

Two Leadership Laws

There are lots of leadership laws out there, but remember these two and you'll be able to figure out most of the rest.

- 1. Make It Personal.** In a fraternity, people aren't there because they have to be—they're there because they want to be. Ours are voluntary organizations, and they are successful because of people. People respond to people, and they're most receptive to people (to leaders) when they can have personal, one-on-one conversations. If you're going to persuade anybody of anything—that he should join your fraternity, that you're the best candidate for an office, that your new idea is one the chapter should adopt—your best chance to do it is in person, in a relaxed setting.
- 2. Leave Nothing To Chance.** No matter what you're planning to do, there is bound to be another detail you can account for. The reason plans fail to achieve their desired level of success is because problems, surprises and other contingencies that were not anticipated undermine the plan. There will no doubt be times when something happens that you couldn't have predicted, but most of the time, if you think about situations you've experienced in the past, play devil's advocate to yourself, and think of all the worst-case scenarios you can imagine, you'll realize there are details that you can take care of, logistics you can prepare for and risks you can minimize. You can limit what you leave to chance, and put yourself in control of making your plan work.

Okay, great. Two more laws to remember. So now what?

Laws are only functional if you apply them, and these two laws are amazingly applicable. Pick your situation, and you'll be able to find a way to make it personal and leave nothing to chance.

First, decide what you want to accomplish. Do you want to get members to take initiative? Do you want to change a frustrating 'old school' mindset in the chapter? Do you want to get elected to an office? Do you want to get someone to join your fraternity? Do you want to get the chapter to support a new idea of yours? For the sake of example, let's say you want to get the chapter to support an idea you have for a new event.

Second, be patient. You may be tempted to announce your brilliant new idea at a chapter meeting. *Resist this temptation at all costs.* Remember, a chapter meeting is anything but a personal setting. Your idea may be truly brilliant, but in a large-group setting like a chapter meeting, people are rarely receptive to brand-new ideas. Most people don't have the chance to ask questions, and if this is the first place you're airing this new idea, you likely won't be ready to answer the questions that do arise. Plus, if some heckler in the back of the room jumps on your idea, it's easy for others to jump on that bandwagon, and before anybody really understands what it was in the first place, your idea can be squashed and labeled a dud. Ideas that are perceived by the majority of the chapter as duds rarely see the light of day again, let alone success.

Third, find your allies. If you're going to generate support for an idea, think about who you most see eye-to-eye with in the chapter. Approach that person in a one-on-one setting (make it personal). Explain your idea. Get feedback. Let your friend ask questions. Ask what he thinks are the chances of success for the idea. Ask about possible pitfalls that might exist (leave nothing to chance). Ask if this person will support you in making this idea a reality.

Fourth, build your army. Now that you have one ally, you're not alone. But you've only just begun. Now both of you must continue to find allies for the idea. Continue to build your army by finding like-minded folks in the chapter, and explain your idea to them, again in a personal setting. Ask for their feedback and support. As you're doing this, you're not only developing a groundswell of support for your idea, you're filling in the details, anticipating contingencies, and leaving less and less to chance.

Fifth, identify the opposition. You know the people in the chapter that speak out against change, who oppose any idea that isn't new, and who resist things that are different. They're your next target. You didn't think this was going to be all about preaching to the converted, did you? Getting your idea to fly is all about getting support from all corners of your organization, including the stick-in-the-mud types. But be confident. You've got support. You've fleshed out your idea. You're ready for the opposition. Sit down with your allies and decide who is most likely to oppose your idea, and approach them. You might want to take a two-on-one approach here, and you should make sure one of those two is the ally of yours that is closest to the person you're talking to. But beyond that, the approach is the same. Pitch your idea. Ask for feedback. Ask for support. *Very often, someone that you suspect would have shot your idea down in a chapter meeting will be receptive to the idea when they're approached with it personally.* Why? Because the newness and surprise of the idea aren't so scary in a personal setting. He has a chance to ask as many questions as he wants, and figure out all the details. And perhaps most important, when you approach someone to tell them about your idea and ask for his feedback, you are telling that person that you value his perspective and voice in the chapter, and that you want his support. Most people take that as a compliment, and if you've got your act together with this idea (and by this step you should), people will see that, and they'll want to get on board with a good idea.

Sixth, solidify your game plan. By now, you should have a critical mass of people that support the idea and are willing to support you on it. (By the way, this makes you a leader now.) Think about who will do what, who will play what role in make this idea a success. All the support in the world is worthless if nobody's committed to do any work to make the idea succeed. So figure out a strategy. Who will tackle what tasks? What is your timeline? What resources will you need? What obstacles must be overcome? How can you minimize what you leave to chance?

Seventh, declare your intentions. Now you can propose your idea to the chapter. Why now? First, you know you have support. You have answered most of the questions and anticipated most of the opposition. You're ready for it. But not only that, most of the chapter knows it's coming, because of the personal contact they had with you (or one of your allies) regarding the idea. People like being in the know. When you announce your idea to the chapter, the people who already know what's going on are going to feel both smart and clever. They're going to feel like insiders, which is a good feeling. And they'll be ready to help make this idea a success, because now they have a stake in it.

Eighth, just do it. The support structure for your idea is in place. Now's the time to execute. But remember as you go, the basic laws—make it personal and leave nothing to chance—still apply in the execution phase. In fact, they apply just as much now as in the setup phase, if not more so. Think about all of the details that will be required. Think about all the things that could possibly go wrong, and how you can make them go right. Have personal conversations with people about their role on the project, encouraging, supporting, encouraging, pushing, removing obstacles, and doing whatever you can do to instill confidence in the idea, your leadership, and the chapter's ability to make it work.

Is this all a lot of work? Yes. Nobody ever said achieving great things or becoming an effective leader was going to be easy. But if you remember these two leadership laws and apply them the challenges you face, you'll find that they can be the keys to unlock almost any door that lies between you and success.