

Building a Strong Team

Why should I invest time in building a team? Isn't it quicker to go it alone?

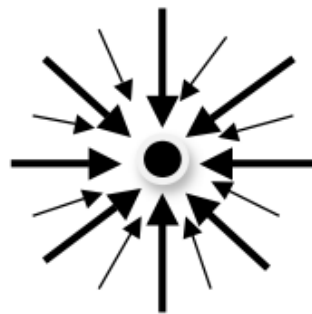
First and foremost, working in teams is more fun than working alone! Teammates also offer support and mentorship to one another. People who feel supported and who enjoy what they're doing are more likely to keep doing it.

Next, by working in teams, we can tap into the diverse range of resources (including skills and knowledge) multiple people bring.

And most importantly, by working in teams, we develop relationships with fellow teammates that facilitate and deepen our commitment to community sponsorship.

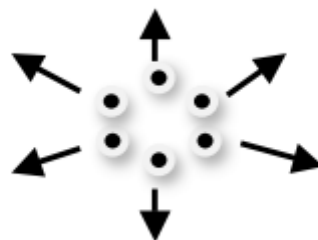
The Snowflake Model: A distributed approach to leadership

Sometimes we think leadership is about being the person that everyone goes to, like this:



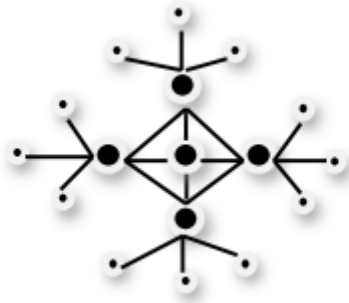
How does it feel to be the dot in the middle of all those arrows? How does it feel to be one of the arrows that can't even get through? And what happens if the "dot" in the middle should disappear?

Sometimes we think we don't need leadership at all because "we're all leaders", but that looks like this:



Who's responsible for coordinating everyone? And who's responsible for focusing on the good of the whole, not just one particular part? With whom does the "buck stop"?

Another way to practice leadership is like this “snowflake”: leadership practices by developing other leaders who, in turn, develop other leaders, all the way “down”. Although you may be the “dot” in the middle, your success depends on developing the leadership of others.



In the snowflake model, decision-making responsibility is decentralized whenever possible. The core leadership team ensures the whole group is coherent and effectively moving in the same direction towards long-term goals. The sub-leadership teams ensure the sponsorship group is effectively delivering on short-term objectives. *Everyone* is responsible for strategizing, ongoing learning, bringing new volunteers on board, and developing resources.

Relationships are the glue that hold the snowflake together, and these relationships support the interconnected teams that make up the snowflake.

This is an age-old challenge. In Exodus, Moses required the intervention of his father-in-law Jethro, to begin getting the picture. He was trying to do it all himself, but why? Because he was hungry for the power? Because he needed to keep himself busy? A more likely explanation is that, like many of us, he wanted it done right, and he thought that meant that he had to do it himself. But as long as he was trying to do it all himself, it couldn't be done well, much would not get done at all. The belief that holding onto all the control would ensure all was done well was an illusion. So Jethro offered him a way out. Find the courage to let go of some of the control and risk letting others share in the responsibility for leading. But not just anyone – he urged him to find people with leadership potential, people who were “capable and honest”.

Nothing is more important than coming to terms with this fundamental question: are we willing, and able, to let go of enough control to let others lead? Can we let go of enough control to allow our community sponsorship group to build the power that can only be achieved by letting it grow leadership rich?

The sooner you have a team of people with whom to work, the sooner the "I" of the leader becomes the "we" of a new group. Once you have formed a leadership team you can more easily establish a rhythm of regular meetings, clear decisions and visible accountability that will help make things actually happen. And remember, you don't build a group of 25 people by recruiting them all yourself. You build it by finding people willing and able to commit to help building it with you.

Building Your Group

Community Sponsorship Groups aren't created as perfect, fully-functioning snowflakes. Rather, they go through different phases of growth and learning, and inevitably experience growing pains along the way.

You will likely begin with a few excited volunteers, who are eager to do more, but perhaps they have limited or no involvement beyond this interest. Start by building strong relationships with one another. Each meet 1:1 – share your personal motivations for doing this project. You may think you know each other quite well – perhaps you attend the same congregation, or have lived next door for years – but have you ever sat down just the two of you, and found out what drives each other, why each of you care? You may have more in common than you ever realised!

Once you have built strong relationships with each other, each of you can network and recruit within the community by scheduling 1:1 meetings, and holding larger group events.

As more people attend events and join the team, start to test your new volunteers. Give them a manageable task (e.g. can you bring 5 people to our fundraising event? Can you get a list of ESOL courses in our area?). Don't get hung up on people who don't show up or deliver; focus on those that do.

Habits of Highly Effective Teams

Interdependent Roles

Each team member must have responsibility, or, their own piece of work that contributes to bigger goals. In an effective team, no one works in a silo. A functioning team will have a diversity of identities, experiences, and opinions to ensure that the most possible is being brought to the table.

Explicit Norms

Your team should set clear expectations for how to govern itself. How will you manage meetings, regular communication, decisions, and commitments? And, most importantly, how will you correct ground-rule violations so that they remain active and legitimate ground rules? Teams with explicit operating rules are more likely to achieve their goals. Some team norms are operational, such as – *How often will we meet? How will we share and store documents? How will we communicate with others outside the team?* – while others address expectations for member interaction. Setting norms early on in team formation will guide your team in its early stages as members learn how to work together. Making norms explicit allows your team to have open discussions about how things are going. The team can update and refine norms as they work together to improve working relationships.

Mutual accountability

Notice how in the diagram the arrows point both ways. The snowflake model doesn't operate as a hierarchy, with managers delegating tasks in a top-down way and expecting results. Rather, team members are accountable to each other, mutually agree on tasks, and expect results from and provide support to each other. Someone within the core leadership team may assign a sub-team with a task, but someone within the sub-team is just as likely to assign the core leadership team with a task.

Clearly defined roles and responsibilities

Each individual in a team has a specific role with clearly defined responsibilities. While the team works together towards common goals, every task should be assigned to a specific team member(s) and each team member should clearly understand their responsibilities. Roles can vary based on the stage you are in the sponsorship process (e.g. in the initial stages, roles may include application form writing, or fundraising; when the family is here, roles may include setting up a bank account, teaching an English lesson, or interpreting at the dentist).