

Leadership



What is a Leader?

Most people tend to associate leaders with people who are in the public eye. These tend to be people like our president, mayor, pastor, or CEO. The common thread is that these leaders have influence and some decision-making authority. Another common perception is that leaders are people who are charismatic and dominant. Often times they embody qualities that we feel we don't personally possess.

Our misconception of what a leader is can lead to the belief that we can never be leaders. Nothing could be further from the truth. When organizing in manufactured home parks it's important to note that leaders are not born, they are developed. Being charismatic has nothing to do with being a leader. Being a leader means understanding the power that you have as it relates to the power of your community.

Three Elements of a Leader

Leaders Have a Vision.

Our community is not perfect; there are always things that can change. Our values influence our vision for our community. Effective leaders understand their vision as it is tied to their values and the values of everyone else in their community.

For example, in 2007, residents of manufactured home parks in Minnesota were organizing to pass a new state law that protected against the closing of parks. Leaders across the state got involved in the process, called and met with their legislators, and were able to successfully gather enough support to pass our new state law. Leaders in Minnesota shared the same values of "Family, Home, and Community." The new state law was their common vision of how to live out their values.

Leaders Have a Base.

In the section on "Power" we learn about where power comes from [Organized People, Organized Money, Organized Resources, and Organized Ideas]. Leaders draw their power from their community (or base); they support the work of their leaders. Leaders in turn have the responsibility of keeping their base engaged, and will consistently have events or actions that their base can participate in. Leaders are ineffective and have little power in a community without a strong base.

Leaders Have a Vehicle.

Unfortunately, this doesn't mean that you get a free car if you become a leader. Figuratively speaking, a vehicle is a means by which to live out your vision and values. A vehicle is also an effective way to keep your base organized. What do you do with a group of leaders and a base? For many residents of manufactured home parks, their vehicle has become a homeowners association.

A vehicle is simply a formal structure, which leaders and a base can participate in to create the changes they want to see in their community.

Stages of Leadership Development

Leadership development has to be an intentional component of any organization, whether it is a homeowners association in a particular manufactured home park or a statewide tenants' union. The four stages of leadership development take leaders through a journey of self-discovery. At every stage, responsibilities increase and change. There is no set period of time for development, as this varies from person to person.

New Leaders: Getting Started

A leader in this stage understands the importance of getting people involved. They generate a lot of good questions. They also attend meetings and encourage other people in their community to attend as well. A common quality of a new leader is that they're angry, they understand what's going on in their community, and they are able to see the unfairness and inequality. In meetings, these leaders participate, give their opinions, and figure out the next steps for their organization.

Emerging Leaders: More Responsibility and a Base

The emerging stage engages the leader with new responsibilities. The main responsibility in this stage is recruitment of new members. This is done through one-to-one personal visits in which the leader talks with individual people about their shared vision for the community.

A leader in this stage asks good questions but also actively seeks out the answers to their questions through research. The leader begins to take a more active role in the campaign by being a spokesperson at specific activities (e.g. rally, meeting) and by seeking out responsibilities at meetings. They also understand the importance of the media and how to get them involved. In the development process they begin to learn about local and state governments, and they become experts on their specific issue.

Their world view changes from their specific neighborhood to a better understanding of the bigger picture. Lastly, they understand how institutional power works.

Experienced Leaders: Teaching Others

An experienced leader teaches others around them and intentionally develops new leaders. They coordinate the outreach to the base and continue to do one-to-one personal visits. Experienced leaders recruit allies to support their campaign. They are also the main representatives for the organization in coalitions and partnerships.

They are comfortable conducting media interviews alone. They attend and participate in strategy sessions. They actively take a role in prepping new leaders in taking a more active role in the organization. They participate in negotiations and run meeting evaluations. An experienced leader is able to connect their issue with much broader issues; for example, how their manufactured home park is tied to the broader issue of affordable housing.

Lastly, an experienced leader chairs meetings and participates on boards of various organizations, such as APAC.

Super Experienced Leaders

At this highest level of leadership development, the leader takes a step back from the day-to-day activities of the organization and acts as an overseer. The crucial component of this leadership stage is encouraging new leaders to take a more active role in the organization. A super experienced leader will chair coalitions and provide feedback to emerging leaders.

