

CULTIVATING A YOUNG LEADER

Learning from books is obviously a crucial component of a child's success at school, but learning to be a leader can be hugely important too. This article shares some insights into leadership from three educators and a college admission expert and how they instil leadership in students.

Our educational paradigm has changed considerably during the last couple of decades.

From teamwork and cooperating with others when doing projects to debating and offering help to learners who cannot cope with certain tasks, the objectives of student leadership requires more analysis than ever before.

It is important for students to experience leadership opportunities during their schooling days to learn the art of building relationships within teams, define identities, and achieve tasks effectively. Student leadership also provides students an opportunity to learn to identify and display effective communication and interpersonal skills.

Positive communication and feedback between teachers and students is vital in building leadership skills, more so in the era of remote education. The relationship between teachers and students will help students to be empathic and training in social skills will also lead to learning cooperation and patience.



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LEADERSHIP STARTS IN SCHOOLS

Schools are undisputedly the most conducive training grounds for leadership skills.

Learning from books is obviously a crucial component of a child's success at a school but learning to be a leader can be hugely important too. Leadership is about developing a strong character, being confident in making decisions, encouraging others, setting goals, and staying motivated. Every educator no matter their subject or expertise, is bound to have their own way to instil and inculcate leadership qualities into their students.

"Building leadership skills takes time, but it is a rewarding process when you see your students on stage leading school assemblies and managing school events," says Emeric Hing, Head of Character, Career & Coaching at Westlake International School, Kampar.

Emeric says student leadership can be seen as a responsibility when a student takes up a task and marshals on a team in completing the goals of the project or organisation.

"Some students assume the role because there is a void and someone needs to get the job done. They acknowledge that they might not be best fitted to do the job, but they give their very best. They need to be commended for it," he says.

"The school and the classroom are a great platform for developing leadership," says Emeric. Engaging with fellow students in different situations can help them learn to be tactful,



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– Emeric Hing, Head of Character, Career & Coaching, Westlake International School, Kampar



accommodating, and wise in decision making.

"In the classroom, they deal with peers within their age group (i.e. assignments). While in school, they work with their teachers (i.e. school-based projects). They get to learn and adjust to working with different people of different ages and backgrounds. This will shape and prepare them for the real world," he says.

Schools today can cultivate a culture of student leadership in which teachers play an important role.

"First, set a direction. Schools and teachers need to be clear on their expectations for student leadership bodies in school. Start creating a leadership culture with teachers and then move on to

the students. Give them the reasons to do what they do.

"Next, identify students who will be able to lead and help build a team around them. Provide them a space (online or physical) and publicly acknowledge students with certain positions, but don't forget the team players too.

"Then we have to take action. Set your students up for success by letting them lead events and projects. They will need your guidance initially but once they are set, off they go!" says Emeric.

He says when Westlake International School set a vision for the Student Council, the students were given the liberty to suggest and lead events. Teachers would help remind them to reflect on the purposes and objectives of what they do.

"Empowering students is extremely vital. We offer the Student Council Committee members certain positions which are tailor-made for them, capitalising on the talents as well as their social skills. We also make sure the next generation of leaders are ready to continue the trend.

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"As teachers, we need to be very intentional in investing our time in forging a healthy relationship with our students. Our personal touch with students really matters. Students are quick to pick up positive reinforcement and perks from their teachers and leadership qualities among their peers," he says.

Their school's co-curriculum activities play a vital role in building up student leadership among their students. Emeric says the LEO Club has been instrumental in helping the community around the Kinta Valley with their recycling project and creating awareness for the students. Their team of prefects and the Student Council are running projects such as the ShoeBox charity and an upcoming TED Talk.

During the movement control

orders, the students continued to venture into their respective projects online, and they managed to build their own incubator to hatch an egg. The Student Council Committee adapted to the new norm and tapped their energy at home to create WISdom, an internal student website for the school.

"Leadership begins from the senior leadership team of the school and the core group of teachers," says Emeric. "You need everyone to buy into the process in building a leadership culture among the students. After all, we are building the leaders of our future," he says.

A TEACHER'S ROLE IN LEADERSHIP

One educator with a unique approach to education and

leadership is Steven Shorthose, teacher, director, and founder of INTuition (a tutoring centre), who has over 20 years of teaching experience in various outstanding schools across Asia, such as Garden International School, The British School Manila, and Alice Smith School.

Steven, together with his team of teachers, ensures that the students enjoy the learning process and feel fully involved in every lesson.

