Class Activities

# Chapter 6: Developing Leadership Skills

## Guide to the Class Activities

Each activity is designed based on Fink’s Learning Taxonomy and is tagged with the following tags under the taxonomy’s learning and assessment structure:

1. Foundational Knowledge (F)
2. Application (A)
3. Integration (I)
4. Human Dimension (H)
5. Caring (C)
6. Learning How to Learn (L)

These activities may be used in either small-group or large-group settings, depending on class size and time available. Some may also be suitable as homework.

## Activities

### Talking Like a Leader #1 (A, H)

Ask students to share in class the kinds of communication that are expected in their intended (or current) careers (e.g. reports, presentations, meetings, sales pitches, etc.). How will skill in communication enhance their performance as leaders? (E.g. explain ideas, give directions, express a coherent vision, and inspire others). How will developing this skill help them advance in their careers?

### Talking Like a Leader #2 (A, I)

Ask students to watch the film, *The King’s Speech,* outside of class. In class, discuss the importance of public speaking for a governmental figure. The film portrays the public as being anxious about the king’s stammer. Why? What symbolic value does a king’s speech convey? In what contexts (war time, crisis, etc.) is speaking well most needed? Is the speech of public figures still scrutinized as closely today?

### Listening Like a Leader (A, H)

Active listening is an important leadership skill. It promotes empathy, is related to social perceptiveness and emotional intelligence, and is essential for managing conflict. Ask students to brainstorm good listening behaviors. Write their suggestions on the board, on an overhead or newsprint. Add any items that are not mentioned (attending, acknowledging, restating, reflecting, interpreting, summarizing, probing, giving feedback, showing warmth, checking perceptions, being quiet and waiting).

Ask students to form groups of three and find a space in the classroom away from others. Students will have the opportunity to enact each of the roles of speaker, listener and observer. Speakers are asked to share how they visualize leadership. What do they *see* in their mind’s eye when they talk about it? Is it a race, a struggle, a building, a party, a garden, etc.? The listener is to practice using the skills identified by the class, including attentiveness, silence, or asking questions. The observer should note what verbal and non-verbal skills the listener uses and count their frequency. Allow 3-4 minutes for each person to speak. Then have the observer share what he or she noticed. The speaker should report how well he or she felt listened to and what listening behaviors were most appreciated. The listener should report on what was comfortable or difficult about listening actively.

Have everyone switch roles and repeat the sequence two more times. Afterwards, discuss with the full class: What opportunities do you have in an ordinary day to really listen to someone else? Even under time pressure at work, are there any listening skills you *can* incorporate? How does the listener benefit from listening? How is listening an act of leadership?

### Thinking Emotionally Like a Leader (F, A, H)

One of the skills associated with emotional intelligence is the ability to use emotions to facilitate thinking. The film *The Social Network* contains many scenes of awkward, difficult or unpleasant encounters between Mark Zuckerberg, one of the founders of Facebook, and his girlfriend, business partners, school officials, and legal team. Select a scene to show in class and afterwards discuss how Mark or the other persons involved did use, or could have used, emotions to improve the outcome of the situation. How could paying attention to the emotions in the interaction have identified underlying issues, and identified people’s true feelings? Could the emotional energy have been harnessed in a productive way? If emotions are too intense at a given point, would it make sense to find an alternative time for discussion? How does intense emotion cloud one’s perceptions and decision-making? How can we regulate emotion without compartmentalizing ourselves into public vs. private personas?

### Managing Emotions (F, A, H)

One of the skills associated with emotional intelligence is the ability to regulate one’s own emotions and put them to good use. This involves being in control of one’s strong emotions, such as fear or anger, and displaying the type of emotion to others that will maintain their composure and ability to interact and work effectively. In small groups ask students to discuss ways to manage their emotions and those of others in the following scenarios (or create your own):

* A group member has failed to complete a critical part of a group project that was assigned weeks ago, and is due today. The project is worth 50% of your grade in the course and your group is scheduled to present it to the class in an hour. You feel angry and afraid of failing the class. The group member with incomplete work feels defensive and marginalized.
* You manage a food station in the university’s cafeteria. There is a chronic shortage of workers because the pay is so low and hours are inflexible. During the lunch hour rush, one of your student workers is making a lot of errors: bringing food out late, not washing hands before serving food, and ignoring your requests to clean up the work station. The food line keeps getting longer and your station is falling behind in serving the meal. You feel stressed and angry. The students in line are growing impatient with the slow service.
* A team project you turned in at work has just been reviewed by your supervisor and criticized for not being thorough enough. One of your team members complained to the supervisor that you failed to do your part of the project and so the others had to cover for you. You feel embarrassed and betrayed. Your supervisor is disappointed and frustrated.

