

Becoming and Being a Leader

We have talked about leadership from the very first page of this handbook. Becoming and being a leader is your primary goal as a youth officer. But exactly what is meant by *leadership*? We have purposely waited until this chapter to answer that question because we hope you have had a chance by this time to conduct some post business—to have tried your hand at leading.

We also know that, initially, leadership may seem like a nebulous concept: it feels like a piece of soap that keeps slipping out of your hands. It's important that you are able to put your hands around this concept—to understand leadership—because this understanding will shape how you approach your officer responsibilities, how you interact with one another, how you make decisions, and which kinds of activities and special

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projects you choose to engage in as a post.

To help you gain this understanding, we'll discuss the following areas in this chapter:

- The desired model of leadership in an Explorer post
- Looking at citizenship and service, based on this leadership model
- The conditions that promote growth and development
- Applying leadership to specific post experiences

Before reading the first section, on the desired model of leadership, stop for a moment. Imagine the following scene:

Beth, Doug, and Dave are talking together. Well, maybe we should say that Beth is talking, and Doug and Dave are mostly listening . . .

At two o'clock, Beth is at the park. She looks around for Doug and Dave. They are nowhere in sight.

"Where in the world are Doug and Dave?" Beth wonders. "I told them everything they needed to get . . . and when to be at the park. Where could they be?"

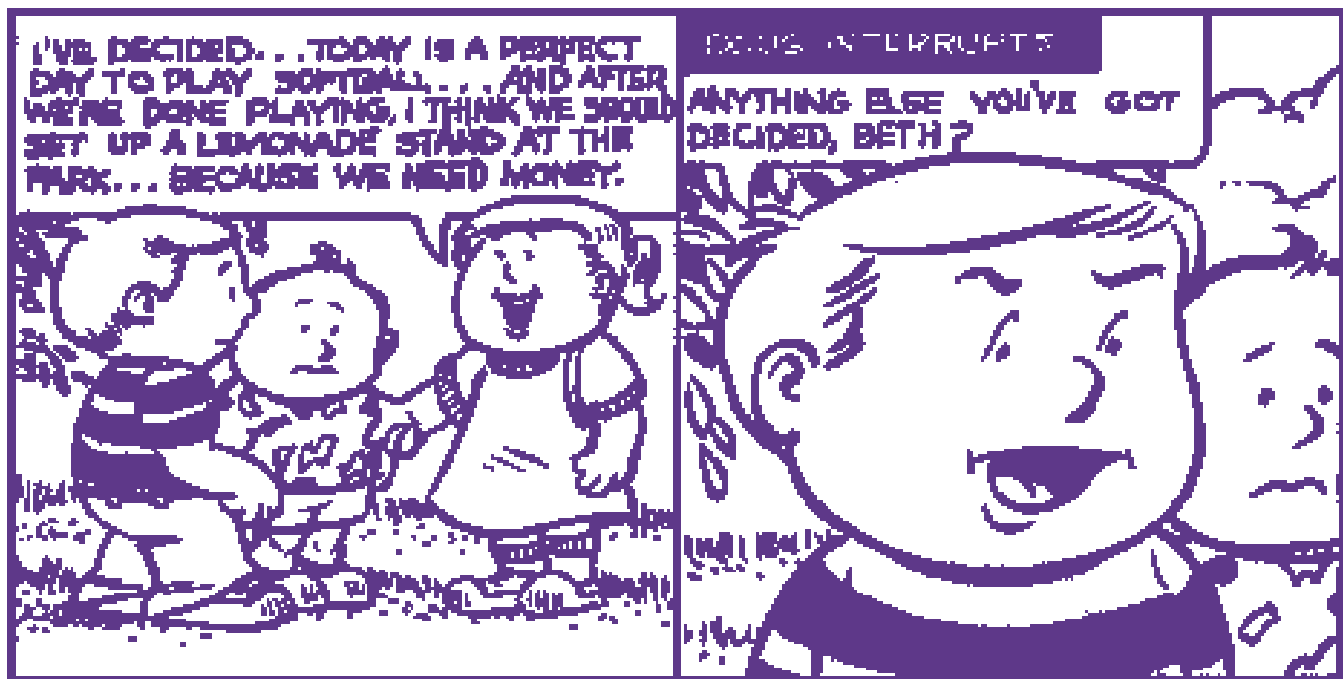
In this chapter, you will discover that leadership is not power over others. It is not making decisions for others, and it is not telling others what to do. Rather, leadership is about empowering others through service. Leadership is about creating an environment within the post where everyone feels a sense of self-worth, where people grow and choose to be present—physically, mentally, and emotionally—because they want to be.

