

Staff Structure Overview

My name is Dave GoWell and I'm the Chair of the RYLA Program in District 7500, which is in NJ, USA.



I've been involved in RYLA continuously since 1994. As I write this, our District is preparing to conduct our 22nd annual RYLA event, and I've attended RYLAs in several other Districts, as well as 2 International RYLAs in Los Angeles, California and Gujarat, India.

Our Rotary eClub received a District Grant to produce a series of training videos to show other RYLA Directors some of the best practices we're discovered or developed.

This is the first of a set of 3 videos designed to show you our staff structure.

The first RYLA I attended was in 1994. I was a presenter for just one session but I observed and took notes for the entire event so I could help our District develop our own RYLA Program. One of the most interesting things I saw was that they brought 2 students back from the previous RYLA to act as Youth Counselors. They were supposed to share what they had learned the year before with the new RYLA participants. I was astonished! The idea had so much potential, but it was being implemented so poorly!

- First, there were only 2 of them and they were placed into 2 out of 10 teams, so 80% of the RYLA participants got almost no chance to interact with them.

- Second, they were given almost no training.
- Third, they had no formal time or place to share what they knew – somehow their knowledge and experience were just supposed to seep into their team as and when needed.
- Fourth, their RYLA career ended after 2 RYLAs. There was absolutely no possibility of coming to a third RYLA.

What a wasted opportunity!

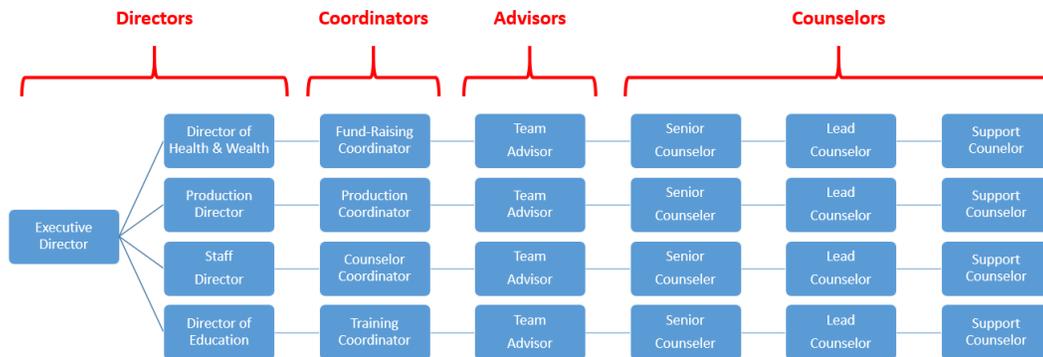
What if:

- there were 10 youth counselors instead of 2?
- every team had one?
- they received some advanced training about how to share their knowledge?
- they were given specific times and places and ways to share their knowledge?
- a few of the 10 were asked to come back to a third RYLA to help train and supervise next year's 10 youth counselors?
- there was a possibility for the very best of them to keep coming back to RYLA, year after year, to continually learn more and more leadership skills?
- there was a series of further advanced leadership training that they received, so that each year's training built upon what they already knew, just like in high school and college?
- we added more and more levels of leadership to the staff structure as we felt the need or desire?

We've been gradually building this system for the past 22 years and it's now at a fairly large and complex state. I would definitely NOT recommend trying to adopt our current system all at once. You need to let it develop slowly and gradually. The key concept is to retain the very best RYLA leaders – from every year and every level of staff – and bring them back the following year to help train the leaders who are a year or two younger.

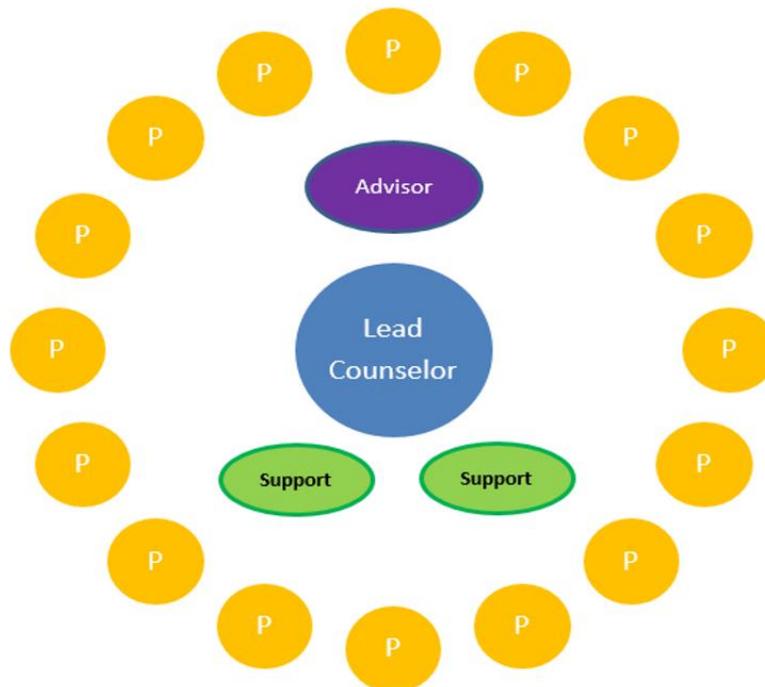
Let me show you how our leadership structure stands today. I expect some of you will think it's too large and too complicated. Maybe it is. We are constantly working to make it better and I expect it will be even better in a few more years.

