



## **The challenges of leadership in colleges**

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If you are reading this I am going to assume you are either intending to take up a leadership role in your college or residential hall or you are currently in such a role. Either way I encourage you to share your own ideas on this topic, agree, disagree I don't care as long as your opinions are constructive.

Leadership in colleges, where do I start...? If you are taking a leadership role in a college or residential hall you could be (but are not limited to) a student club president, a residential advisor, a committee member or simply a student who takes an active role in their college community. In my opinion time management is a skill you must have to be a student leader, without it you will do a poor job - plain and simple. As a student you have to balance your time between your university studies, any paid jobs you have, sporting activities, your social life (which includes spending quality time with friends and family) and of course your commitments to your college or residential hall. If you can't manage your time effectively between these areas of your life, then one or more of them will start to falter, and as a leader this means you are not setting an example of how to be a model student leader to your fellow collegians. As a leader you should expect people to look up to you, in particular freshers. The best way to ensure that the culture of your college becomes what you want it to become is to set an example as a model student. Monkey see, monkey do. If you can't dedicate time in your day towards your college commitments then you will quickly find that all the plans you had for improving college will be put on the back burner until it is too late.

This leads me onto the point of culture change. The word change will immediately cause a reaction of fear amongst older college students. People resist change, it is natural, as soon as you realise this; you can handle it. Older students in particular won't want to see the institution that nurtured them be changed, because it distorts their reality. But change is a good thing in most cases. It keeps things fresh and exciting and stops life from becoming predictable. I am a big supporter of traditions in college. People gain a sense of belonging and feel a connection with college alumni when they know they have gone through the same traditions. So when I talk about changing college culture I really mean adding to the existing culture so as to improve it. If you want to make big changes in college it comes back to the culture of your community. The easiest way to change college culture is in Orientation Week, when you have a bunch of new students with little knowledge of the culture of your college, and you can set an example and make your expectations clear. Doing this makes achieving your goals much easier. It again comes back to managing your time: getting things ready for orientation week well in advance and having a clear vision of where you want it to go.

Vision is important for student clubs. One of the most annoying things about student clubs is they are only in power for one year and so only focus on short term goals. If you want to make any significant impact on your college it must be a long term impact. Thus a real challenge facing leaders in college is ensuring that the ideas they put in place remain in years to come. Continuity is very important for this reason, and a great way to ensure this is by creating an immediate past president position, and facilitating knowledge sharing and changeover processes between outgoing and incoming executives. Continuity is something that all student clubs should think about, if only to prevent past mistakes.

Colleges and residential halls have lots of stakeholders and trying to please these stakeholders is a difficult task. Your head of college is one stakeholder who invests a lot of time and resources into the college and you need to have a good relationship with them to see the college run smoothly. But often what the students want and what the head of college wants are two different things, so finding win-win situations for both parties is the key to pleasing all parties concerned.

This is just a quick rant about my views of student leadership, and I haven't addressed all the challenges that leaders will face, but I hope this will at least give you some food for thought and get you thinking about ways to address issues and how to overcome them.