

DECA Leadership Retreat

A DECA leadership retreat is a locally created program that provides an opportunity to train your chapter members in areas that you might not otherwise have time to do in the classroom. It can be a one-day, two-day or longer conference planned specifically to accomplish the goals you set.

Preparing and conducting a DECA leadership retreat can be very time consuming. However, it can be a most rewarding experience and can save time and effort in the long run. It should be open to every DECA member who wants to be involved.

The following check list will help you prepare the retreat:

- **Plan the Timing of the Retreat**
A leadership retreat can be planned early in the school year to serve as a “get acquainted” event. A retreat can also be beneficial in explaining what DECA is all about. Plan recruitment ideas so that as many members as possible will attend, especially for your first retreat. After the first year, students will be eager to attend.
- **Plan the location of the Retreat**
One successful location for a retreat is a campsite. Cabins can offer shelter in case of bad weather, yet provide a change from the many comforts and luxuries found in everyday living. A campsite is far enough away from everything else that students can concentrate on leadership and the planned activities. Students can feel comfortable and relaxed in this location, as there is no applied dress code.
- **Prepare an Agenda**
The agenda should include leadership activities as well as fun activities. Everyone should be required to participate in everything, including meals.
- **Select Counselors**
Counselors/supervisors/facilitators/chaperones can be the DECA chapter advisor(s), parents, or other faculty members. Make sure these adults are also willing to participate as group or council leaders. This is an excellent way to show your school faculty members what your program is all about. Each council (see below for definitions and functions) should also have an alumni member. Alumni chosen should be ones who can share DECA experiences with their councils. Many of the new students might be afraid to ask the advisor a question, but they will ask an alumni member more easily.
- **Create Councils**
Groups called councils will work on activities during the entire retreat. Anytime there is a small group activity, it will be in councils. Each council should have an adult leader, one or two alumni members and eight to ten members. Council members will get to know each other very well by the end of the retreat. When selecting councils, do not put friends together. Do not explain the concept of councils to the students until they are at the retreat. If they think they are going to be separated from their friends, they may decide not to go. Councils should be balanced as much as possible. In each council, include new and existing members, all grade levels, different classes

of the program, strong students, shy students and a good mix of males and females. It may take effort, but this will be time well spent.

- **Meet with the Counselors**

If possible, the DECA advisor should arrive at the camp one or two hours before the buses arrive to arrange everything for the students' arrival. Alumni members should also plan to arrive early to help with last-minute preparations. Once the buses arrive, the alumni members and counselors should help the students find their cabins and get unpacked. They can then lead some recreational activities. The purpose of the retreat and all important and/or complex activities should be explained early.

- **Prepare the budget**

Try to keep the cost of the retreat to a minimum. Use some of the organizational sites (Camp Fire, Boy Scouts, etc.) that only charge a small fee. This allows more students to attend, especially if it is early in the school year.

- **Create Sweatshirts or T-shirts**

Have a retreat sweatshirt designed and give these to all members as they arrive at camp. Officers can design the sweatshirts; however, members should not know about the sweatshirts until they arrive.

- **Give Attendees a Notebook**

Each arriving student should be given a notebook. Chances are they will not bring paper and pencil with them. The notebook can be used to take notes during leadership activities and for keeping a journal of retreat happenings that are meaningful to the individual. You may also wish to prepare beforehand or have the students prepare sections to address the following purposes of the retreat and to record how each was achieved:

1. To learn more about yourself than you did before the retreat.
2. To learn more about someone else than you did before.
3. To share information about yourself with someone else.
4. To understand what DECA is all about and how you can contribute to DECA.
5. To appreciate each other for who you are and what you can contribute to DECA.
6. To become a unified group of DECA members with common goals, directions and motivations.
7. To learn to be responsible and work together as a unit.
8. To write a program of work for the year.

- **Conduct Icebreaking Activities**

Icebreakers can be found on the DECA Web site in the "Leadership" section or through other resources. These activities help students to get to know each other in an atmosphere of fun and set the tone for working together during the many activities of the Retreat.

- **Have Debriefing Sessions**

Each night, following the day's activities, the adult and alumni counselors should conduct a debriefing session with the members in their cabins. The debriefing is a very important part of this retreat. It allows the counselors an opportunity to talk once more with the students to discuss any special concerns, and to make those last thoughts for the day positive. Please encourage discussion and make sure everyone says something. No one should just sit and listen. If a student does not volunteer

something, ask him/her specifically. Usually students are talkative. The purpose of the debriefing session is three-fold:

1. To review the day's activities and their intended focus
2. To solicit comments, suggestions and thoughts about what students liked and did not like about the activities
3. To wind down the day and briefly preview the next day

The adult or alumni counselor should make notes and give it to the conference chairperson at the end of the debriefing. The following are some possible debriefing questions:

First Night

What did students come to this retreat expecting to learn?

What did the students enjoy the most today?

What did the students learn today?

What would the students like to see more of? Less of?

Other general comments:

Second Night

What have students learned about people in general since this retreat began?

What did the students enjoy the most today?

What did the students learn today?

What would the students like to see more of? Less of?

Other general comments: