A Leadership Road Map for Recovery School Communities

A Guidebook for Leadership Groups

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Acknowledgement: This project was made possible by a generous grant from the C. Charles Jackson Foundation.
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Introduction

Attending school at a recovery high school or in a collegiate recovery community can be a good news/not-so-good news proposition. The good news is that the community of peers can provide invaluable support for recovery. Researchers have found that peer social support is one of the most important factors in producing positive outcomes for sustained recovery from addiction (Baker & Harris, 2010). The not-so-good news is that if the community becomes socially dysfunctional, the quality of that support can seriously suffer. One of the most important factors in maintaining the social health of a recovery community is its leadership. This refers not to the staff but rather to the members of the community itself – those members who have emerged as leaders or want to be leaders. Building strong leaders and giving them direction to lead is a critically important investment towards the strength and resilience of the community to help maintain its healthy functioning.

Reaching a desired destination requires a good map. The purpose of this guidebook is not to present an “end all, be all” approach to leadership. Rather the purpose is to outline some important issues for leadership development with high school and college students in recovery and important issues for discussion as a road map for building strong leaders and a healthy school community. There are several ways one can use this guidebook. One is to use it as a Facilitator’s Guide. Those wanting to facilitate leadership development can use this material to help build leadership groups in a recovery school. A second way is for those already emerging as leaders to use this material as a means to build a leadership team and gain traction in leading a recovery school community in a positive direction.
Where This All Began

This guidebook is the result of a leadership project generated through the interaction of practice, reflection, and theory. A generous grant from the C. Charles Jackson Foundation has made this entire project possible. The project focused on developing leadership in recovery schools. The ideas, themes, and discussion questions have evolved from a few years of dedicated practice, intense reflection, and diligent comparison to theory. Furthermore, the general themes and framework were developed in partnership with students in the StepUP Program at Augsburg College who served as co-facilitators and mentors for leadership groups at recovery high schools.

The seminal ideas for this project began with a Leadership Summit we conducted for emerging leaders in the recovery high schools in the twin cities metro area. At the first summit the students came up with the idea of having Leadership Groups at their respective schools and having college students in recovery mentor them in their leadership development. We developed this model as we worked with these groups and reflected on what seemed to work and what did not so we could learn from our experience in this endeavor. This guidebook also reflects my own research in my doctoral program in Educational Leadership. I wrote several papers on leadership and reflected on what we have done with this project in light of relevant and helpful theories to find support for what we were doing but also to generate new ideas.

A major underlying assumption about leadership development in recovery school communities is that leadership is contextual. Established models and theories of leadership can be helpful but by themselves they are insufficient because leadership must adapt to its own context to be relevant. Recovery communities are dynamic entities and are constantly changing. Consequently, their needs change as well. Leadership must also change and adapt to be effective in addressing those needs.
There are some helpful general principles of leadership but their relevance and application depends upon the needs of the context. Hence, many of the discussion questions in this guidebook are contextually-driven.

This guidebook outlines six themes that emerged in our work on leadership and leadership development. The format of this guidebook introduces each theme, reviews some relevant theory supporting the theme, and then poses reflective discussion questions for leadership groups to ponder and then act upon. This entire model is based on the exercise of interactive group reflection, action, and then further reflection. Our hope is that readers will find this manual immensely helpful as they develop leaders and leadership groups within their own recovery school communities.

**Summary of Leadership Modules**

This model of leadership emerged from our practice of developing leaders and leadership groups within recovery school settings. The themes form a basis for discussion modules which allow for context-based reflection, identifying leadership qualities, and brain-storming ideas for meaningful action. Each school and recovery community will have its own unique needs and challenges as well as assets and strengths. The trajectory of the discussion questions focuses on positive solutions and actions as a means to initiate positive change. This focus helps to prevent leadership groups from getting mired and immobilized in the negative if the community is suffering from dysfunction.

