Animal Leadership Activity

Overview and purpose
This activity can be used to engage students in a conversation about how complex leadership can be, different leadership styles and how people with various leadership styles can work together. Use this activity in the classroom or with any group of students (e.g., school health team members, sports teams, school clubs).

Participants
Junior and senior high school students

Time needed
60–75 minutes

Materials
- Animal pictures (included)
- “Attributes of Leaders” handout (included)
- Leadership quotations (included)
- Markers
- Flipchart paper

Leader preparation before the activity
- Hang the leadership quotations around the room.
- Stick the animal pictures onto flipchart paper and put them up on walls around the room. Ensure that markers are available at each picture.

Notes/adaptations
- Student leaders can facilitate all or parts of this activity if they are given time to prepare.
- Depending on the time available, this activity can be completed over two sessions (Parts A–C at one time, and Parts D–E at another time).

Instructions

A. Large group introductory discussion (5–10 minutes)
1. Instruct students to think about someone in their life who they consider to be an excellent leader. This person may be someone that they know or someone who has influenced them.
2. Have participants introduce themselves and share who they identified as a leader in ten words or less.
3. Explain that one of the first hurdles to overcome in leadership is to understand that not all leaders fit the stereotype or have the same traits. Leadership is complex, and can include a broad range of people, actions and abilities.

B. Large group discussion: definitions of leadership (10 minutes)
1. Explain to students that leadership has many definitions and interpretations. Ask student volunteers to read out the leadership quotations posted around the room.
2. Have students answer the following questions:
   - What do these quotations have in common?
     - Possible answer: All quotations recognize that leadership occurs in the context of a group or when people are working together.
   - What are some styles of leadership that you’ve seen or experienced (e.g., the way that a leader acts)? Can you give an example?
     - Possible answer: Leadership styles occur on a continuum. Hierarchical leadership is a top-down style of leadership, where one person is largely in charge of making decisions. Shared leadership is a democratic style of leadership that involves using different people to lead and make or inform decisions at different times.
• Is one of these leadership styles preferred over the other? When might each style be more appropriate?

  » Possible answer: Hierarchical leadership might be more appropriate during an emergency, when there is no time to request input and decisions must be made quickly (e.g., evacuation during a fire). Democratic leadership might be more appropriate when a leader needs to get buy-in from a group about a decision (e.g., a teacher using student input to create a set of classroom rules). In many cases, a leader may need to use both styles and act across the continuum of leadership styles.

3. Explain to students that many people have a preferred leadership style that they use in a leadership role. It is important to recognize your own preferred style, and respect the styles of those around you.

C. Large group discussion: attributes of a leader (10 minutes)

1. Distribute the “Attributes of Leaders” handout and ask students to read it. Instruct them to circle any characteristics they would use to describe themselves, and add any additional characteristics at the bottom of the worksheet.

2. Ask students the following questions:

• What words stood out to you?

• What attributes struck you as being especially important? Why?

• What attributes do you think would be the most challenging to develop or apply?

• What leadership attributes did you add to the list?

• Are there any attributes you would like to develop in the future? How could you do this?

D. Personal leadership style exercise (25–30 minutes)

1. Just as we are individuals in other ways, we also differ in our leadership styles. This exercise helps students examine their own leadership styles, and reflect on their implications in different situations.

2. Invite the group to think about the qualities of each animal and decide whether their leadership style is most like a dog, cat, snake, lion, deer or mouse. Note: The purpose of this activity is to have participants identify these qualities on their own; definitions are likely to vary from group to group.

3. Instruct students to go to the animal that most reflects their leadership style.

4. In small groups (based on each animal), have students use the flipchart to write down the qualities of that animal (allow 10–15 minutes for discussion). Tell students that they may switch groups if they feel the qualities of another animal are more consistent with their leadership style.

5. Have each small group present back to the larger group.

6. After all the groups have shared, ask each student to select one of the other animals in the room and respond to the following questions by writing their answer on a piece of paper (alternately, have students pair up with a different animal and discuss these questions):

• Given my qualities and the qualities of this other animal, how can I be better prepared to work well with that animal?

• Why is it important to understand and see the differences between my animal’s leadership qualities and those of another animal?

• Do I ever need to take on the leadership style of another animal? When? Why?

7. Have some or all of the students share their responses to the questions in step 6 with the larger group.

E. Large group debrief discussion (10–15 minutes)

1. Facilitate a discussion with students using the following questions:

• How did your group approach the tasks assigned?
  » Were your actions reflective of your leadership style/animal?
  » Were there any challenges?
  » Was everyone engaged in the conversation?

• How did you feel when your animal was being discussed by the other students?

• What insights did you gain about your own leadership style?

• How can you apply what you learned as you move forward?

Source

Creating Sustainable and Active Leadership, originally adapted from The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, National Network for Youth, Youth Leadership Institute.

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Deer
Dog
Mouse
Snake
Lion
Attributes of Leaders

Below is a list of characteristics that are sometimes used to describe leaders. Circle the attributes that you would use to describe yourself. Use the space at the bottom to add other leadership attributes that you feel are important.

- Physical vitality and stamina
- Intelligence and ability to make wise decisions
- Willingness (eagerness) to accept responsibility
- Ability to complete tasks successfully
- Understanding of others in the group and their needs
- Skill in dealing with people
- Need to achieve
- Capacity to motivate
- Courage, resolution and steadiness
- Capacity to win and hold trust
- Capacity to manage, decide and set priorities
- Confidence
- Ability to speak up and take control when necessary
- Adaptability and flexibility of approach

Additional attributes:
“If you can dream it, you can do it.”

Walt Disney
“Fail to honour people, they fail to honour you; but of a good leader, who talks little, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will all say: We did this ourselves.”

Lao Tzu
“True leadership is the art of changing a group from what it is to what it ought to be.”

Virginia Allen
“If you are a block ahead of the parade... you’re leading it. If you are two blocks ahead of the parade, you aren’t even in it.”

Dr. Lawrence Kratz
“Time is neutral and does not change things. With courage and initiative, leaders change things.”

Jesse Jackson
“Leaders must encourage their organizations to dance to forms of music yet to be heard.”

Warren G. Bennis
“Do what you do so well that they will want to return to see it again and bring their friends.”

Walt Disney
“Successful leadership is not about being tough or soft, sensitive or assertive, but about a set of attributes. First and foremost is character.”

Warren G. Bennis
“Mountaintops inspire leaders, but valleys mature them.”

Winston Churchill
“Think big, act big, and the results will be big.”

Anonymous
“Our only limit to the realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt
“A leader takes people where they want to go. A great leader takes people where they don’t necessarily want to go, but ought to be.”

Rosalyn Carter
“Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson
“Never trouble another for what you can do for yourself.”

Thomas Jefferson
“All of our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them.”

Walt Disney