



Expectations of an Advisor

To many professionals taking on the role of advisor to a student group for the first time, the question may arise as to what exactly is expected of an advisor. Specifically, what does the University expect and what do the students expect? The advisor may also wonder what he/she should expect from the student organization.

The role of an advisor is many-faceted. The advisor may act as mentor and friend, policy enforcer and trouble shooter, resource and idea person or listener/counselor, mediator, facilitator, referral person and sometimes as just another member of the group. The advisor's role will vary depending on the type of organization, the size of the group and its stage of development, from a newly founded group to one that is well established.

Fortunately, the advisor generally does not need to act in all of these roles at the same time. A newly founded group will probably need someone to take on the role of teacher, providing an important interface between the group and the University, and offering advice and guidelines. A well established group will need an advisor able to act as historian, passing on the traditions of the group as well as listening to new ideas that come out of the group.

There are some aspects of advising that could be said to carry on throughout the life of the organization. The "ideal" advisor is aware that she/he is often seen as a role model, mentor and advocate for the group. Although the advisor's influence is likely to carry more weight than that of most members of the group, the advisor is not a real authority figure. Being an advisor is a delicate balancing act; it requires that all those involved meet one another with respect and openness.

To foster this attitude of openness and respect, it may be helpful to meet with your organization early in the semester to discuss mutual expectations (what the advisor expects of the students; what the students expect of the advisor). This kind of communication will facilitate advisor-group interactions as well as engendering an open atmosphere within the group itself.

What do students expect of their advisors?

A partial listing generated by a conference of student organizations may be of help:

1. Be supportive; a resource person and motivation,
2. Have respect for individualism and don't be over controlling; allow the students to run the organization; allow the group to fail, but be there to Help them understand failure,
3. Attend meetings and events; be an involved and enthusiastic member of the group,
4. Act as sounding board; be there to listen and communicate,
5. Be accountable,
6. Know your members and know your resources.

A key word to summarize all these expectations might be collaborator, that is, a co-laborer. You are working with the students, not for them or over them.

What should the advisor expect of a student group?

Obviously, one expects attendance at meetings and enthusiasm for the activities of the organization. The advisor may reasonably expect members to take initiative and to follow through on commitments, to give support to one another and to show mutual respect for one another. While one may wish for smooth sailing, a more realistic expectation could be called constructive conflict, a possibility that students should also learn to expect and accept.

Finally, it is important for both advisors and student members of the group to realize that their respective roles within this group represent only one small portion of their lives; the student member is, after all, first a student, while the Advisor is first a professional. Both have other responsibilities that must come before their activities in the organization, and it is important that neither lose sight of that fact in their expectations of the other.

Having acknowledged all these weighty expectations, let us not lose sight of one important goal of any organization: to have fun. For student members and Advisor alike, membership in a student organization should be a pleasantly memorable experience, and to that end, this is our final word of advice: Let it be fun!

CREATING SUPER STARS!

Some of the most important things you can do as the club advisor are the smallest things that people tend to take for granted. A good advisor is a positive source of energy and motivation for members. You can radiate your positive energy by doing some of the following:

- Smile and say thank you. (this cannot be done often enough)
- Plan get-togethers and share time away from the job--meet for dinner, pizza parties, etc.
- Get together on a one-to-one basis--treat to a soda or ice cream.
- Send birthday cards to club members
- Write club members thank-you notes.
- Attend the Honors and Recognition Banquet to honor members with awards to deserving members
- Write a letter of recommendation
- Attend the Activities Fair

From *A Survival Guide for Club Advisors* Elmira College

MOTIVATING AND RETAINING STUDENTS

As you know, volunteers are essential to student organizations. It is important to know how to keep students interested and working for the good of the organization. By using these suggestions as an advisor and by encouraging club officers to do the same, the club should have little difficulty attracting new members and retaining the ones it already has.

The three keys to keeping students are:

1. training them effectively
2. meeting their personal needs
3. allowing them to design and implement their own objectives

Here are some suggestions for how you as a leader can keep students' momentum going:

- ⇒ Provide proper placement (the right person for the right job)
- ⇒ Explain the purpose of the group clearly.
- ⇒ Have a positive, "we can" attitude.
- ⇒ Develop clear expectations of assignments (What needs to be done? By when?)
- ⇒ Allow for personal growth (what does the volunteer want to learn?)
- ⇒ Offer feedback
- ⇒ Organize an effective training program (remember, people learn in various ways).
- ⇒ Provide a sense of unity (yea, team!)
- ⇒ Compliment good work
- ⇒ Reward good effort (certificates, trophies, thank you notes, etc.)
- ⇒ Help volunteers set achievable goals.
- ⇒ Initiate recognition (press releases, ads/letters in the SUN, etc.)
- ⇒ Initiate social interaction (parties, contests, dinners, etc.)
- ⇒ Recognize individual achievement (remember birthdays, special honors, etc.)
- ⇒ Conduct exit interviews with dropouts to find out why they left the group. This will provide important information on how things can be changed to make the club more satisfying for everyone.

Adapted from "Motivating Volunteers: What Makes Them Tick" by Val Christen and Ray Myers.

For more information on this, or any other policy/guidelines pertaining to student organizations, please contact the Student Activities Office, 5th floor, Willard Straight Hall, (607) 255-4169, email: <activities@cornell.edu>.
