



# Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

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Series Set II Number 3

Reprint August 1999

## Set II Strategies for Presidents

### Leadership Styles

by Marsha Hoffman Rising, FGS Past President

# Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

The paper discusses the different leadership styles of presidents, the characteristics of the styles, and when a good president can make use of the different styles of leadership in different situations.

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## Set II Strategies for Presidents Leadership Styles

by Marsha Hoffman Rising, FGS Past President

### INTRODUCTION

The president of a genealogical society not only influences policy for a term of office, but sets the psychological tone for the society as well. This tone is defined by the style of leadership adopted by the president. This paper will examine various leadership styles recognizing that few people adopt one style to the exclusion of all others. Most leaders vary and combine several aspects of leadership styles depending on the problems faced by the society, the personality of the existing governing board, and the policies already developed by the organization

Past experiences and psychological make-up do influence the style adopted by the president. Research in formal organizational structures, however, suggest that leaders can indeed change their style. Change requires flexibility, courage and energy, but it can be done. As you examine the five leadership styles discussed below, think about the leadership methods you have developed. Evaluate if a change in your style might benefit you and your organization.

### TASK ORIENTED LEADER

These individuals determine goals, concentrate on the job that needs to be done and motivate people to help. If some members interfere or attempt to provoke conflict, these leaders are able to move forward without becoming unduly concerned. They focus on the responsibility at hand and ignore the distractions. These presidents feel comfortable in making most needed decisions and after deciding, can easily convince others to support them. These leaders have confidence in their own abilities and are secure in their position. They often accomplish a great deal. However, their methods can result in others feeling excluded and even resentful.

*The Board of the We All Have Roots Genealogical Society feels that communication among members should be improved. President Let's-Do-It agrees. She collects samples of other society's newsletters, develops on her home computer a prototype of a newsletter for the We All Have Roots Society, obtains bids from several printing companies, and then presents her newsletter proposal at the next Board meeting.*

### **CHARISMATIC/AUTHORITARIAN LEADER**

This leader presents new ideas, then invites questions and discussion from the Board and membership. The final decision, however, is made by the President and then sold to members; sometimes on a one-to-one basis. These leaders delegate well and have the ability to persuade others to work hard toward the agreed upon goals. This type of leader tends to be personal with praise and with criticism. These leaders show concern with individual member's feelings and work well with others on an individual basis.

*The Blue River Genealogical Society needs to select an editor for their new quarterly, Damp Times. Two qualified candidates are available. President Peacock acquaints the Board with the job qualifications and provides biographical sketches of each of those interested in the position. President Peacock feels that Susie Smith would do a better job. After the Board meeting, President Peacock separately telephones his Vice-president and Treasurer, both strong personalities. He tells each how much he values their opinions and asks how they feel about Susie Smith as quarterly editor. Within a few minutes President Peacock has contributed why he feels Susie Smith is such an asset to the Society. The other officers agree she has much to offer and each could support her appointment as Editor. President Peacock states he greatly appreciates their help and believes the Society is stronger for each of their contributions. At the next meeting, President Peacock appoints Susie Smith the Damp Times Editor.*

### **DEMOCRATIC LEADER**

The president with this approach seeks to obtain cooperation of members and encourages participation in decision making. Communication is very important to this type of leader and open discussion is encouraged.

These leaders present several ideas, encourage new ones from members and then ask the group to make the decision. Most members respond well to this style of leadership and report satisfaction with the job done as long as the leader does not relinquish ultimate responsibility.