District 7500 RYLA
Staff Hierarchy

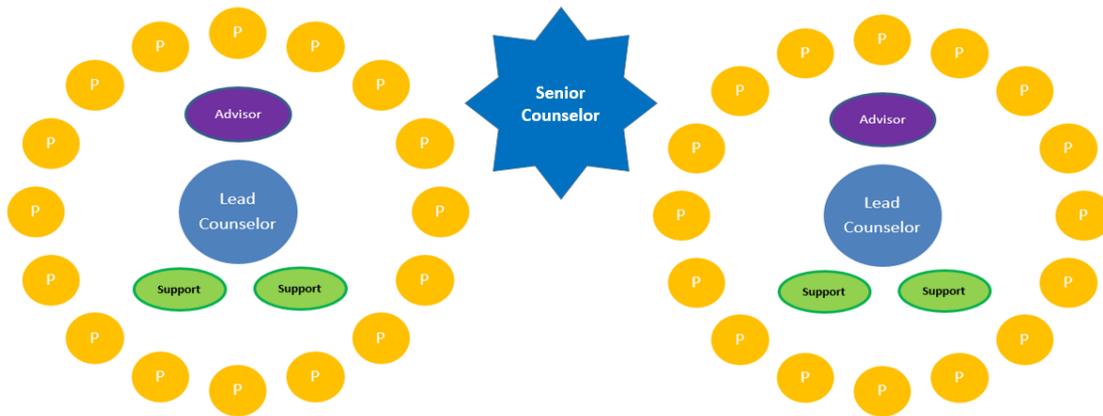


We have about 8 levels in our leadership Hierarchy. A group of about 5 Directors oversee a team of about 8 Coordinators who in turn manage Advisors, Senior Counselors, Lead Counselors and Support Counselors.

District 7500 RYLA
Team Structure



When a participant first comes to our RYLA they are placed in a Team with about 15 other Participants. The Team is Led most directly by 1 Lead Counselor who is at their 3rd RYLA. The Lead Counselor is assisted by 2 Support Counselors who are at their 2nd RYLA. Each Team also has an older Advisor who might be at their 5th RYLA...or their 15th! The Advisor is there to provide help as needed and to make sure everyone is safe.



The 4 or 5 best Lead Counselors return the next year to be Senior Counselors. Usually 1 Senior Counselor watches over 2 Teams and supervises the 3 Counselors on each team.

District 7500 RYLA Staff Progression

Participant	Supp Coun Candidate	Support Counselor	Lead Couns Candidate	Lead Counselor	Senior Counselor	Advisor	
RYLA		RYLA		RYLA		RYLA	
June	January	June	January	June	January	June	
Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4	
						Year 5	

It takes 5 years for a RYLA participant to work their way up to the Advisor level. The first year they are a Participant. The second year they are a Support Counselor. The third year they are a Lead Counselor. The fourth year they are a Senior Counselor. The fifth year they are an Advisor.

District 7500 RYLA Staff Training Process

Year 1	June	RYLA	Participant
	January	Staff Training & Selection	Support Counselor Candidate
	March	Staff Training & Selection	Support Counselor Candidate
	April	Staff Training & Selection	Support Counselor Candidate
Year 2	June	RYLA	Support Counselor
	January	Staff Training & Selection	Lead Counselor Candidate
	March	Staff Training & Selection	Lead Counselor Candidate
	April	Staff Training & Selection	Lead Counselor Candidate
Year 3	June	RYLA	Lead Counselor
	November	Sr Counselor Training Camp	Senior Counselor Candidate
	January	Staff Training & Selection	Senior Counselor
	March	Staff Training & Selection	Senior Counselor
	April	Staff Training & Selection	Senior Counselor
Year 4	June	RYLA	Senior Counselor
	January	Staff Training & Selection	Advisor
	March	Staff Training & Selection	Advisor
	April	Staff Training & Selection	Advisor
	June	RYLA	Advisor

During that time there is an ongoing process of training and selection, with more experienced staff actively mentoring the younger staff at every stage. The Advisors train the Lead Counselors and Senior Counselors, and the Senior Counselors train the Support Counselors.

Why do we go to so much effort and trouble?

RYLA is a YOUTH Leadership training program. And the best way to learn something is by actually doing it – not listening to some adult telling you how THEY do it. To get as many youth as possible actively LEADING in some way, we've found that setting up this system of multiple leadership levels allows the maximum number of people to all practice leadership at the same time. Our leadership hierarchy is also similar to what you find in many large corporations or education institutions, so we are providing a practical training ground for real-life leaders.

There is also redundant supervision of the newest RYLA participants from several different levels of experienced staff, so there are many sets of eyes on the participants to promote safety.

The staff structure is organized so there are usually twice as many candidates as job openings – this lets us be choosy and only select the best.

The staff work very hard together to organize and facilitate the RYLA events and this creates very strong bonds of friendships between them. Many of them become best friends and several have met their future spouses at RYLA.

20 years ago I had to work very hard organizing our RYLA program, but now that we have a large team of experienced leaders I find most tasks are getting done without my direct involvement. In fact, during last year's RYLA I was away on a business trip for the entire time, including 2 entire months before RYLA started. Our staff handled everything on their own and they did a fantastic job.

Let me mention once again: You should not try to duplicate our elaborate staff structure all at once. It would be far too confusing and difficult. The most important thing is to develop some system evaluating the youth leaders and inviting the best of them back to RYLA the next year. At each successive RYLA they will learn more and refine their leadership skills further. They will take on more and more responsibility. They will help you develop your RYLA program in ways you wouldn't have imagined. And you will have a TRUE youth leadership program!

All of this has been from my perspective. Now I'd like you to hear about it from two other perspectives: From the perspective of a new Participant, and finally from the perspective of a few of our staff members who have gone through some of our staff training programs.