LECTURE NOTES ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

THERE IS A STRATEGIC ANTIDOTE TO THE “SHARKS” WE ENCOUNTER IN WORKING FOR CHANGES IN SOCIAL LEGISLATION AND POLICY.

- The strategic antidote is leadership development.
- How important is leadership development in community organizing and lobbying to influence social legislation and policy?
  1. Many professionals would say it’s the basic building block of such effort.
  2. Why? (Because whatever the problem or pressure facing a people, their prospects are better with more and better leaders.)
  3. Building power requires leaders.
  4. Building coalitions and consensus requires leaders.

- While there are many things we can do tactically to prepare ourselves to deal with sharks, there’s also an overall strategic approach to the problem.

- The most effective preparation in this respect is an in-depth program of leadership development within one’s organization.
- One of the first questions we have to ask ourselves is, how many leaders does an organization need?
- To answer this question we need to agree on what we mean by “leaders.”
- Some of the more common leadership styles include:
  1. Autocratic leaders: Make decisions on their own and try to impose them on everyone else.
  2. “Laid back” leaders: Wait for things to happen, often leading to fragmentation or disintegration.
  3. Supportive leaders: Act as teachers, helping others learn, often producing a student-teacher atmosphere in which they define for everyone the “right” and “wrong” ways to do everything.
  4. Democratic leaders: Share decision-making, encourage creativity, and work to build consensus.

- These leadership styles often reflect not personal styles as much as organizational decision-rules, i.e., how decisions are structured in organizations—whether democratic, autocratic, etc.
The real question about leadership is how do we build it in depth, i.e., how do we produce a surplus—if such a thing is possible—of competent and committed leaders, both formal and informal?

Which raises the question, who’s responsible for leadership development in a grassroots organization that wants to influence social legislation and policy?

1. Most commonly it’s the paid staff.
2. Why is that approach problematic? (Because paid staff are few and many leaders are needed.)
3. The remedy is to make the primary job of leaders the development of other leaders.

What kinds of things motivate people to become leaders?

1. Threats—to themselves, their loved ones, their neighborhoods, their communities, their jobs, etc., and resentment and anger
2. Observing effective leadership models
3. Contingencies and ideologies (i.e., rewards and punishments of various kinds)

People rarely come to understand their potential for leadership through talk or intellectual information, but almost always by engaging in action, so what’s the lesson for organizers?

1. We never try to convince someone to become a leader?
2. Instead we ask them to do a particular job that requires leadership.

Which is most important in identifying a potential leader?

1. Knowledge and skills
2. Character and personality

What are the indicators that an individual has potential as a leader?

1. Leaders have followers because of their relationships with people.
2. Leaders produce organizational resources.

How do we find such people? (By creating opportunities to do organizational tasks that require building relationships.)

What’s the alternative to measuring leadership potential by relationship-building and resource productivity? (We get people who are facile talkers or who occupy positions of prestige in the community, but aren’t authentic leaders.)

What’s wrong with elevating people into leadership roles when they don’t have relationships and the ability to produce resources? (They can’t build consensus or power.)

What are some important qualities that you value in leaders?

1. Likes and respects people (and, in turn, is liked and respected)
2. Builds relationships
3. Builds trust and confidence
4. Reliable
5. Lets others take credit
6. Works hard at whatever needs to be done
7. Not easily discouraged
8. Self-aware
9. Asks questions
10. Open to new ideas
11. Learns from mistakes
12. Flexible
13. Self-disciplined
14. Mature
15. Sets limits
16. Courageous
17. Sense of humor
18. Good listener
19. Talks well
20. Commitment
21. Honesty
22. Positive outlook
23. Confidence
24. Trust in people
25. Mistrust of unaccountable power
26. Vision (What is it?)
27. Not angling for position or prestige (i.e., “We don’t want a farmer who farms farmers.”)

- What are some important skills you value in leaders?
  1. Good listener
  2. Diplomatic
  3. Recruits people
  4. Personally organized
  5. Defines issues
  6. Runs effective meetings
  7. Understands politics and organizational life
  8. Knows fundraising essentials
  9. Knows action-research essentials
  10. Knows media essentials
  11. Committed to training
  12. Competent public speaker
• How do you find good leaders?
  1. Most good leaders are not found but developed.
  2. The first step in leadership development is to begin to get to know people.
  3. What is it you want to know? (Personal history that reveals values and self-interests—the contingencies and ideologies that are important in that person’s life.)
  4. The second step is to create or identify roles and situations that offer opportunities for leadership development.
  5. How do you actually get the person involved? (This is the crucial step because often the most promising people don’t want to take on leadership roles.)

• What are the obstacles to getting people to take leadership roles?
  1. They fear failure.
  2. They fear burdensome demands.
  3. They fear unending commitment.

• What are the essential characteristics of relationships that nurture leadership knowledge and skill?
  1. Support
  2. Challenge
  3. Accountability

• How can you ensure healthy maintenance and growth of leadership in an organization?
  1. Define the sine qua non of leadership as leadership development
  2. Build support, challenge, and accountability into the culture of the organization
  3. Rotate leadership roles
  4. Institute ongoing training
  5. Build in evaluation of everything (e.g., meetings, actions, campaigns, etc.)
  6. Make it fun
  7. Involve leaders in setting leadership development goals—don’t allow professional staff to monopolize the process

• What are some important milestones in the development of leaders?
  1. Recognition of the need for and role of informal leaders, plus willingness to serve as such
  2. Recognition of the necessity and role of informal meetings
  3. Recognition of the need for both “wins” and “builds”
• What’s the difference between *task* leadership functions and *maintenance* leadership functions?
  1. Task functions focus on the job to be done.
  2. Maintenance functions focus on people’s feelings (e.g., feeling welcomed and valued).
• If your leadership people were heavily weighted toward task or maintenance functions, how would you deal with the problem?
  1. Do some training
  2. Do some modeling
  3. Do some recruiting
• Many of you will be working with leaders as professional staff, so it’s important that you know the differences between the roles of leaders and those of professional staff.
• There are different traditions and practices in different institutional settings.
  1. Grassroots organizations usually make sharp distinctions between the roles of leaders and those of professional staff.
  2. Public-interest lobbying organizations also make sharp distinctions between the roles of leaders and professional staff, but often the opposite of grassroots organizations.
  3. Labor unions usually combine the roles of leaders and organizer in paid positions that are elected.
• Withal, usually when organizations have both elected leaders and paid staff—whether planners, administrators, or organizers—their roles are very different.
• Leaders are usually out front on defining issues and decision-making.
• Organizers are typically out front on defining organizational development strategy and process.
• Professional staff, typically not indigenous to the area in which they’re working, must be able to establish a high degree of trust and confidence very quickly.
• Professional staff must not be ambitious for personal power, prestige, or position—although typically they have a great deal of *informal* influence, often much more than leaders.
• The staff person often must be prepared to define his or her role to members and leaders.
• The staff person need not be an expert on specific conditions, problems, or issues, but must understand the essentials of building community, organization, mobilization, and institution.
• In such circumstances, typically there are well-defined constraints on the staff role:
  1. Staff are not decision-makers
  2. Staff are not the public voice of the organization
  3. Staff do not hold elected office
  4. Staff seek to pass on all they know to leaders
• What do you imagine is the reason for these limitations on the role of staff?
• So what do you want to be, a leader or a professional staff person?