Competing Mind sets in Addressing Social Problems

Victims	Functionaries	Leaders
Complain a lot but unwilling to do anything	Prepared to help, but not willing to take initiative	Take initiative and inspire others to get involved
React to a situation only when it throws them into crisis	Ability to be proactive but tend to get bogged down in bureaucratic "busy work"	Proactive in demanding solutions to community issues
Have needs	Have «capacity»	Have power
Motivated by fear	Unclear motivations	Motivated by self-interest, values, and vision
Don't believe that change is possible	willing to accept limited changes but only as it relates to problems	Believe in deep and lasting changes that alter relations of power
Take directions from anyone willing to help them (so-called experts)	Take directions from protocols and other functionaries, do not consultation with the community	Engage the whole community to create direction
Blame everyone for their problems including themselves	Tend to ignore root causes of the problem and instead look only at fixing its symptoms	Strategies and conduct power analysis to find out who can deliver desired changes
Short term involvement, only until their fear goes away	Easily frustrated or burnt out because they can't solve everyone's problems	Develop long term vision for change that requires delegating responsibility and cultivating new leaders

These are not static categories that people are stuck in. We all ultimately choose the kind of people we want to be. Being a victim, functionary, or a leader has very little to do with one's status, profession, age, etc. If we are serious about pursuing social change, we need to make the decision to be a leader, and work to turn other victims and functionaries into leaders as well.

When you were growing up, were you ever forced to sit at the 'kids table' even though you were way too old to sit there? You would sit and eat your dinner, while your companions were throwing food at each other and crying because they couldn't play with their toys. At the other table, the table for grown ups, people were having conversations about your family, and about you.

"This kid is really smart, but they don't have a sense of responsibility," the adults would say. "We don't give them an allowance, because they'd just spend it on a car and clothes. We think we should send them to boarding school so they can have a better education. They'll have to earn their fair share though, this summer we're making them work at the car wash."

Putting You in Your Place

It's amazing how many decisions are made for you when you aren't at the table. Before you know it, you're working for a car wash all summer to pay for boarding school, but you don't want to go to boarding school. You don't want to buy a car either; your dream is to play the saxophone! They are right about one thing though. You are smart.

So why aren't you at the table? This scenario is a metaphor for society today. Decisions are being made about your life and your future, and you aren't at the table. How often are manufactured home park residents present when decisions are being made? Rarely.

There are two reasons you aren't asked to sit at the table

- People are doing bad things to you, and they don't want you to know about it
- People are trying to do "good things," and they think they know what's best for you

Either way, people are making decisions for you. They aren't giving you a choice. You won't be receiving an invitation. In Arden Hills, MN, homeowners became aware of a plan to build a freeway through their park, which would destroy at least 50 homes. They went to city hall to investigate why they had not been consulted about these plans and how they would be able to participate in changing the plan. The city responded: "You can watch the city council meetings on TV."

People are trying to put you in your place, and that place is not at the table.

Who is at the Table?

People at the table participate in "public life." They are well connected. They are big shots. They have titles. They are leaders. Specifically, they are politicians, business people, lobbyists, celebrities, the media, functionaries, and so-called "experts."

What Happens When You Aren't at the Table

Everyday we see the consequences of policies that were formed without residents at the table. What do you think your lot rent would be today if residents were invited to your park-lord's staff meetings to discuss rent increases? How many parks would still be open if residents were present for back door meetings between developers and city planners? How much park prejudiced press coverage would there be if residents were in the newsrooms when reporters were told what stories to cover?

If you have chosen to become a leader, and you care about stopping rent increases, park closings and media bias against your community, the solution lies in getting involved in public life.

The Assault on Your Public Life

We have been taught that power is bad. We have also been taught that you are either born a leader or a follower. If you are not charismatic, a genius or big shot then you cannot be a leader. This is all designed to deny you a public life. Park prejudice is a system of biases that strips people of their public life. Time after time, when homeowners step into the public area, their adversaries will take cheap shots and make personal attacks about them. "This person has a gambling problem. They never pay rent. Their home is a mess." It's amazing how often the other side will play to these stereotypes in front of government bodies to destroy your credibility. Usually the statements are untrue. But even if they were true, how is that anyone's business? Public officials and decision makers generally consider attacking someone's private life off limits in the context of political discussions. Why don't they apply you the same respect? Park prejudice is an assault on your public life.

