Lemhi County Citizens Gain Leadership Skills at LEAD-ON Leadership Symposium

The Situation
Lemhi County is a community of volunteers who serve as leaders in a wide variety of organizations including the Fire Department, Search & Rescue, Fair Board, City Council, Library Board, and city government. The county hosts over 50 volunteer organizations.

Recent Community Leadership Studies yielded the following results:
- 7 studies found leadership development and civic participation are characteristics of successful communities.
- 6 studies found that having a community vision and being proactive were characteristics of successful communities.
- 5 studies found evidence of networking and cooperation as critical factors for community success.
- Well designed and effective community leadership development programs provide training, contact, and experiences that are relevant to the other top characteristics of successful communities.
- Community leadership development programs provide the framework and process to help a community build a critical mass of informed and capable people.

Volunteer organizations struggle with ineffective leadership, or ineffective meetings, or “STP’s” (same ten people) which leads to ineffective organizations. People want to build their skills but leadership trainings are usually held outside of the county. Because of time and travel expenses, most volunteers cannot afford to attend.

By using the EVOLVE (extension volunteer organization for leadership, vitality and enterprise) program, a community steering committee was formed to determine skills taught, speakers, format of the program, location, and date. The committee worked to define leadership as “ability to bring a group of people together and effectively guide them to cooperatively set goals, work together, and accomplish a worthwhile purpose.” The committee titled the symposium “LEAD ON” which was the acronym for leadership, education, achievement, development, organization, and network. The motto of the program was: “Apply the forehead directly to it!” The purpose of the symposium was to:
1. Enhance each participants ability to bring a group of people together
2. Effectively guide them to cooperatively set goals
3. Work together to accomplish those goals
4. Carry out their purpose

Our Response
The community group formed to develop a symposium represented by county government, school district #291, the religious community, federal government, and chamber of commerce. A University of Idaho Extension Critical Issues grant was awarded to fund the symposium. Other outside funding partners included the Bureau of Land Management and the Salmon Challis National Forest.
A one-day symposium was developed by the community group and included hosting Jana Kemp of Management Essentials as the key-note speaker. Jana Kemp also taught 2 break-out sessions. Janice Stimpson, District IV Interim Extension Director, was the lunch speaker and taught a break-out session as well. There were 5 morning break-out sessions which included:

- Jana Kemp—Saying No
- Lynn Dahle—Stress Management
- Panel Discussion—Lessons from Community Leaders
- Shannon Williams—Personality Compass
- Dr. Adam Deutchman—Effective Meetings

The afternoon break-out sessions included:

- Jana Kemp—Team Decision Making
- Janice Stimpson—Volunteers, They Aren’t What They Use To Be
- Panel Discussion—Working with the Local Media
- Katie Hoffman—Time Management

Continuing education credits were applied for and awarded to teachers attending the program.

**Program Outcomes**

There were 35 people in attendance that represented 19 different organizations and businesses in Lemhi and Custer Counties. When asked why they choose to attend the following responses were received:

- Networking
- Personal growth
- Continuing education credits
- Leadership skills
- Interested in being a more effective teacher and more cooperative leader
- More support for soccer program
- Asked by my manager
- More effective volunteer

When asked if the symposium met their expectations, 84% said yes, 5% said exceeded, and 10% were uncommitted. Break-out sessions averaged a rating of 3.6 out of 4. The keynote speaker was rated as a 2.8 and the lunch speaker was rated as a 3.7 out of 4.

Participants were asked how they would apply the skills and knowledge they gained at the symposium. Comments included:

- I believe I lead better now
- Change the way I run board meetings
- Meet right away with leaders of my organization to apply the things I learned to share
- Give feedback early and often

In a wrap-up meeting held 2 weeks after the symposium, participating teachers expressed they had applied the skills taught at the symposium in several ways. One participant applied the principles taught in the personality compass workshop during teacher negotiations. Another said that she now remembers to be helpful and respond quickly to students and parents concerns and that they are her customers. Many were able to say “no” to commitment requests and didn’t have to be rude about doing it, and others said they asked more questions before committing. They appreciated the fresh perspective the symposium brought about.

**Future Plans**

Everyone indicated that the symposium should be an annual event, and we should change the topics covered each year. In promoting the symposium, it was discovered that real estate agents also need continuing education credits, and were interested in the symposium for next year. Topics suggested for next year included handling conflict, motivating your board, communication, using humor, poverty, goal setting, discipline, delegation and follow-up, writing job descriptions for volunteers, constructive criticism, and facilitation.

**For More Information**

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