

Developing Student Leaders:

Five Core Skills Every Student Leader Needs

By: Tim Milburn

The study of leadership can include such a wide range of things. When my student leaders approach me at the beginning of their student leadership year, they will often ask what they need to focus on. They want to know what to work on in order to be an effective student leader.

As a result of those conversations, I've narrowed the list down to five core leadership skills that I believe are accessible to student leaders. I call them The Student Leadership Backpack (SLB).

The SLB contains the tools that a student leader will need to be successful throughout a student leadership year. I have chosen these because they can be learned and developed. While this is my own subjective list, it has proven itself over and over again as the most valuable of leadership traits for those involved in student leadership opportunities.

1. Lead Yourself First - The Student Leader's Hardest Task

Student Leaders start with themselves. Character, self-discipline, and personal organization skills determine what kind of leader a person will be. Student Leaders must serve as an example to those who put their trust and loyalty in them. Student Leadership starts off as an inside job.

2. Develop Your Influence With Others - The Student Leader's Biggest Asset

Influence allows a student leader to lead. A student leader knows how to move people in a certain direction through mission, vision, and values.

3. Make A Difference Mindset - The Student Leader's Noblest Cause

The student leader understands that there is a moment between a person's need and their ideal future and helps them achieve that. A student leader knows that participating in this moment is the opportunity to be the difference that people are looking for.

4. Clear Communication - The Student Leader's Strongest Skill

The ability to communicate is often overlooked in student leadership. But clear communication is what motivates and moves people. A student leader must be able to keep people informed and focused on what's most important for the organization. A successful student leader will provide clarity and not confusion.

5. Get Others Involved - The Student Leader's Highest Investment

By definition, a student leader is one who has people following him or her. If all a student does is accomplish tasks, he or she is a student worker. But if a student focuses on getting others involved and spends time equipping them, he or she is a student leader.

I have incorporated each of these core leadership skills into the Core Leadership Training Modules. That's because I wanted to be intentionally training my student leaders in each of these five areas. How are you intentionally training your student leaders?