Building a Public Life

By making a decision to become a leader, you have decided to have a role in public life. But don't expect the establishment to welcome you with open arms. You will have to build your public life by the same means they did, but for very different ends. You will have to form intentional relationships with powerful people. You will have to present your credentials, and take a stand for what you believe in. There will be times when you need to compromise, and times to dig in and fight. There are times when you will need to hold people accountable and there are times when people will hold you accountable. You will make friends and enemies. Sometimes friends will become enemies and enemies will become friends.

Differences Between Public and Private Relationships

Relationships you have with your closest friends and family are examples of private relationships. Relationships with public officials, allies, and others in the political area are public relationships. It is important to understand some of the distinctions between the two.

<i>Private Relationships</i>	<i>Public Relationships</i>
Seek love	Seek respect
Conflict is avoided	Conflict is necessary
Unconditional	Conditional
Similarity, like mindedness	Diversity, multiple perspectives
You have to be nice	You have to be civil
Selfless	Self-interest
People you would go on vacation with	People you act professionally around

Being Nice

Minnesota, more than any other state in the country, prides it's self in being "nice." There is nothing wrong with being nice, but being nice should never come at your own expense. Sometimes, leaders are thrown off guard by decision makers when they meet face to face. They expect to encounter a vicious monster foaming at the mouth and threatening them. Instead they meet and find that they really are actually quite "nice." Suddenly leaders begin to second-guess themselves and their tactics. The truth is these people aren't being nice. They are being civil. They are responsible for demolishing people's homes, raising their rents to pad their own pockets, and keeping you from having a say. None of these things are nice. So in your public life, be civil. Don't be mean for the sake of being mean, but do stand up for yourself and your community and stick to your demands. Would you voluntarily tie one arm behind your back in a boxing match? No! So don't do that in your public life.

Knowing When to Step Up and When to Step Back

In the community-organizing chapter we looked at power from two points of view: power as it is and power as it can be. We also talked about good and bad qualities of leaders. To be effective as a leader you need power, but there is a right way and a wrong to use it.

What is Power Building?

Power building means using your leadership to build the power of your organization and advancing the cause of Mobile Justice. Power building requires working with others in the community to marshal all the clout and resources you can to address common concerns in the community. Power building is relational. It requires building relationships with your base, your allies, agenda setters, and decision makers.

Good leaders understand community organizing and the importance of developing leaders in the community to build on the work they are doing. Power building doesn't mean creating power in the theoretical sense, but actually exercising it by demonstrating to people your ability to create change. Power is a means to an end, not an end in and of itself.

What is Power Tripping?

Power tripping happens when a leader tries to individually consolidate as much power as they can, often at the expense of others. Power trippers don't see it as necessary to develop a common vision or goals, but rather spend all their energy trying to convince others that their way is best.

Frequently power trippers exhibit a lot of emotion and extreme unreasonableness. Many power trippers will play the "selfless card" to avoid criticism. Power trippers are also very fearful of allowing others to the table, because they feel it will threaten their power.

The sad reality is that their power is an illusion. For that reason, power trippers often perceive themselves as having more power than they actually do. What little power they do have is abused, which turning people off to the organization and undermines the real power they could have. Remember, our power comes from organized people, organized ideas, organized resources, and organized actions. All of these things require power building.

Interventions

Here are some ideas for interventions to break the power tripping cycle. Personal interventions are generally best to try first. They involve meeting one-on-one or in a small group with the power tripper. The main goal here is to convince the leader of the need for change. If this fails you should consider structural interventions, which require working within the organization itself to create changes.

Personal Interventions

Analyze the Problem

What is the problem you're having? Does the leader fail to understand the consequences of their actions? Or do they know the consequences and yet they power trip anyways? How will this person respond to criticism? What are the benefits and risks of intervening?