In many ways these themes form a road map for leaders. Finding one’s way towards a desired destination requires a good map. Leadership facilitators and leadership groups can use these themes to help themselves and their communities become places that support their fellow recovery school members and reach towards a level of community thriving. The following is a summary of the six themes:
One: Envision Your Leadership

The first discussion module focuses on helping emerging leaders define what it means to be a leader in their own context. The questions help the group participants to concretely describe what a leader is, looks like and acts like in their own recovery school setting. The participants can then begin to identify ways they can be the leaders they want to see in their own community.

Two: Create a Community Vision

The second module helps participants to dream big and define what they would like their recovery school to be like as a community. The questions help participants
to reflect upon what they would like to see in terms of the quality of the relationships, the levels of respect, and the overall culture in their recovery school setting. This can help them to create a vision for their community in concrete ways.

**Three: Identify Community Assets**

The third discussion module helps participants to find ways to identify and build upon the strengths of their community. These discussion questions help them to identify the positive things already present in their community and how to maximize them for the benefit of the community. The goal is to assist the participants in finding ways to build a healthier, more inclusive, and cohesive community in their respective schools.

**Four: Model Positive Self-Change**

The fourth discussion module helps participants to identify how they can be the initiators of positive change within their community. The focus is on what they can change about themselves and how they interact with others as a starting point for creating positive change within their respective school communities. The strategy is changing others by means of changing oneself.

**Five: Engage Others to Join**

The fifth module focuses upon how to engage others to do their best and become partners in helping to transform their school community. These questions direct participants to identify ways to encourage and motivate others to practice respect and build trust within the community. This module involves building positive, transformative momentum within the community by engaging others to join the cause for the benefit of the community overall.

**Six: Create a Community Impact**

The sixth discussion module is designed to help participants broaden their lens beyond their own community and see how they can make a positive difference for
others. The questions focus on how to generate ideas for community service projects for which community members will feel a passion. Furthermore, this will help members commit to a purpose greater than themselves.
Leadership Modules:
Descriptions, Reflection Questions, and Group Activities

One: Envision Your Leadership

*True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others.*

(L. Spears)

One of the first tasks of leadership teams in recovery school communities is to define their leadership in their own context. Traditional models of leadership can be very hierarchical in nature. A non-traditional model applicable to recovery school contexts is *Servant Leadership* which Robert Greenleaf developed several decades ago. This model focuses on community and teamwork with the goal of enhancing the personal growth of its community members while also improving the quality of caring within the community. According to Spears (2004), this is an approach to leadership that places serving others as “the number one priority…and at its core…is a transformational approach…to a way of being that has the potential for creating positive change…” (p. 8).

Servant Leadership is a holistic approach. This model emphasizes promoting a sense of community and sharing power in decision making processes. There are several key helpful elements within this approach which student leaders should note and incorporate into their leadership style. Those elements are empathetic listening and dialogue, a vision for the future which includes learning from the past, and, a commitment to growth and thriving (Spears, 2004).

**Reflection Questions**

Student leaders should discuss the following questions as a small group to help define and create a vision for their leadership within their own school setting.
Answering these questions should be done on both an individual and group level. Begin by writing down the answers for yourself and then discuss them as a group.

1. What does it mean to you to be a leader in your own school setting?
2. What would you like your leadership in your school to look like in the near future?
3. What do you already have in place for student leadership already in your school?
4. What challenges might you personally face in trying to be the leader you want to be in your school?
5. What kind of support do you need from your leadership peers to be the kind of leader you want to be?

**Action Steps**

1. What can you do over the next week or two to start being the leader you want to be?
2. Who can you ask for support in taking these steps?
3. Who can you give support to and what would that look like to help them to be the leader they want to be?
4. What can you organize as a leadership team to begin meeting some needs of your community?

**Group Activity**

- On a large easel sheet of paper or poster board write out or illustrate the main themes of what it means to be a leader that you identified as a group.
- On another sheet of paper/poster board draw an illustration of what a leader would do to help their community.
- Can you think of any other possible activities that might help you illustrate or practice leadership in your school?
Two: Create a Community Vision

*Community is... about the experience of belonging.*
(P. Block)

A second important task for a leadership team is to dream and envision what they would like their school to be like as a community. Kouzes and Posner (2008) described student leaders as “possibility thinkers”. These authors further stated, “All enterprises, big or small, begin with imagination and the belief that what’s merely an image today can be made real in the future” (p. 51). This is both an emotional-intuitive process as well as an intellectual one. This process begins with a passion or feeling that a vision is worth striving for as a goal. In this context this vision must have meaning and value for all the members of the community (Kouzes & Posner).