"We achieve this by ensuring small class sizes of four students or less to guarantee more involvement and encourage a strong student-teacher bond, which I believe is crucial for success. This guarantees an in-depth knowledge of the student, which leads to more trust and academic risks where students





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Director & Founder of INtuition

take on challenging tasks to master content or skills.

"In the hands of great teachers, like the ones we have in INtuition, it will also lead to a strong understanding of the subject matter," says Steven.

True to his belief, at Intuition, the intake is no more than 50 students per establishment. Once that is full, the management starts a separate centre elsewhere. This is mainly due to Steven's belief that students should be able to be close to the centre and able to walk to school if possible.

The low numbers keep things

more intimate between the teachers and students as well, allowing for students to really witness the leadership skills of the teachers themselves as they navigate the classrooms.

"As an educator myself, I constantly try to keep the classroom a place where students can happily get a question wrong as making mistakes is a pre-requisite to good learning. Furthermore, our students' contact with adults and discussions in the classroom is not only limited to teaching. The teacher-student relationship is vital to progress and going 'off topic' and discussing environmental or world issues is integral to this relationship.

Students feeling valued and known allows them to take academic risks, which are key to learning," explains Steven. One of Steven's former students is Anthony Tan, the founder and CEO of Grab, who is known for wanting to finish his examinations early, as he wanted to progress through the education process as effectively as possible. His journey took him to Harvard and eventually saw him create the massively successful e-hailing company, Grab.

According to Steven, two factors cultivate good learning and leadership skills: the ethos of the establishment and the culture of each teacher and classroom. "Students don't enjoy being judged and many aren't comfortable answering questions in front of a big group. If the trust

in every classroom is real, then students will thrive by asking questions, offering solutions, and then students should find what their strengths and weaknesses are," says Steven.

For students wanting to extend their new found leadership skills beyond the four walls of the classroom, Steven suggests playing an essential role in the community can help. "Planting trees, reducing city heat, and composting are all necessary issues to address, and I feel families can be driven to positive change by their children."

ALIGNING FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEADERSHIP

For Dr Cheng Mien Wee, Executive Director of Sunway International Schools & Director of Pre-U Studies, Sunway College, programmes targeting building student leadership have changed with times.

"In the 1990s and 2000s, programmes on student or youth leadership have focused on developing young people's soft skills, for example their ability to effectively communicate by presenting ideas and arguing viewpoints, thinking creatively and critically, and collaborating and working with others. These attributes are often called '21st century skills'.

"From the 2010s to 2020s, youth and student development programmes are taking on additional dimensions of life, i.e. people's 'life skills', that include digital literacy, financial literacy, and environmental stewardship for sustainability. These are core

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skills for today's students—our Gen Zs and Gen Alphas—to succeed in their adulthood,” she says.

In the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (1988) by Sean Covey, youth or student leadership encompasses all activities—both formal and informal—that are aimed at building positive habits, principles, and virtues in young people.

Dr Cheng says leadership in formal context is about systematic processes of teaching and building young peoples' knowledge and skills, and all these happen through schools and colleges or universities.

“So formal education is the right ‘place’ and ‘time’ for instilling positive traits and leadership and these make for better student graduates, a more educated work force, and overall nation building.

“But we cannot discount the importance of instilling student leadership in informal education settings like at home and in communities.

“When leadership lessons from school and home are not aligned, the student's development suffers and his or her success in adult years is compromised,” she says. Collectively, leadership



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skills and attributes that are developed through education—both formal and informal—are important and help people succeed at work and in life.

Dr Cheng says honing leadership skills and attributes in Gen Z and Gen Alpha means

equipping them with both soft-skills and life-skills that prepare them for success in their adulthood. Schools can develop student leadership culture via three areas: curriculum—academic and co-curricular, community service, and awards and recognition.

These leadership skills strategies cover the 3 As: Adapt (work at embedding or adapting leadership development into the school's curriculum and extra/co-curriculum), Adopt (look into ways for engaging and embracing communities and serving their needs), and Award (coach students on setting personal and academic goals, guide them towards achieving their goals, and recognise and reward their outcomes.)

“Our teachers bring these aspects into their lessons and assessments of students' learning outcomes,” she says. “Besides the curriculum, community service is an integral part of the Canadian and IB programmes at Sunway International School (SIS). Students earn academic credits or grades that not only recognise the hours they spent in their community service projects but also how they have served particular needs or found solutions to identify problems.

“At SIS, students are recognised for their leadership in academic and non-academic as well as extra-curricular pursuits. These opportunities encourage students to explore and expand their leadership potential and build on their strengths,” she says.