The Desired Model of Leadership

Leaders come in two basic varieties, from two different positions of looking at themselves and others.

The first position is often thought of as the traditional one, or the usual way of getting things done. It's how Beth approached Doug and





Dave in the brief scenario you just read. Leaders who are in the first position see themselves as people who make decisions for others, who tell people what to do, who see people as tools to get their own needs met and the work accomplished.

This kind of leader sees himself or herself at the top of an organization, and this “top mind-set” easily allows the person to have thoughts and feelings of *being better*, of deserving more privileges. Leaders with this kind of thinking often let their titles give them their sense of self-worth. This type of leader is not known for listening well, for delegating responsibility, or for noticing those with less privilege and power. Control and manipulation can easily result from this kind of leadership.

In Exploring, we turn that model of leadership upside down. What’s different about this second kind of leadership, this upside-down version?

Leaders in this position see themselves as people who *serve* the best interests and needs of the people they’re leading. They see themselves more in the role of a coach, counselor, or guide than in the role of a general.

They do not take away the responsibility of others thinking for themselves, making decisions, or weighing their own actions. They encourage interdependence, versus dependence on them or a kind of individualism that is more focused on the *I* than the *we*. They replace self-centeredness with other-centeredness.

Three things characterize this kind of leadership in Exploring:

First, this kind of leadership means serving others. *Service is leadership*. The best way to tell whether this kind of leadership is happening is that those being served grow as individuals and grow together with one another. Simply put, that means the participants in your post grow and develop under your leadership as officers and grow as a group, an interconnected group who appreciate more and more how each person is valuable to the whole post.

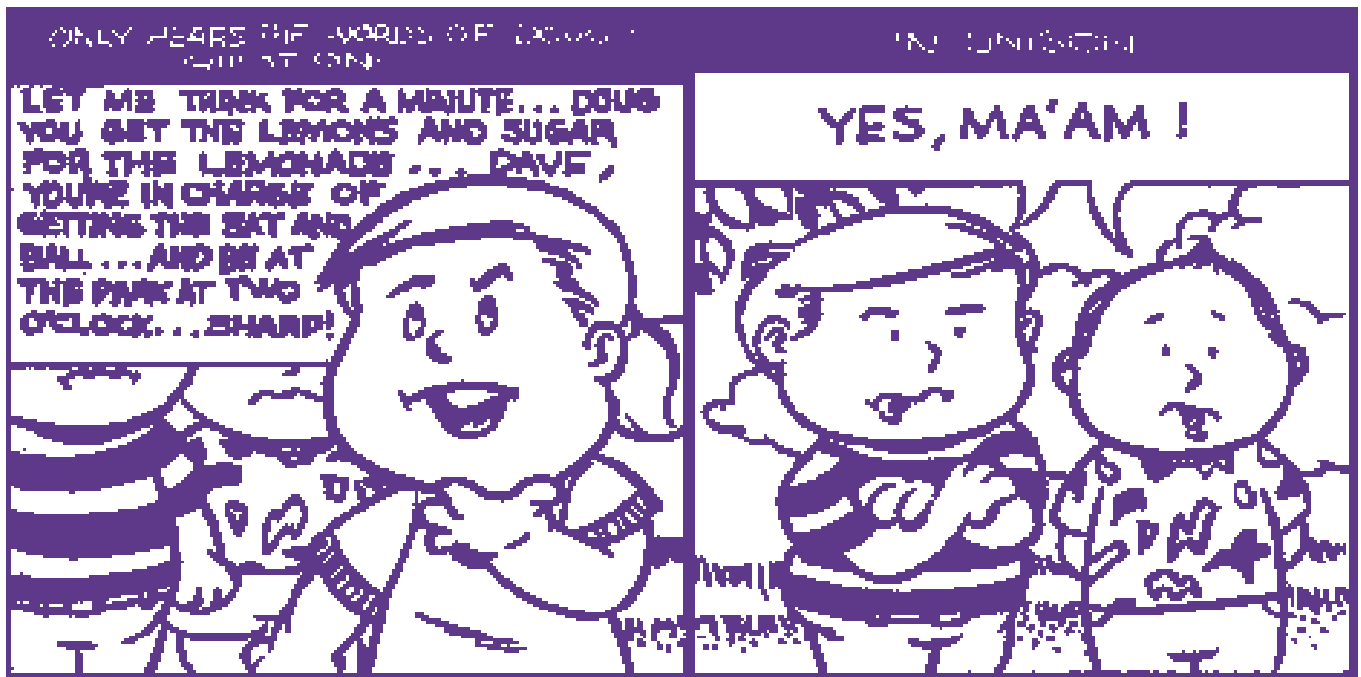
Second, the desired leadership in an Explorer post is shared leadership. This shared sense of leadership is a natural outgrowth of seeing service as leadership. With shared leadership, the goal is to involve