Community is about relationships. Peter Block (2009) described leaders as “social architects” who are able to create experiences that build connection, relatedness, accountability and commitment. Community is about belonging and connection. This implies at least two things. First, it implies being related to and being a part of something. Second, it also implies ownership. Peter Block astutely observed, “To belong to a community is to act as a creator and co-owner of that community” (p. xii). This means that the community will be what the members make it to be either intentionally or unintentionally.

The challenge which leaders face is to be able to change self-interest and isolation - which can especially exist in recovery communities - into connection and caring for others. The well-being of any community depends upon the quality of the relationships within the community and the cohesion between its members. Connection and cohesion should be a major part of the vision for any recovery school community. Peter Block astutely observed, “The context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity, and gifts rather than one of problem solving, fear, and retribution. A new context acknowledges that we all have the capacity, expertise, and
resources that an alternative future requires” (p. 29). Student leaders can be the visionaries that help bring about this new future for their school community.

**Reflection Questions**

Student leaders should discuss the following questions as a small group to help define and create a vision for their community within their own school setting. This is both an individual and group reflective exercise. Begin by writing down the answers for yourself and then discuss them as a group.

1. **Reflection on previous week(s):**
   a. What did you try last week in terms of being the leader you want to be?
   b. What worked well? What did not work so well?
   c. What can you learn from the last week’s experience to help you move forward?

2. **What would you like to see your school community be like in terms of:**
   a. Respect towards others? What might this look like?
   b. Inclusiveness of others? How are others included or excluded in your school?
   c. A sense of belonging or connection? How does this happen?
   d. Any other important qualities?

3. **When have you experienced being a part of a community like this and what was it like?**

4. **What were some of the key interactions or attitudes among the members that made it like this?**

5. **What might be some obstacles you see in your own school to creating this type of community?**

**Action Steps**

- What can you do over the next week(s) to help create the kind of community you want to see?
• How can you support each other as a leadership team to do this?

**Group Activity**

• On a large sheet of easel paper or poster board draw a picture of what you would like to see your school community to be in terms its sense of belonging, inclusiveness, and cohesion.

• Can you think of any other possible activities that might help you build community?
Three: Identify Community Assets

The task of...leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in ways that make a system's weaknesses irrelevant.

(P. Drucker)

A third task for a leadership team in a recovery school community is to find ways to build upon the strengths of their community. Once they have clarified their vision for their community they can begin moving in that desired direction. This requires that the leadership members identify the strengths and assets already present within their community. This is not ignoring problems or pretending that they do not exist. Rather this involves approaching whatever challenges exist from the solution-side of the equation.

One helpful approach which experts in this field have developed is Appreciative Inquiry. This approach views the central dynamic of positive change as shifting from a problem analysis to a “positive core analysis” which identifies the root causes of success in an organization. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) involves four steps towards identifying that positive core. Those steps are as follows: (1) Appreciating and valuing the best of what is in any setting; (2) Envisioning what might be in the context; and, (3) Dialoguing about what should be in the context (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 13). Essentially, AI is a process that can engage all the members of a community in co-creating a future that benefits everyone. This perspective allows leaders to regard a community as a possibility to be realized.

Reflection Questions

The following are AI questions which student leaders should discuss as a small group to help identify assets and strengths within their own community school setting. Again, this is both an individual and group reflective exercise. Begin by writing down the answers for yourself and then discuss them as a group.
1. Reflection on previous week(s):
   a. What did you try last week to create a sense of *community* in your school?
   b. What worked well? What did not work so well?
   c. What can you learn from the last week’s experience to help you move forward?

2. Describe a time in your school community that you consider a high point when you felt most excited and connected to your school community when you saw it at its best.

