

BECOMING A LEADER IN A PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

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A psychologist-colleague said bluntly: "I do not want anything to do with APA"—but then went on to lament problems that plague psychology and her/his personal career. Just like "Waiting for Godot," by Samuel Beckett, my colleague seemed prone to inaction and to be waiting for someone else to find the solutions.

As one who teaches leadership, ethics, and law to graduate-level psychology students, I believe that the definition of professionalism means that every psychologist is a "social trustee" and has the responsibility of advancing the knowledge base, professional ethics and standards, and quality of services--all to benefit society (Brint, 1994). To not actively support and advance psychology may introduce ethical considerations.

During my doctoral studies, "Small Groups" was one of the best graduate courses that I ever completed. It created an awareness of how groups are empowering for all concerned, and that leadership requires analyzing, influencing, and managing the group dynamics (especially communications).

In psychological associations (e.g., the APA, any of its Divisions, or a state psychological association), leaders must develop and maintain social power. As opposed to other groups with nonprofessional members, psychological associations do not rely on reward, coercive, or legitimate power (except there is limited legitimate power when a leader is elected to an office, but it is only briefly allowed).

Among psychologists, the key to leadership is identifying and relying on inner resources--and the payoff will be inner rewards.

A leader of psychologists must have a force that will motivate and influence other psychologists to think and behave in a preferred manner, due to "one's social position in society, or from being liked and admired (Franzoi, 2006, p. 313). With this power base, the members benefit by sharing in the referent and expert power, as occurs in the contexts of professional conferences and scholarly information (e.g., publications and websites). Also, of course, social reinforcements abound in interprofessional relationships.

Given that psychologists are highly intelligent and well educated, leaders in psychological associations cannot resort to directive or controlling communications or maneuvers. To do so might lead to an escalation of psychological reactance (i.e., rejection and resistance), and leadership will decline.

I believe that effective leadership in psychological associations is aligned with contingency theory. That is, the leader must promote leader-member collaboration, with the members being true stakeholders. Thus, the leader engages in "telling, selling, participating, and delegating (Chance, & Chance, 2002, p. 116). The goal is to motivate psychologists to use their individual and collective abilities and exhibit a willingness to work on behalf of the psychological association.

Returning to my negative colleague, hopefully I can lead her/him to being more positive toward APA by the following four ideas:

- (1) professionalism necessitates individual commitment to improving the profession (no "Waiting for Godot");
- (2) participation in a psychological association will be empowering;

(3) inner rewards will be gained by accepting a leadership role;
and

(4) collaboration with other psychologists will be fulfilling
and create motivation for professional excellence.

I hope that that my colleague will heed my invitation to get more
involved in the activities of APA and other psychological
associations.

References

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