Appeal to Self-Interest

Ask yourself what is in this leader's self-interest. Why are they a leader? What do they value? What issues or complaints do they have with their involvement? Rather than looking at power building as a threat to their authority, they should see the benefits (less work to do on their own, more likelihood of success, and more genuine power).

Choose the Best Messenger

Who does this person listen to? What relationships does this person value? Who do they respect? Who will they not respond well to? Who will they feel threatened by?

Structural Interventions

Control of the Agenda

The one who sets the agenda carries a tremendous amount power. Make sure that multiple voices are heard in setting the agenda, and that the agenda allows for community comments, discussion, and decision-making.

Bylaws

If your association has bylaws, what do they say? Are there things that are in the bylaws that concentrate power in the hands of a few? If so, how can you change them? Are there good things in the bylaws that aren't being followed? If so, how are they enforced?

Democratic Elections

Leaders should be directly elected by your base to ensure that they are truly representative of the community. Leaders need to be accountable. If they are not serving the best interest of the organization, people have the right to vote for new leaders to represent them.

Adopt Power Building Model

The next page lays out an alternative model to the power tripping cycle. Use this as a tool to promote democratic decision-making and to keep people involved in the work of the organization.

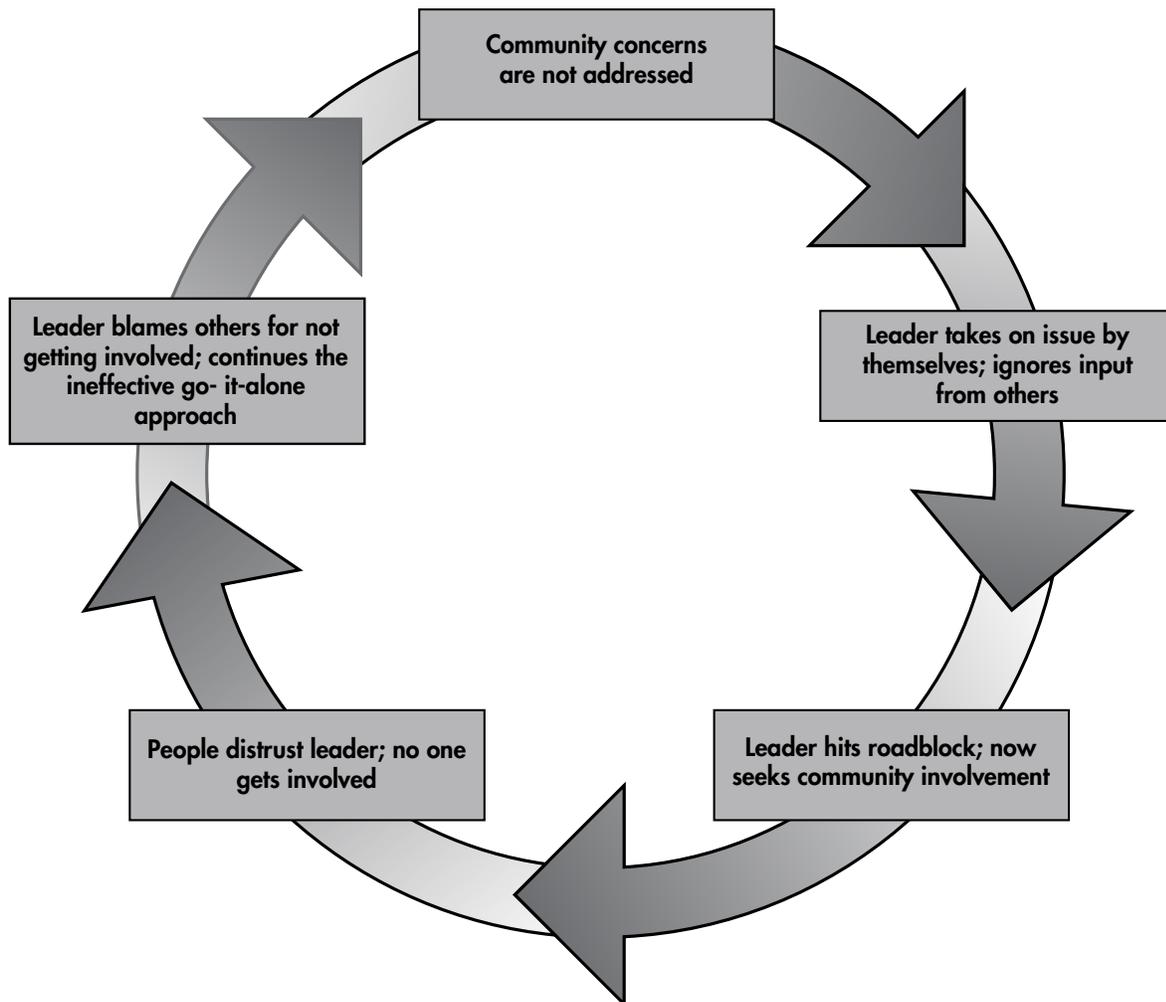
Power Building Model



Power Tripping versus Power Building

Unfortunately, this is a cycle that plays itself out all too often within organizations. Sometimes it is an intentional abuse of power, but many times it is unintentional. Some leaders don't recognize that their actions and behavior are undermining their community's ability to build their power to address community issues. Power tripping needs to be addressed whether intentional or not.

Power Tripping Cycle



The organizing section of the manual explores some strategies to get people involved as leaders for change in your community. We also talked about self-interest as a means of building honest relationships with potential leaders. Understanding the different stages of leadership development charts a course for how a leader can grow.

The reasons people choose to become leaders are different than the reasons people choose to stay leaders. A serious challenge faced by any organization is retaining leadership and getting people to work beyond an immediate crisis once it is resolved.

Retaining powerful leaders is critical to the success of your organization. When a leader leaves the organization you lose a lot. You lose the knowledge and experience that person gained while with the organization. You lose the relationships that person built with decision makers and allies. You lose the time and energy that went into training and developing that leader. Sometimes you even lose some of your base. The point here is that whatever time you put into retaining leaders pales in comparison to the amount of work you will have to do to make up for lost leaders.