For instance, SIS LEADS is a co-curricular programme that prepares students in areas of



financial literacy, digital literacy, environmental stewardship, and youth leadership.

Dr Cheng says today's youth have to be digitally savvy, and constantly learn, unlearn, and relearn. Aside from digital literacy programmes, teachers guide students on becoming effective online learners and lifelong learners.

Besides schools, students can also develop their leadership skills via serving in non-governmental organisations, community groups like homes for orphans and people with special needs, and religious organisations. "Many religious organisations have well established youth leadership programmes," she says.

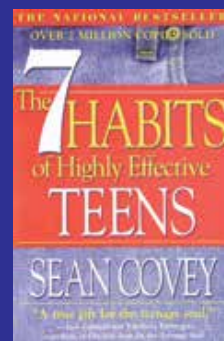
HONING LEADERSHIP THROUGH PASSION

To Christopher Rim, founder and CEO of Command Education, a US-based college consulting firm, leadership can take on many forms, but in essence, it is emotionally intelligent self-startership and an enthusiasm to improve whatever community that student is a part of. Students most effectively demonstrate leadership when they find creative solutions to issues around them.

"At Command Education, our work is centred around helping students find and develop their own leadership qualities by becoming involved in their communities, starting their own projects, and taking charge of their education. Some students may initially be hesitant to take this step, so we encourage them to find leadership through their own passions.

SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEENS

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey, the author explores 7 habits that can help teens and their parents navigate the problems they encounter daily.



HABIT 1: BE PROACTIVE

Being proactive means taking control of the things you can control and forgetting about the things you can't control.



HABIT 2: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Beginning with the end in mind means knowing where you want to be in the future; you can't make a plan if you don't!

HABIT 3: PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

Putting first things first means learning how to plan and how to manage your time so that which is most important gets done!



HABIT 4: THINK WIN/WIN

Thinking win-win means being creative and finding ways for BOTH you and the other party to succeed when trying to resolve a conflict.



HABIT 5: SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND

Seeking first to understand means listening: try to see things from another's point of view before you start sharing your own.

HABIT 6: SYNERGISE

Synergy means that the sum is greater than its individual parts. In other words, synergizing is proving that 1 + 1 can = 3. How?



HABIT 7: SHARPEN THE SAW

Sharpening the saw means taking the time to stay at your best. It also means constantly improving on the use of the first six habits.



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"For example, if a student is passionate about the environment, we help guide and encourage them to become environmental advocates in their own communities through efforts such as raising awareness, mobilising their peers, fundraising, and more," he says.

If students pursue what they are passionate about and put time and effort into exploring their passions, then they can develop their leadership traits.

"When students take up leadership roles, they will be further motivated by the impact they can make. This creates a domino effect. In terms of college admission, elite schools are looking to pluck students who are community leaders and transplant them to their own campuses so that they can make an impact and improve the community at their new college," he says.

While great leaders have ambitious goals, they also understand that they can achieve even greater things together with others. Creativity and adaptability are important because making an impact often comes with overcoming obstacles and finding creative solutions to those challenges.

"Leaders can be made," says Christopher. "From a lack of experience and insecurity about their own abilities to making an impact, a student can become a great leader if they apply themselves and take it step by step."

He believes schools can cultivate a culture of student



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— Christopher Rim, Founder & CEO of Command Education, New York, USA

leadership by creating opportunities for students to gain leadership and encouraging a culture of collaboration and support. By rewarding students who seek leadership roles in their communities, schools can create a culture where any student can feel as though they are truly able to make a difference at their school.

"Developing leadership in students is critically important to their future success," says Christopher. By developing

leadership early on, students start thinking bigger, and realise that by properly taking advantage of the opportunities around them, there is no limit to what they can do once they graduate from college.

"When students create projects or initiatives that aim for success, this only encourages them to aim big not only in their current schools or communities, but also in their college goals and career aspirations."

He says schools can implement leadership classes in their curricula that guide students on how to find their passions, explore them, and make an impact through them. Schools can also give students training on how to create a resume, how to brainstorm their own self-started initiative, and how to create partnerships and teams to maximise their impact.

"In our work with students, we start early with training students on leadership skills. We first get to know a student and understand what topics and issues they are passionate about. From there, we help students brainstorm on how to develop and build on these interests in order to make an impact through them. We find that students feel empowered once we help break down the steps to leadership.

"By starting their own initiative, students learn valuable skills such as time management, project management, adaptability, and more, which are all extremely valuable traits to their own development and future prospects," concludes Christopher. ©