



CHALLENGE



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A Herff Jones IMPACT Resource for Students

Getting Peers Involved

Think about the last activity your group sponsored. Who participated in it? Was it the same ol' people who always participate in student activities, or did your program attract a diverse group of students who are representative of the whole student body? It's easy to fall into a routine of planning activities for the students who always participate—after all, they are the ones who typically respond, and no one likes to put in a big effort and get little response. The challenge for student leaders—particularly those elected to represent their peers such as class officers and student council members—is to plan activities for ALL students.

Try these tips for getting more of your peers involved in activities:

Ask people to get involved.

Think about how difficult it is to say no when someone asks you to do something. “Hey Jim, we could really use your artistic abilities on the posters for the dance. Can you help?” It's amazing how a simple statement like, “Hey, I think you'd be good for this committee position” or “You really have a good eye for color—have you thought about joining the art committee?”

can be the extra push some students need to get involved. Many times, students view membership in groups as closed, or they don't have the confidence to just show up at a meeting. Offering an invitation to get involved might be all they need to do so.

Plan low-risk activities. For most students, dressing up in

weird clothing and acting outrageously are too high risk—they aren't willing to open themselves up to possible ridicule, so they decline to participate. Draw students into participation with activities that take little to no risk. How about a rock concert T-shirt day, favorite sports team day, or a hat day? Con-

duct contests for things that will include everyone, such as a best homeroom attendance contest or a class with the most improved GPA contest. Bring back the field day concept from elementary school and plan fun activities that each homeroom participates in as a team.

Appeal to a variety of interests.

Realize that every event doesn't need to have mass-market appeal. You can be very successful by planning a series of smaller events that appeal to different groups in the school.

Brainstorm a list of the various sub-groups or cliques in your student body, then create a list of all the activities your group has sponsored. Check the list to see which sub-groups are likely to participate in each activity. Evaluating your program in this way can show where the gaps are in your programming. Have any groups been left out? If so, identify some leading members of those groups and ask them about activities they might be willing to participate in.

Follow through by planning at least one activity to appeal to each group. Recruit people from that sub-group to help with the planning—get some skaters to help plan an extreme games event to showcase the skate boarding and inline skating skills of some of your students, for example, or ask some of the more literary members of the student body to help with planning a poetry reading or coffeehouse event.

Diversify your committees.

Make a conscious effort to include new and different people on your group's committees. Seek out students who have varied interests and backgrounds. Publicize the committees that are available for participation and give clear information about how people can get involved.

Brainstorm a list with your current members of kids who might be good people to get involved in



your committees and activities. If you're looking to diversify membership, target different factions of the student body and identify a few key people that might be approached to join. Have someone in your group approach these people personally to ask them to participate.

Keep track of students who have participated in things like relay races at assemblies. Don't let the same people always do it. If no one else volunteers, ask different people to participate; some students may be afraid to volunteer, not wanting to step on the toes of the kids who "always" do it.

Create a database of student talents in various areas. Find out the strengths and interests of students and use that information to identify students to ask for help with a particular project or activity. What students are good at art? Who knows how to operate video computer programs? Who's familiar with graphic arts programs? Who is good with tools and building things? Once you've identified students in these and other areas, you'll know who to ask for help with building a float or a stage set, designing a printed program for an event, creating a video commercial for your event, and so forth.

Make a personal connection. Students who feel alienated from the typical "rah-rah" types of student activity groups will be unwilling to participate in the activities those groups plan. A simple way to overcome this is to make a personal connection with them so they don't feel alienated

any more. One way to do this is to deliver a birthday card or balloon to every student on his or her birthday, or go an extra step and create a locker sign and decorate each student's locker for their birthday. Or, next time you do a candy-gram fundraiser, send one to every student in the school with a personal note signed from one of your members on behalf of the group.

Take advantage of technology to get the word out about events in a timely manner so students can plan to be involved. Sometimes people don't participate for the simple reason that they don't know about things. Send evites (www.evite.com) and text messages, post information on a Web site, and use e-mail in addition to all the traditional methods of publicizing an event.

Give incentives. Come up with a prize for the member who brings the most non-members to a meeting. Or offer students an incentive to participate in an activity, such as some terrific door prizes or free food.

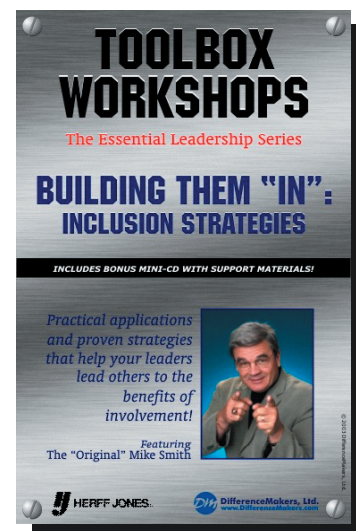
Build in competition. Sometimes a little competition spurs people to participate. You could offer a prize to the class or group that has the most participation, or with something like a charity fundraiser, have the class competition but set an overall goal that, if reached, will mean the whole school gets a reward.

Create a buzz. If kids are talking about your activity or organization, interest will grow and others will want to get in on the fun. Talk up your events with your friends or classmates. Use mysterious an-

nouncements to get people wondering about an upcoming event. Let people know how much fun it will be or tell about some unique aspect of the event.

Make it an ongoing effort.

Don't just try at the beginning of the year to get people involved. Be sensitive to changing seasons and commitments and keep trying. For example, at the end of the fall sports season, some students who didn't have time to be involved in your activities because they were on a fall team could find themselves with extra time on their hands and might be willing to get involved now. Likewise with the end of other activities such as a drama production, marching band season, cheerleading, etc. Make a renewed effort to get these people involved in your activities. Don't let students get the impression that it's a one-time deal, if they didn't get involved at the beginning of the year they're out of luck. Keep making the effort to involve your peers all year round.



Building Them "IN" Toolbox Workshops Series is an essential series that includes practical applications to help leaders get others involved. Contact your local Herff Jones Professionals for details.