everyone in the decision-making process. Everyone has a responsibility to participate.

Third, the desired leadership is grounded in principles. Principles are the foundation that gives leadership a sense of direction when it comes to actually doing something, making decisions, looking at one’s own behavior, and making desired changes. They influence what we think about. They are the kinds of things that result in character. They are at the heart of what makes a caring and responsible person.

As an Explorer, you may hear a term used to convey a kind of leadership that is grounded in values. That term is *Character Education in Action*. Character Education in Action simply reinforces the idea that *we learn by doing and by looking at what we have done*. You will come to realize the meaning of leadership best, not through preaching or mandates, but through action—through sharing activities with one another and by interacting with caring and responsible adults.

The other part of Character Education in Action is looking back, and that is called *reflec-*



tion. An experience is not complete until you've had a chance to think about it and understand it.

How Do You Become This Kind of Leader?

We all probably know some, if not all, of the things we must do to become this kind of leader. The specifics that follow are not full of surprises. The process begins and ends with our taking responsibility for actually *doing* these things until they become a part of us. That's what is hard!

To become and to be the second kind of leader, we need to

- Think for ourselves
- Have respect for the value of each person
- Listen and empathize with the thoughts and feelings of others
- Clarify our expectations and the expectations of others
- Commit to our responsibilities
- Face problems for the purpose of solving them
- Notice growth
- Take every opportunity to encourage, provide support, and provide timely feedback
- Accept our own humanity and the humanity of others—see the humor in our actions

- Reflect on our actions—examine our thoughts and feelings
- Choose to change, when change is necessary for growth
- Discover what we value, and reaffirm those values in how we act
- Respect other people to the point that we give them the same right and responsibility to do these things—to think, clarify their expectations, commit to their responsibilities, and so on

Back to Beth

Again, before going on to the next section, stop for a minute. Remember the episode with Beth, Doug, and Dave? If Beth had been the second kind of leader in that scenario, can you visualize what she might have said, and how she might have acted? Think about that before reading the second scene of the cartoon.

The scenario could be rewritten a thousand different ways because each of us is a unique person and, therefore, will be a unique leader. There is no one way for becoming the second kind of leader. Much

depends on our intent and the spirit in which we do something.

One more thing: People are not necessarily one kind of leader or the other. Often, we're both kinds of leaders at different times. A part of growth is getting better and better at catching ourselves at what we're doing.