Why People Become Leaders

People usually become leaders in response to an immediate crisis that impacts them directly. They are angry at the sense of injustice they see, and through their leadership they aim to right a wrong. Some folks become leaders in the fight for Mobile Justice after a history of involvement in other issues. Some people are just born angry and naturally like standing up to bullies. Others are looking for something useful to do with their time.

Why People End Their Leadership

There are numerous reasons people end their leadership. The most obvious one is that the crisis that originally got them involved has ended. Either they won and no longer feel the need to stay involved, or they lost and now feel bitter and hopeless. This isn't the only reason people end their leadership. Here are some others:

- Change in responsibilities
- Lack of time
- Fear of retaliation, or failure
- Personality conflicts within organization
- Leader feels that their work goes unappreciated or unrecognized
- Skills are misused, people aren't doing what they want to be doing
- Leader feels that they aren't being heard
- Burn out
- Feeling of doing the same things over and over again
- Frustration, cynicism, and a sense that nothing is changing

Why Leaders Stay Involved

Leaders are more likely to stay involved if they believe in a long term vision or set of goals beyond an immediate crisis. That way leaders realize that there is always more to be done and that their continued leadership has relevance. They also are more likely to stay involved when:

There are opportunities to become involved on a variety of levels (community, municipal, state, regional, national, galactic, etc.)

They connect manufactured home issues to a broader set of issues they care about (senior citizens rights, immigrant rights, affordable housing, racial and economic justice)

- They see that they are empowering others, they are agents of change
- They realize the problem isn't going to go away unless they do something
- There is a feeling of camaraderie and support from fellow leaders and allies
- Victories inspire them to hope for more change
- They feel useful and appreciated
- They feel challenged
- They see their leadership as part of their legacy

So, How do you Keep Leaders Involved?

1. Develop a long term vision. When working on a specific issue, set long term goals to show how the campaign relates to this vision.
2. Keep people fired up and angry. As long as injustice persists so should our outrage.
3. Celebrate victories. It really is okay to have fun.
4. Delegate. Spread out the work to avoid burnout
5. Use a leader's skills wisely. Don't make them do things they hate.
6. Show appreciation. Be generous with your compliments.
7. Build a strong support network. No one likes to feel that they are alone.