

School-Community Relations, Second Edition

**By Douglas J. Fiore, *Eye on Education*.
Larchmont, NY, hardbound, 320 pages,
\$74.95, ISBN: 1-59667-022-3**

Agriculture educators are frequently viewed as pillars of the community in which they teach, and are at the very least required to make frequent contact with parents, industry leaders, and other local stakeholders. This book offers best practices in creating a positive partnership between the school and its community. While the book is written for school principals, agriculture educators and preservice agriculture teachers can gain valuable insight in how best to join the school's agriculture department and the surrounding community. Main components of the book include 13 chapters on the essentials of effective school-community relations, followed by chapter summaries, case studies, and questions for analysis at the end of every chapter. Additionally, Fiore supplies readers with 26 show-cases which highlight real-life examples of topics discussed. Chapter discussions include benefits of and understanding the need for effective school, or agriculture department, relations within a community, roles of different types of publics, working with the media, effective verbal and nonverbal communication, welcoming community feedback, spotlighting a program, and crisis management. Again, while the chapters are geared toward school principals, the leadership role taken on by great agriculture teachers requires the same communication skills, and each of these chapters is directly applicable when leading a successful agriculture department.

Throughout the text, Fiore focuses heavily on the importance of public perception regarding the school, as it is what ultimately determines the direction of the relationship between the two. Throughout the chapters, he makes recommendations for actions that will enhance the public's perception of the school. These start with assessing these perceptions, and Chapter 2 delves into methods for reading the pulse of the community. One of the methods Fiore elaborates on is the "home visit", which he claims opens the door of communication between individual and community members and school leaders. This message is echoed throughout agriculture teacher preparation programs in the form of supervised agriculture experience visits. However, these visits can be awkward for a new agriculture teacher until he or she is established in a community, and Fiore's recommendations can ease the flow of SAE visits.

Several chapters address the different types of stakeholders that a leader should be sure to include in

communication, as well as how to most effectively communicate with each of them in a manner that enhances perceptions of the school or agriculture department. These groups include students, parents, formal and social leaders in community organizations, businesses, and school faculty and staff. The support of many high school agriculture programs hinges on relationships with these groups; this text informs the reader of how to effectively work with each of them, as well as how to avoid common mistakes made when working with each of these groups.

While perceptions of an agriculture department can be made through direct, two-way communication, one-way communication through the media effects the perceptions of many, often without providing feedback to the agriculture teacher. Fiore elaborates on how to effectively and appropriately communicate messages while maintaining or enhancing the school's positive image in various forms of media, including newsprint, webpages, television, radio, email, and over the telephone.

Chapter 11 focuses on the establishment of an effective crisis management plan, as well as how to communicate with individuals (including students) faced with crises. Teachers frequently encounter students and families facing crises, and understanding methods of appropriately handling these situations will be beneficial for agriculture teachers at any level of education or experience.

The three opportunities Fiore recommends for schools to invite the public in to enhance perceptions are open houses, parent-teacher conferences, and commencement ceremonies. All three of these have forms in the agriculture department: agriculture awareness events; career development events, fundraisers or trips involving parents; and chapter banquets. Chapter 12 discusses actions during each of these that, when taken, will increase attendance, quality of the event, and therefore public perception of the school or agriculture department.

As new agriculture teachers enter the classroom, oftentimes they are prepared to teach students; they are somewhat less prepared to lead an agriculture department under of the watchful eyes of parents and community members. Through Fiore's book, preservice and inservice agriculture teachers can establish a plan for enhancing and maintaining public perception of the school agriculture department, and increase relations between the school and community.

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The Student Leadership Challenge, Five Practices For Exemplary Leaders

By James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint. San Francisco, CA, paperback, 178 pages, \$25.00, ISBN: 978-0-470-17705-1

College and University leadership educators are constantly looking for ways to incorporate real-life applications to the leadership theory that is being taught. This book offers practical applications as well as real-life examples of college students' personal-best leadership practices. This book is directed to undergraduate students who are looking to better their own leadership practices and would work well in a leadership class setting.

The main components of this book include eight chapters. Five chapters focus specifically on the Five Practices For Exemplary Leaders which are: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. Concluding each chapter is a Review and Practice Section that includes activities, case studies, and questions to provoke thought and action in the student's own leadership experience. Each chapter includes excerpts of college student leaders who experienced success while using one or all of the Five Practices For Exemplary Leaders. In addition to these excerpts, there are also inspiring quotes by well-known leaders in society including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I have a Dream" speech. Each chapter inspires readers to analyze their own behavior and think of specific ways in which these applications could be implemented in the student-led organizations in which they are members and leaders.

Throughout the book, Kouzes and Posner tell time tested stories of how student leaders have made major impacts on the campuses of their Universities and Colleges using the Five Practices of Exemplary Leaders. Model the Way focuses on students setting the example that they want followed for success in their organizations. The first step in setting the example is establishing individual values. This chapter asks students to look at their own lives and pick out the values that matter the most to them and why they are important.

Inspire a Shared Vision enforces the idea that relationships with others must be built before expectations of followers can be established. To gain necessary relationships, student leaders must enlist others in something that matters by giving life to their vision and envisioning the future. People do not want to put in hard work for something they cannot envision as important. Leaders cannot know what

people view as important until proper relationships are built.

Challenging the Process reinforces that small changes make large impacts. Student leaders should search for opportunities for improvement in their organizations. Another important component to this chapter is the concept of experimentation and taking risks. Although Kouzes and Posner mostly focus on the triumphs of leaders, they also point out that good leaders learn from their mistakes and failures as much as successes. True leaders must be willing to take risks and know that failure is always an option. If not, the process is never changed and new successes are never accomplished.

Enable Others to Act is a chapter where many student leaders struggle. Trusting others and allowing others to be responsible for tasks that can improve them as leaders is just as important as engaging in practices that strengthen the leaders themselves. Leaders that participate in the same activities as the members and work alongside them to accomplish a task fosters collaboration and camaraderie. This cooperation demonstrates the leader's sense of selflessness and inspires members to do more. At the same time, in order to assure the future of the organization, a true leader must build others up and allow members to experience leadership roles. Learning to delegate to others and building trust is the central theme of Enabling Others to Act.

Encourage the Heart focuses on recognizing contributions and celebrating victories as essential means of rewarding hard work. Positive reinforcement is required of any successful organization to encourage continual growth. People tend to become burned out on the process when appreciation is not bestowed. As leaders, it is necessary to constantly be encouraging to maintain positive morale. By letting members and followers know they are appreciated and necessary, better and harder work will be done. Mini-celebrations should be conducted regularly for extraordinary accomplishments to happen.

As leadership educators look for ways to incorporate real-life applications into their classrooms, The Student Leadership Challenge offers this real-life application along with inspiring stories of other college student successes. The Student Leadership Challenge is an easy read and can assist student leaders in establishing a plan to incorporate the Five Practices For Exemplary Leaders into their organizations.

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