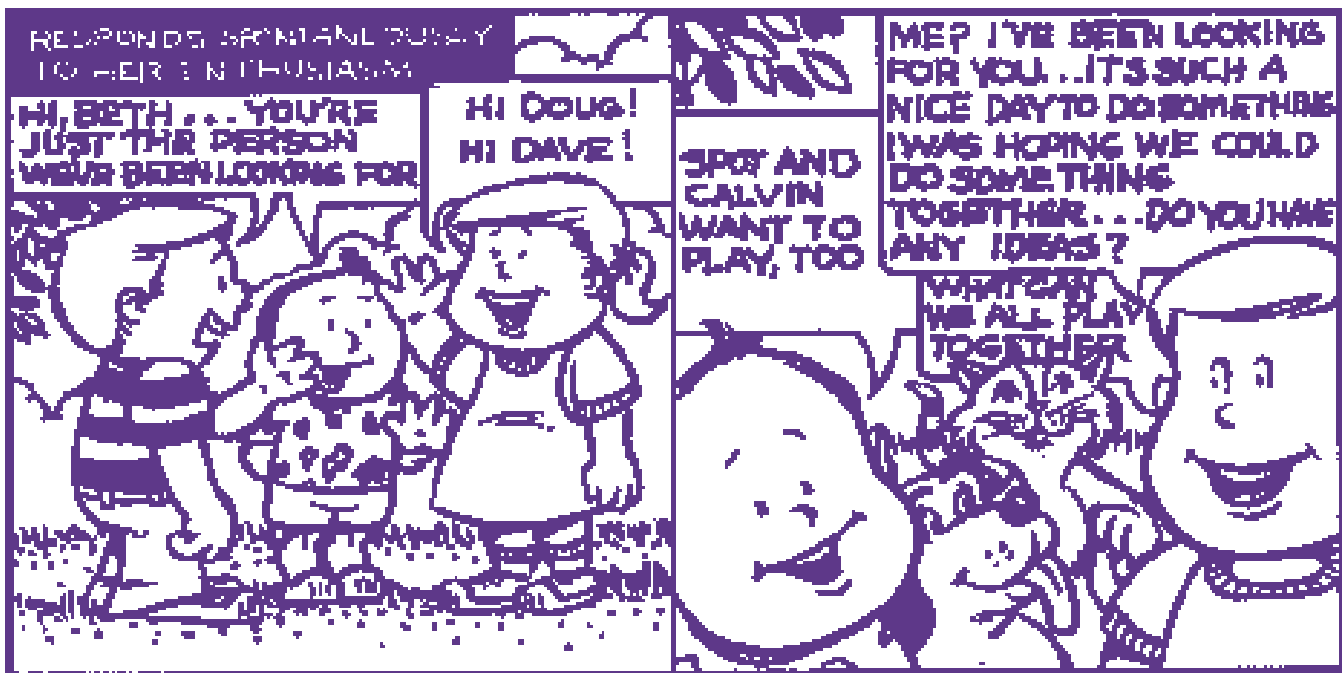
Looking at Citizenship and Service

Seeing leadership as service has some profound implications for an Explorer post and for you, a post officer.

Life is a process of receiving and giving. Both are extremely important. It is as important for us to be able to receive the gifts of others—their ideas, skills, and insights—as it is for us to give those things to others.

“Generosity of spirit is thus the ability to acknowledge an interconnectedness—one’s debts to society—that binds one to others . . . It is also the ability to engage in the caring that nurtures that interconnectedness. It is a concept of citizenship that is still alive in America that everyone should strive for.”

Robert Bellah
Habits of the Heart



As young people, you are not *waiting* to be citizens. You already are citizens. You have as much to give as anyone else, and our families, communities, and our country need your gifts. Don't underestimate what you can do or what your post participants can do.

Think about the number of lives affected by the post participants in California who marked the trails in a national forest for the visually impaired so that they could learn about the flora and fauna. Think about the lives that have been affected by a ham radio post in Arizona that provides communication services in emergency situations. Or think about the effect of a history post in Iowa that faithfully recreated the daily life of an 1850s' frontier settlement.

In this upside-down version of leadership, where you see yourselves serving others, consider yet another important implication.

We don't rely on others to define the limits or frontiers of what we can do. Instead of looking up an organization and asking, "Do you have a project

you need help with?" you take the next step. Think about the needs you see around you, you look at the talents and resources of your post, and *you* come up with ideas. You are the designers, the dreamers, the true explorers.

In the second scenario when Beth asked, "Do you have any ideas?" there were many important things going on. It was not only that Beth asked her friends for ideas, it was also the manner in which she asked the question. She *believed* that they had good ideas. That is the kind of leadership your participants need to hear from you. They'll come up with ideas, just as Doug did, who, after thinking for a minute, excitedly said, "I have an idea! I have an idea!"

In the next chapter, we'll talk about planning your post's program. Remember the implications we discussed in this section as you consider, suggest, ask for ideas from the participants, and plan *your* actual program. Think about the unlimited power you have to make a difference.