3. What do you value most about yourself as a member/leader in your school and what you value most about your school community?

4. What do you think are the core strengths that seem to give life to your school community?

**Action Steps**

- Think of one or two ways as a leadership group you can practice some of the core strengths of your community you identified?
- How can you help each other be accountable to practice these core steps?

**Group Activity**

- On a large easel sheet of paper or poster board make a creative display (by drawing or collage) illustrating the most positive experiences you have had in your school community.
- Brainstorm as a group some ways you could create mini-public service announcements about your school highlighting these most positive experiences.
- Can you think of any other ideas for activities that might help you identify and highlight the positive community assets in your school?
Four: Model Positive Self-Change

*You must be the change you wish to see in the world.*

(Mahatma Ghandi)

A fourth issue for student leaders consists of how they can be initiators of positive change within their respective school communities. In reality they have already begun to do this by clarifying a community vision and beginning to build on the positive assets within their community. This discussion module helps leaders to identify how they themselves can initiate positive change by becoming living examples of their own values and vision.

A helpful model which experts in organizational change have developed is *Advanced Change Theory* (Quinn, Spreitzer, & Brown, 2000). According to Quinn, et al., “…changing an organization requires leaders to change themselves first” (p. 148). This process begins by the leaders empowering themselves to align with a vision for the common good of the entire community. Quinn, et al. stated that leaders must realize “…that change must begin by looking inside. They then alter their behavior to fit their values and, ultimately, their vision of the common good. The result is new capability and potential for action” (p. 155). So as opposed to focusing on what may be wrong with the other members of the community, leaders can be more effective by focusing on themselves and how their actions can be solutions to bring about new trends of positive change.

This approach to community change is based on the dynamic between freedom and accountability. Peter Block asserted, “…the real task of leadership is to confront people with their freedom” (p. 21). This freedom means that community members can be the creators of their own experience. However, this also implies the need for a willingness to be accountable. According to Block, “Freedom is not an escape from accountability. Freedom is what creates accountability” (p. 21). Accepting this
freedom means members also should take responsibility for the care and well being of
the community to which they belong. Consequently, sustainable changes can begin
on a small scale and initiate at the grass roots level before taking hold community-
wide.

**Reflection Questions**

Student leaders should discuss the following questions which can help identify
how they can model positive self-change within their school community setting. This
process of change begins with the individual, moves to the group, and then to the
community. Begin by writing down the answers for yourself and then discuss them as
a group.

1. Reflection on previous week(s):
   a. What did you try last week to build on community assets in your school?
   b. What worked well? What did not work so well?
   c. What can you learn from the last week’s experience to help you move
      forward?
2. Where do you see you have “talked the talk” but not “walked the walk” as a
   leader?
3. What personal shortcomings have you become aware with yourself that may be
   a block to positive change in the community?
4. What do you need from your fellow leaders to help you model positive self-
   change in the community?

**Action Steps**

- Identify two or three ways you can be an example of positive self-change in
  your school community regardless of what others do.

**Group Activity**

- Write down each example on a sticky note and place them on a large easel
  sheet of paper as a group. Then group the examples into themes and discuss as
a group how you can support each other in modeling these examples of positive self-change.

- Can you think of any other activities that might help you be role models of positive self-change?
- Role play with each other an example or scenario of modeling this positive self-change.
Five: Engage Others to Join

_Listener may be the single most powerful action the leader can take._

(Kouzes & Posner)

A fifth challenge which student leaders face is how to engage others into a commitment to the shared vision and shared ownership of the well-being of the community as a whole. This means that leaders must know the needs of their community and the concerns of its members. According to Peter Block, “Leaders will always be under pressure to speak, but if building social fabric is important and sustained transformation is the goal, then listening becomes the greater service” (p. 88). Leaders must be willing to listen to their community members, give voice to their concerns, and find ways to engage their commitment towards a shared vision.

This kind of leadership creates accountability because it confronts people with their own freedom to make choices. This ability to make choices means that community members can create the kind of community they want by virtue of those choices. Leaders can help to create a new context and possibilities by bringing community members into new conversations through questions that highlight those new possibilities.

