Your Group, for some more ideas.

Delegate

Leaders who try to do everything themselves not only run the risk of 'burning out' but also create instability.

If you give the impression everything is under control, and you are taking on all the work, then others may feel they're not needed.

Activities should be assigned to other members so that each person's workload is reduced and you can all work more effectively. When people take responsibility for an action or task, they will have more ownership of the group.

Don't wait for members to volunteer their help - encourage and suggest they take on a role, particularly if you know they have skills and interests in that area, and support them as they do it. (See Landcare Note: Sharing The Load – Delegation).



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Praise and recognition

A great way to inspire people is to praise their efforts and contributions. Do it as soon as possible after the event, at an appropriate place and time, and be specific about what they have done that you admire.

Praise doesn't have to be public or elaborate, but it should reflect that person's personality and achievements. You could offer congratulations and recognition at a meeting, send them a card or gift or make very public acknowledgement at one of the group's events.

Be consistent and set limits

People need to know what to expect from leaders. Sudden bursts of inspiration followed by inactivity and inattention will confuse and frustrate them.

Learn your limitations and keep within them.

Honesty will be respected.

If you are in a leadership position, you must overcome personal preferences and treat all members equally, particularly if there are conflicts that must be managed.

Learn from other leaders

Talking with leaders of other organisations, sporting and community groups can give new insights to leadership. The same goes for talking to someone whose leadership style you admire. Find out what they do to succeed as a leader, and try to use some of those techniques.

Take advantage of training opportunities

Members of Landcare groups can be sponsored to attend training and personal development opportunities such as workshops and conferences which are a great opportunity. Improving leadership skills may be enhanced by attending courses on a range of topics so think broadly when looking at the options.

Look for new leaders

Look for natural leaders in your group and encourage the development of their leadership skills. Signs of potential include a friendly open person with a variety of skills who is willing to be involved. They will have good local knowledge and be well respected by other members of the group or the community.

Many potential leaders never take on leadership roles, probably because of lack of support or confidence and limited development opportunities. As a leader, you should delegate tasks and responsibilities to them, starting small and providing support.

The next step would be to approach them about assuming a leadership role and discuss their potential. Invite them with you to functions to act as a group representative.

Common leadership pitfalls

Being a good leader isn't easy but avoiding some common mistakes can make things simpler.

Ignoring conflict in the group

Conflict is incompatible behaviour between people who have different interests. It's a natural part of life and common in group situations. Facing and managing conflict can increase your understanding of issues and help create new solutions. (See Landcare Note 8.2: Conflict Resolution).

Trying to be like previous leaders

Everyone has different skills and talents and a leader should do what they are good at. Discover your own strengths and talents and capitalise on them; then don't be afraid to change procedures so the group benefits from what you do best.

Not asking for help

Going outside the 'comfort zone' is great for personal development, but don't be afraid to ask for help while you are out there! Previous



leaders are usually willing to help out, especially if their leadership was openly admired.

Pushing too hard

Members may feel uncomfortable if a new leader tries to push too hard. Instead of introducing all the great ideas immediately, you should start slowly and build group confidence. Leadership is not about power – it's about helping members move in a direction that is good for the group.

Leadership skills

Leadership training is part of personal development and training programs are available in many forms. Your local government contact or local Landcare coordinator should be able to give you information on courses or give you some ideas of where to find more information.

Further references

Chamala, S and Mortis, P (1990) *Working Together For Landcare*; Queensland.

Department of Primary Industries. Chapter 4: *Developing leadership skills*.

Community Leadership Centre:
www.ourcommunity.com.au/leadership/leadership_main.jsp

Related Landcare Notes

This Landcare Note is one of a series. These notes provide an excellent guide for the ongoing operation of your group.

Landcare Note 2.1: Planning

Landcare Note 2.2: Strategic Planning

Landcare Note 6.1: Effective Communication in Your Group

Landcare Note 8.2: Conflict Resolution

Landcare Note 8.5: Sharing the Load – Delegation

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