TIPS FOR THE PRESIDENT

Minor revision of 2002-2003 presentations by Alice Stolz, Organization Chair, League of Women Voters of Washington

Whatever your leadership style, you’ll be both administrator and spokesperson for the League. You will find yourself doing things you thought you couldn’t do, but you do it, because you are the president and it’s part of your job. And it’s not about you, it’s about League. Remember the “imposter phenomenon” – if you act as if you know what you’re doing, people will believe you.

As you begin your presidency:
- Designate what activities you will focus on personally
- Coordinate all League activities
- Facilitate with information, suggestions and support, then
- Delegate, delegate, delegate

If your League has co-presidents or a steering committee, the key to success is for everyone to know and to agree on who is to do what.

Future shock is here with rapid and overwhelming information overload. Tips:
- Glance through all mail/email immediately, note deadlines, forward to others as needed.
- It is important that you share the information from state and national with your board and/or members as soon as possible. There is so much mail, email, and website material, you can easily be overwhelmed. Don’t let communication stop with you, buried on your desk or in your computer.

Delegate, delegate, delegate. What can be delegated and to whom?

If you are feeling overwhelmed, ask yourself who could:
- Help make phone calls?
- Answer letters?
- Draft letters to the editor or media releases?
- Read the mail/email?
- Check phone messages?
- Attend the coalition meeting? (If two of you attend, there’s always a backup.)

Can I separate unfinished business into categories? What can I do next week, next month? Keep lists of reminders – in “tickler” file or on computer or on a notepad or whatever works for you (so satisfying to cross off completed tasks!)

What if delegation doesn’t work, the person doesn’t do it? Were you clear about the task, the goal, the deadline, gave some suggestions; say if any problems to contact you? Did you say that if they find they are unable to do it, to let you know so that you can find someone else? Or they do it, but not the way you wanted? (Don’t micro-manage.)
Leadership and board training. Most of us sort of know our bylaws, policies, guidelines, but many of us don’t review them unless we come to a sticky wicket problem, then “If all else fails, read the directions.”

What kinds of problems?

- Outside pressures – other organizations wanting instant agreement on joining coalition, sponsoring, endorsement, insisting on speaking to your board for “15 minutes.” (Translation – “30 minutes”). Have committee listen, make recommendations or listen one meeting, vote the next. Remember, you don’t have to take a position on an issue just because League has a position on it. Your League may choose to take no position if: your resources are elsewhere committed, it doesn’t fit into your priorities, your members could care less or are split on the issue (membership interest and support are vital), or because of other factors – timing, political climate, conflict with other positions, or negative impact on other activities or relationships.

- Board members(s) not knowing process, or not following process

- A “do-nothing” board (do you give small, sure-to-succeed tasks; or do you come brimming with ideas for them to just ratify, sometimes after the fact? Help them to be pro-active.)

- Personality clashes, overt or covert, between board members, or members(s) and president

- Immediate past president can be a mentor, or always off in foreign climes, or a portfolio or project chair, or a royal pain. (It’s OK if you don’t do it the way she did!)

- The board makes a decision that you don’t agree with for whatever reason. As leaguers, we are used to looking at both sides, weighing pros and cons, right? Think about it until you arrive at a perspective that makes it comfortable for you to represent League on the issue. It’s not about you, it’s about League, remember. If all else fails, delegate to someone else.

In all of the above, never get angry (that’s letting others set your agenda), don’t take things personally (even if it is), and don’t just do something, sit there (take time to think it through – anything can wait 24 hours.)

Many of the above problems can be lessened or never happen if we read the directions first. That’s why for board retreat and/or first board meeting, we advise reviewing the non-partisan statement, action guidelines, the board brochure. Then everyone is on the same page at the start. You can also take a few minutes at each board meeting to review some pertinent part of the guidelines. And you can always call the state League!

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