Student leaders need to find ways to engage the community in sharpening the focus of the community vision in terms of its desired future. This means that student leaders will need to consider alternative viewpoints, utilize the influence and expertise of others, as well as allow others to influence the leadership group’s decisions. Leaders need to foster a sense of interdependence that everyone is necessary and mutual collaboration and cooperation is necessary for success (Kouzes & Posner).

A key element in creating community engagement is providing opportunities to experience examples of that desired future for the community. Peter Block described this as, “Leadership begins with understanding that every gathering is an opportunity
to deepen accountability and commitment through engagement” (p. 87). He suggested that leaders create experiences for community members that provide opportunities to experience relatedness, commitment, and accountability for the well-being of the community as a whole. Engagement is the path towards a culture of shared ownership.

**Reflection Questions**

Student leaders can discuss the following questions as a small group to help identify how they engage others within their school community setting towards shared ownership of the community’s well-being. Begin by writing down the answers for yourself and then discuss them as a group.

1. **Reflection on previous week (s):**
   a. What did you try last week to model positive self-change in your school?
   b. What worked well? What did not work so well?
   c. What can you learn from the last week’s experience to help you move forward?
2. Describe a time when you have felt the most connected to members of your school community.
3. Describe a time when others outside of your leadership group seemed invested in the school community.
4. Complete the following statement – *Our school community would be awesome if ….*

**Action Steps**

1. What activities could you plan to help foster a sense of connection and belonging within your school community?
2. What activities could you plan to help build more trust between members of your school community?
Group Activity

- As a group compile a master list on a large easel sheet of paper or poster board of each participants’ comments on “Our school community would be awesome if…”
- Brainstorm some ideas of PSAs (public service announcements) or other media bits you could create in visual form to communicate these messages.
Six: Create a Community Impact

"As a Rock Star, I have two instincts: I want to have fun and I want to change the world. I have a chance to do both."

(Bono, U2)

The leadership topics and discussions thus far have focused on how to build core leadership qualities among the leaders and identify ways to improve the social fabric of the recovery school community. Student leaders must be creative and innovative in finding ways to help their communities become a better place to belong and reach a level of thriving as a collective group. But now the focus will shift from within the community to outside and beyond to the community at large. This is one of the most exciting opportunities for leadership because it involves identifying ways the school community can make a positive difference for others.

The tendency for a group to want to reach out beyond itself and make a difference for others reflects a healthy level of collective emotional and moral development. Carol Gilligan (1982), a well known psychologist, theorized a helpful model of psychological development which significantly applies to student leadership in this regard. In her model she described the first stage of development as reflecting a focus on self and individual needs. The second stage is marked by a transition from a self-focus to a sense of care and concern for the welfare of others. The third stage reflects an even more mature perspective and tendency to balance self-needs with others’-needs but also to include a broad and universal concern for others. This implies that as a community begins to grow in its own collective emotional and moral health it will become more interested in finding ways to make a difference for others beyond its own setting. Student leaders can help their community discover their passion and find ways to reach out to be of service to others in need.
Reflection Questions

Student leaders can discuss the following questions as a small group to help identify how they engage others within their school community setting towards finding ways to make a difference for others. Begin by writing down the answers for yourself and then discuss them as a group.

1. Reflection on previous week (s):
   a. What did you try last week to build trust and cohesion in your school?
   b. What worked well? What did not work so well?
   c. What can you learn from the last week’s experience to help you move forward?

2. What needs do you see in your surrounding community outside of your school setting?

3. What do you feel a passion for that could make a difference for others outside of your school community?

4. Where are some opportunities for you as a leadership team to be of service for others outside of your school community?

Action Steps

1. As a group brainstorm some ideas for how you can perform some random acts of kindness towards others both within your school but also outside of your school.

2. Make a plan for performing these random acts of kindness and check in with each other in your next meeting to discuss how these went.

Group Exercise

- How can you involve others in your school in performing random acts of kindness?
• How can you find others in your school to recruit to help with performing some kind of service that would meet a need and make a difference for others? Brainstorm your ideas and write them down.
References


