

SAGE ON THE STAGE VS GUIDE ON THE SIDE: HOW TO BECOME A GUIDE

LET THEM LEAD

You joined to give, to shape, to serve,
To help young hands and hearts find nerve.
But pause awhile, reflect your role—
Not to control, but to console.
You're not the star upon the stage,
Not keeper of the book or cage.
You are the whisper in the wind,
That says, "You've got this—try again."
The child who plants a seed with care,
Who speaks up bravely at the fair,
Will learn far more from work and try
Than from a voice that tells them why.
They need a space to test and dream,
To stumble, build, and lead a team.
They grow when you don't pave the way,
But walk beside and softly say:
"I'm here to help, not take the reins.
Your path is yours, with all its gains.
Ask questions, risk, and don't despair—
I'll walk with you, I'll just be there."
So stand not high, but kneel instead,
Let youth take charge, and forge ahead.
Their future blooms when you take pride
Not as the sage—
But as the guide.



A GUIDE ON THE SIDE

Youth are at a critical stage in their lives, and are very capable, but they need to be guided in the right direction in order to unlock their full capacities to do good and make a difference. This is where you come in! As an adult involved in youth's lives, whether that be as a volunteer, as an advisor, or a staff member - you have the unique opportunity to influence these youth for good.



A common problem in many youth-led programs is that they are not, in fact, youth-led. Over time, adults take over the planning or dictate exactly how youth should run meetings, plan activities, or even what roles they are or are not allowed to do. Youth are often treated as being “inadequate” or “irresponsible” when in reality, many teenagers are the exact opposite... if you let them. Just as each of us will respond differently to how we are treated, many teenagers withdraw from participating or taking responsibility for something when an adult takes that opportunity away.



In many cases, this is not at all intentional - the adult is trying to be helpful and advise the youth, but many times this turns meetings where youth are to be discussing their ideas for activities into long-winded lectures by adults about one thing or another. Other instances may include cutting off youth when they are sharing their ideas, immediately vetoing ideas because “you know it will not work”, or deciding to have “back-up” plans in case the youth forget to bring their assigned materials. Each of these actions, though unintentional, cause youth to shutdown and withdraw, causing their capacity to grow in that particular program to be limited. How then, can we as leaders avoid this?

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TIPS & TRICKS



1) Build Relationships. Express interest in each of them and their lives. Ask questions, and remember things about them. Memorize their names, and work at it if this is a weakness of yours. Share things about your life too, and be honest in how you interact with them. As always, follow the guidelines in the Youth Protection Trainings, which you should have completed before becoming a 4-H Adult Volunteer/Staff/Advisor.

2) Let Them Lead. When in meetings, sit back and let the Presidency lead. Help them come up with a plan during their Presidency meeting, but then let them lead. When they turn time over to you for club or council announcements/information, do so briefly (though thoroughly) and then turn the time back to them.

3) Encourage Ideas. During brainstorming sessions, do not shut down any ideas or activities, even if you know the logistics or the expectations of the youth will not be met. Instead, ask guiding questions to help them figure out logistics. Inform them of the budget or other circumstances that may prevent them from doing it, but do not dissuade them from trying their idea out. If they are set on doing it, encourage them and let them learn from their experience. (Obviously if there are legal or other important problems with it, guide them through it).

4) Educate Yourself. Seek out resources in your community or online to understand youth development and to better understand how you can interact with the youth. There are always changes we can make to improve our interactions with others, and working with youth is no different. None of us ever reach the point where we interact perfectly with every youth. Learn from them. Learn from other adults.

CONCLUSION

Becoming a Guide on the Side is a process. It takes effort, it takes learning from trial and error, and it takes intentionality. However, as you seek to understand the needs of your youth in your program, you will be empowered to empower the youth. Seeing those youth grow and become more than they are is one of the joys of working with youth. Because, after all, that is what 4-H is all about!

