

Midwinter Conference Presentation – Leadership Chairman Deanna Farley

The Department Leadership Committee has been asked to address concerns expressed by our units. Many have difficulty maintaining membership, having someone take on leadership roles within their unit, having enough volunteers to work on our Auxiliary programs, losing their meeting place through no fault of their own, conflict resolution issues, and the list goes on.

Department Headquarters has received many phone calls regarding different options that have helped posts and units work together. Asking The American Legion for help in the revitalization process of a Unit is a great idea. The posts and units that work together as a Legion Family have the best success rate. The following suggestions may help struggling units:

1. Consider changing meeting times to make them more accessible for more members. For example, if the majority of the members are “seasoned members,” maybe they would rather meet during the day rather than at night, so they don’t have to drive in the dark. Conversely, if the members are still actively employed, maybe a later time would work better so they have time to get home from work, feed the kids, and get to the meeting. Sending a newsletter or summary of the meeting minutes afterwards to all members helps keep those informed who may not be able to attend the meetings. The summary doesn’t have to be long or formal – a simple email may be sufficient.
2. Have fewer “meetings” and more “events.” For example, rather than conducting a business meeting every month, have business meetings every other month and plan an activity in between – such as making tie blankets for the local nursing home, tray favors for the Veterans Home, sending greeting cards for shut-ins, or simply having a social to get to know each other better.
3. For units whose communities are close to each other, maybe they want to consider working jointly on projects. They don’t necessarily have to merge units to do that – they just work in a spirit of cooperation. However, merging is not the end of the world. It is better to merge units and keep the Auxiliary mission alive than to disband and abandon support for our veterans.
4. Encourage units to consider co-presidencies. Rather than having one person “having to do it ALL,” take turns. Maybe some members would be willing to step up if they knew they had a partner to help them. Or maybe one person doesn’t mind running meetings but doesn’t want to coordinate projects. There may be two people who would complement each other’s strengths to make the workload more manageable.
5. For the units that don’t have a place to meet, find a local library, church, community center, or restaurant. Most towns have several places that are available. (Look for restaurants with good desserts! 😊)
6. Some units get discouraged because “they don’t do enough.” Have them take a moment to determine what they DO accomplish. Most units do a poppy distribution, which is part of the Poppy Program. (If they don’t, encourage them to do one.) If they distribute poppies, they probably raise money. If they raise money, they disburse it to various veteran projects, VA hospitals, or Veterans Homes – that’s part of the VA&R Program). Many units sponsor a girl for ALA Badger Girls State (another program!). If they don’t have the funds to sponsor a girl directly, they may solicit contributions from local businesses, Rotary groups, Lions Clubs, etc. A majority of members help at their church, or volunteer at local blood drives, food pantries, etc. That’s the Community Service program! Maybe they collect a quarter every time someone swears at a meeting and donate it to AEF. Remind units they do not have to work every program! Find the ones that interest the members the most and do those. Quality is better than quantity.

If Units have other suggestions, please inform Bonnie Dorniak at Department Headquarters (608-745-0124 or deptsec@amlegionauxwi.org.) Department is always looking for new and creative ideas to share with members when they call looking for assistance.

DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP TIPS

Remember, good leaders are made, not born. If you have the desire and willpower, you can become an effective leader. Good leaders develop through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training and experience.

Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. In a nutshell, leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

Twelve Qualities of Leadership

1. BE **COURAGEOUS**: Leaders must have a strong belief system to withstand and meet boldly today's challenges and maintain the courage of their convictions.
2. BE A **"BIG THINKER"**: Leaders have the ability to see things in a large perspective. They challenge tradition; they are not afraid of idealism.
3. BE A **CHANGE MASTER**: Leaders move people and things in different directions that are more beneficial to all.
4. BE **ETHICAL**: Leaders have a keen sense of fairness and justice. They are highly principled.
5. BE **PERSISTENT AND REALISTIC**: Leaders set realistic goals and see them to completion.
6. HAVE A **SENSE OF HUMOR**: Leaders know that life and business are no joking matters, but they have the ability to keep things in perspective.
7. BE A **RISK TAKER**: Leaders have the courage to begin while others are waiting for better times, safer situations, and assured results.
8. BE **POSITIVE AND HOPE FILLED**: Leaders know that 80% of success in life is having a positive mental "ATTITUDE".
9. BE **MORALLY STRONG**: Leaders cherish personal freedom and know that integrity and taking full responsibility for their actions is a vital part of the moral code on which they base their actions.
10. BE A **DECISION MAKER**: Leaders are willing to make decisions that affect future generations because they know that indecision will forfeit everyone's future.
11. **ACCEPT AND USE POWER WISELY**: Leaders take responsibility for themselves, for their actions, and for the results.
12. BE **COMMITTED**: Leaders are committed to their goals and stay long after others have given up.

LEADERSHIP PRESENTATION TIPS

- An **EFFECTIVE LEADER** creates a vision of the future and is able to deliver that vision to others. That vision will encourage our membership to think outside of the box! That is important!! Just because it has always been that way, we can still make it better!!
- Be **PREPARED** to speak at any event! You may not know when you will be asked to speak. We are a role model and a pillar in our communities. Make us look good!
- When you are **INVITED TO SPEAK**, ask how long you are expected to talk. Allow for time to answer questions. Be prepared.
- People want facts, **NOT YOUR OPINION!** Be able to back up what you are saying.
- Research your material! Have a list of **REFERENCES** with you if needed.
- Don't be afraid to say "**I DON'T KNOW**" but I'll get back to you! Remember to follow up!
- **LOOKS ARE EVERYTHING!** Dress appropriately. ALA Branded clothing is always OK!
- Stand up to **be HEARD!** Your voice will project better. Use a microphone if available.
- When speaking with other presenters, be careful **not to upstage** the main speaker.
- A leadership role is not a **DNA position**. (Decide and announce). Ask for input from others.
- Give everyone a chance to speak. Have a **ROUND TABLE** at the close of the meeting.
- Handout a **PRINTED AGENDA** for everyone to follow. Honor timelines start to finish!
- **KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE.** Do not preach to the choir!

LEADERSHIP TEAM OBJECTIVE

- The **LEADERSHIP TEAM'S OBJECTIVE** is to work closely with the District Presidents, District Membership Chairmen, and District Leadership Chairmen to identify units in need of additional information and/or training.
- **PART OF THAT OBJECTIVE** includes developing future leaders in each unit by enhancing their knowledge of the ALA history, their programs and the organization itself. The team will be a unit's mentor where needed.
- The **DEPARTMENT LEADERSHIP TEAM** offers classes in a Leadership Workshop environment or will provide materials for one hour individual sessions to be done at the unit level. These are some of the items that could be covered in a unit meeting or Leadership Workshop environment:
 - Duties of Unit officers
 - How to conduct a meeting
 - I'm a Member, What next?
 - Finding / utilizing the strengths of your unit members
 - Better reporting practices
 - Using current technology
 - Conflict Resolution
- **MANY LEADERSHIP REFERENCE MATERIALS** are available on the American Legion Auxiliary National Website as well as our Leadership Program Action Plan on our Department website. The Leadership Program develops leaders at all levels of our membership.