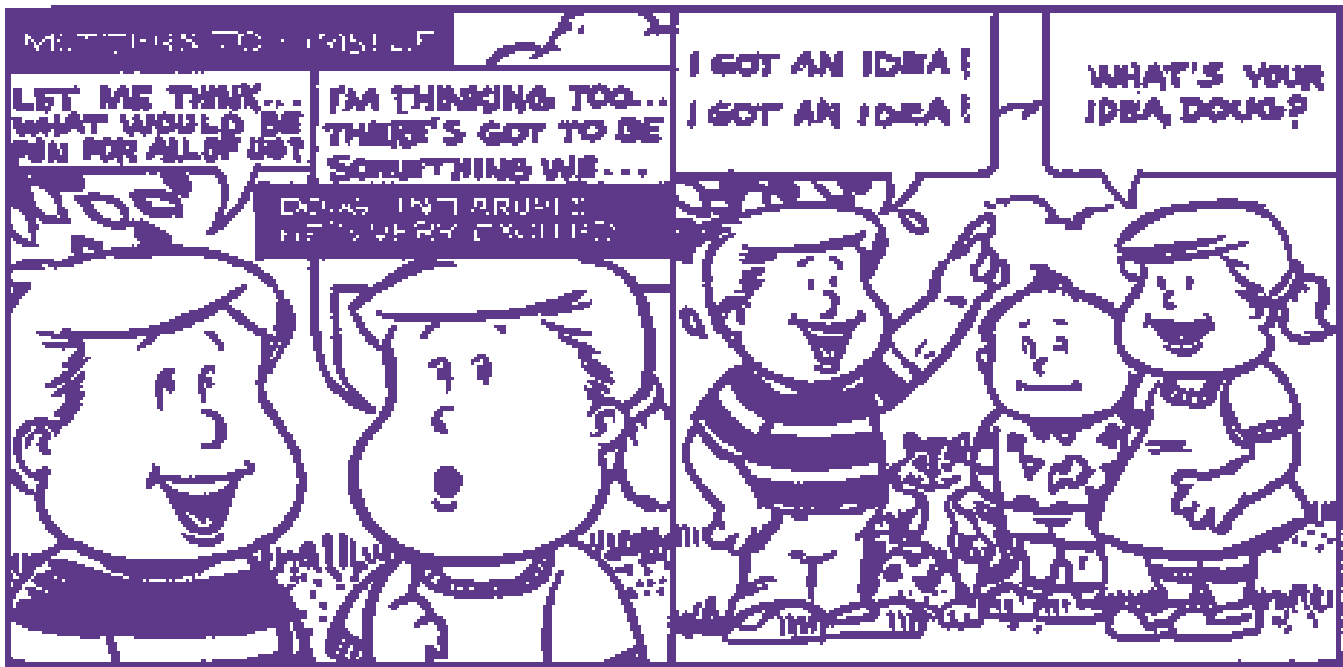
Conditions Promoting Growth and Development

Every age has exciting possibilities for growth. We go through different stages of growth in our lives, and each one is crucial to our overall development. Adolescence is one of those vital stages.

Important things have been discovered about the growth and development that needs to happen at this time in life, things that you, as young people, must not miss out on. The reason is that, when young people miss out on these kinds of things, they may become adults who are not healthy or whole. Perhaps those adults keep looking back and trying to fill the holes in their lives rather than looking forward and living full, productive lives.

What are these things that are so critical to growth and development? Young people need experiences that provide opportunities to

- Interact with peers and acquire a sense of belonging
- Gain experiences in decision making



- Discuss examples of conflicting values and formulate their own value systems
- Reflect on self in relation to others and discover more about themselves by looking outward as well as inward, by interaction and introspection
- Experiment with their own identity, with relationships to other people, and with ideas, and try out various roles without having to commit themselves irrevocably
- Develop a feeling of accountability in the context of a relationship among equals; to participate as a responsible member of a group of people
- Cultivate a capacity to enjoy life

(Conditions described in *Requirements for Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth* by Gisela Konopka)

Consider how many of these conditions are an essential part of Exploring. Look back at the goals of Exploring, and think about your responsibilities as an officer. They are all related to the conditions necessary for growth and development listed above.