Once groups share their responses to the scenarios, discuss which strategies seem most effective in regulating one’s own emotions, and which are most effective in acknowledging and moderating the emotions of others.

### Stakeholder Web (A, I, H)

This activity helps students practice their problem-solving skills.

1. Have students identify an issue that is relevant to your campus and is broad enough to affect multiple stakeholders. For example, your school may be experiencing a drop in enrollment, a government funding shortage, concern about student safety, or controversy about an administrator, faculty member, or campus program.
2. In small groups have students identify who the stakeholders are on this issue (e.g. government agencies, students, parents, faculty, administration, alumni, donors, the surrounding neighborhood, etc.)
3. Discuss how each stakeholder is affected by the issue and what matters to them about the issue (e.g. maintaining the school’s reputation, finding new sources of revenue, etc.)
4. On a large piece of paper, have them sketch how the stakeholders are connected to each other. Who communicates with whom? Whose concerns are similar (e.g. financial, reputational)? Do all group members agree with what the web of relationships shows?
5. Together, generate some solutions to the issue you have identified. Draw these along the borders of the paper, as a frame. After weighing the pros and cons of the proposed solutions, select one or two options that best address *most* stakeholders’ concerns. How should the solutions be implemented?

### Big Picture Thinking (A, I, C)

This activity helps students practice their conceptual skills. It is best done after completing the Stakeholder Web. From that exercise groups will have a better understanding of a campus issue, how it affects various stakeholders, the pros and cons of various solutions, the best solution, and how they might implement it.

Ask students to step back and see the big picture. How could the process of addressing a problem, and the insights they gained during the process, help improve campus functioning in other ways? For example, how might complementary stakeholder interests be combined to form better reporting mechanisms across campus, or identify potential donors for other campus needs, or suggest guidelines for evaluating other campus programs? Students should try to identify at least two “big picture” applications of their problem-solving exercise.

### Create Your Own Activity (A, L)

Have students form into groups of 4-5 in order to design a group activity that will develop one of the leadership skills outlined in the chapter, such as managing resources, solving problems or developing a vision. Allow 15 minutes for developing the activity and then 5 minutes for each group to run the activity with the rest of the class. This exercise employs all the elements of teamwork - communication, goal-setting, cooperation, creativity, task orientation, etc. This can also be assigned as homework the week before, so class time is only used for doing the relevant activities.

### Creating and Communicating Vision (A, I, L)

Visionary leadership is a skill that can be challenging for some people. This exercise uses a brainstorming activity to help students develop that skill. Begin by randomly assigning students into small groups of 3-5. Then ask each group to prepare a vision statement and communication plan for a new organization that they are starting. You may elect to allow each group to start completely from scratch or you may wish to provide them with more specifics. This might include specifying a certain type of organization (e.g., non-profit, corporation, public agency), a particular industry or field, etc. Have students share their vision statements and communication plans and then discuss some of the following questions:

* Was this a challenging task? Why or why not?
* How did they function as a group?
* Would this have been easier for some people to do by themselves?

## Writing Assignments

### Virtual Leadership (A, I)

In a 2-3 page paper have students reflect on the relative importance of the nine leadership skills in an online environment. Which skill sets become more important? Are new skills needed for online teams?

### Motivation (A, I)

What motivates leaders to improve their skills? In a 2-3 page paper ask students to judge the effect of traits, one’s beliefs about the nature of people and of work, and style of leadership on motivation.

### One Minute Paper Topics (F, A, I)

Which of the skills in chapter 5 would you most like to develop?

Is there a leadership skill that wasn’t mentioned in the chapter that you think is essential for effective leadership?