*The End of the Earth Genealogical Society is planning a fall conference. They would like to have a syllabus available for attendees. President Washington appointed a committee to investigate alternatives to production and printing. After the committee reports at the Board meeting, President Washington is careful to review the positives and negatives of each alternative. After considerable discussion, Valerie Vocal expresses her strong feelings that the group should use Plan A. However, President Washington is aware that Calvin Quiet has prior experience in the publishing field. The leader briefly tells the group of Calvin's qualifications and asks if Calvin has an opinion as to which plan the group should adopt. After Calvin explains why he supports Plan B, several other Board members expressed agreement. Valerie continues to advocate Plan A. President Washington asks that the committee again review Plan A and Plan B suggesting there might be a way to combine the best aspects of both plans. The president asks the committee to further investigate each proposal, weigh the points raised at this meeting, returning to the next meeting with a recommendation. Two weeks later, the committee returns suggesting a modified Plan B. They carefully explain their reasons and note the individual consulted. The Board votes unanimously for Plan B.*

This form of leadership has the disadvantage, however, of becoming time-consuming and sometimes decreasing actual productivity. Considerable time is taken in reaching the original consensus. In the interests of pleasing everyone, decisions can be weakened. Although most of us believe strongly in the democratic

process and we should like to be this type of leader, this is not the leader you want in a crisis.

### **PROCESS-ORIENTED LEADER**

This leader's ultimate concern is member satisfaction. She has a deep interest in people's feelings and is sensitive to the importance of social interaction. This leader recognizes that a genealogical society performs an important social outlet for many of its members. It is important that people feel good about the society and other members to the greatest extent possible. This person tries to see that members are recognized and praised for activities both personally and publicly.

Members are encouraged to participate in board meetings. Organizations who elect presidents with this style may have large councils or board representing a large proportion of the membership. The President serves in the role of facilitator.

She encourages members to bring up problems for discussion. This type of leader is more **part** of the group than **head** of the group. The human element is more important to this leader than the achievement of objectives. This type of executive is usually well-liked and member satisfaction with this person may be quite high. Usually another leader will emerge, however, who is more task oriented and will steer the discussion to goals and/or problems. If these two people work well together, much can be accomplished.

*President Positive feels that the hardworking society volunteers should be recognized. She discusses a social event with the Hospitality Committee. She encourages the committee to involve as many society members as possible in both planning and presenting the affair. She devises buttons which display the number "30." At the social event, the president presents a button to each of those members who have*

*contributed thirty or more volunteer hours to the society during the past year. President Positive explains that each of these individuals has contributed not only to the growth of the society, but to the good feelings members enjoy as well. After the affair, President Positive sends a list of those who received buttons to the local newspaper.*

### **LAISSEZ FAIRE LEADER**

This President, with minimum personal participation, allows the group complete freedom in determining goals and decisions. This leader may supply various materials for group discussion or gather data requested by the members. He takes no part in the discussion, however, and does not try to steer the members in any specific way. This leader makes minimal contribution to the discussion unless questioned. He makes no attempt to regulate or supervise the organization or its decisions.

This type of management encourages independence and self-reliance in society members. It forces individuals to become associates in the group and to get involved in the problem solving process.

*Several board members of the Finding Families Genealogical Society approach President Laid-back suggesting that the society help the Many Books Public Library raise funds to buy the 1920 U.S. Federal census. At the next meeting, President Laid-back offers the idea and provides the cost of the census. He asks the group if they want to adopt this project. He invites them to think about ways in which the Society could raise the necessary funds. Discussion begins.*

A major disadvantage of this style is that without a strong leader, the group may have no direction or control. Strong personalities, who were not elected, may attempt to gain control and cause dissension within the society. Other members may become frustrated and the society may evolve into chaos.

**SUMMARY**

It becomes apparent these are not five separate styles. Most people use a combination of techniques depending on their society, its history and written policies, the values and personality of the leader, and the confidence the members have in their president. Leadership styles may change depending on the goals and structure of the society as well as the challenges it faces.

The democratic process may work best when the society is deciding how to raise funds or whether to publish the county marriage records. On the other hand, if the company who was printing the conference syllabus has an equipment breakdown three days before the event, the society needs an authoritarian leader who can quickly make decisions.

Good leaders recognize both the positive and negative factors inherent in each leadership

style. However, the most effective leaders are ones who consider various leadership methods, know themselves well and then deliberately choose a style to fit the situation.

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- I: Strategies for Societies
- II: Strategies for Presidents
- III: Strategies for Vice-Presidents
- IV: Strategies for Treasurers
- V: Strategies for Secretaries
- VI: Strategies for Program Chairpersons

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