Applying Leadership to Post Experiences

Let's try to apply what we've said about leadership to the kinds of experiences you will have as a post officer, and take a moment to examine three kinds of experiences in particular:

- Experiences with certain expectations and specific goals
- Common, everyday experiences
- Very challenging experiences

Experiences with Specific Expectations and Goals

As an officer, you will be involved with many post experiences that have definite expectations and specific goals associated with them. All the events in the first three months of your post fit this description, as does any activity in your year's program of activities, your superactivity, your regular post meetings, and your officers' meetings.

This kind of post experience asks certain things of a leader, of an officer. It asks you to take responsibility for:

- **Having carefully thought through the purpose or mission of that activity.**

For example, if you are the president, one of your goals in the officers' briefing is to explain to the other officers the purpose of the post officers' seminar. That means you have carefully gone through the agenda for the post officers' seminar with your Advisor, and spent some time by yourself deciding how best to communicate the seminar to your officers.

- **Helping everyone feel a part of the mission of each of these specific post experiences.**

Officers and participants must feel that they can contribute something of value to the goals of each post activity. As a leader, you must be sure everyone is encouraged to contribute and everyone is carefully listened to. Sometimes, in an organization or community, it's easy to get into a pattern where we listen to ideas from the same people again and again. It's important that leaders in any organization ensure that it is including a diversity of ideas.

- **Keeping a meeting, a seminar, or an activity on track.**

If you know and have really thought through the expectations and goals of the post experience you're engaged in, you will know when that activity is getting off track. Using the goals and expectations is also an excellent way to objectively get people back on track. They help keep personalities and emotions in their proper perspective.

- **Weighing and examining whether what occurred in these specific post experiences achieved their goals.**

Reflection should be an integral part of each post experience. When you reflect on post experiences with definite expectations and goals, you have a good way to assess how successful or worthwhile that completed activity was, and to ask the next question: Why or why not?

Common, Everyday Experiences

We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that it's the big events that make all the difference in a successful Explorer program. Often, it's the common, everyday moments that characterize a post.

For example, officers' reports are a regular part of post meetings and officers' meetings. As a fellow officer, could you make a difference by complimenting other officers when they give particularly good reports or presentations? Could you make a difference if you personally talked with an officer whose reports had become stagnant, who seemed to be just going through the motions?

Consider other common, everyday moments like these:

- Being on time
- Participating in unexciting duties, such as getting the necessary equipment for an activity
- Remembering to say thank you to people—participants, other officers, and adult leaders
- Pairing up with different participants in an activity, not the same ones
- Taking the time to discover why someone who has often suggested ideas hasn't in a while
- Finding out why someone's attendance is becoming sporadic

Challenging Experiences

Whenever there are people, there are challenging experiences. A challenging experience may be an interpersonal conflict or a problem that needs to be addressed. In Exploring, we have discovered that one of the most challenging experiences that a leader has is the area of delegating responsibilities. It's often hard to know when support and direction are still needed and when it's time to let go.

We're not going to make this challenging experience seem easier than it really is, but we'll talk about some guidelines for you to consider:

- Keep in mind that every situation is unique and that the individuals involved are unique. You should consider each situation on its own merits.
- If we are honest with ourselves, we are probably more aware than we'd like to admit that we know when support is still needed and when it is time to let go. Often, the problem is not knowing the answer to this question—it is confronting ourselves and admitting that it's hard for us to give up some of our control, to step away from trying to do everything and letting someone else have the opportunity.
- It's important that when you do delegate responsibility, you give people the opportunity both to succeed and to fail. You should not step in too quickly; you must truly give them the responsibility.

In Exploring, we have developed two learning activities to help you with two specific kinds of challenging experiences. The first activity (*problem solving*) is designed to help you solve problems that arise inside or outside of your post. The second activity (*ethical controversy*) is designed to help you learn how to think through the ethical considerations of challenging situations and to lead a group to a consensus after considering those ethical issues. Both of these

activities are explained in the Appendix of this handbook.

When you begin to consider these three kinds of experiences—experiences with definite goals; common, everyday experiences; and challenging experiences—where you as a leader can make a difference, you begin to realize more and more the need and purpose for ongoing contemplation, for thinking about things, for reflection.

