

Choosing and utilizing chapter officers

This is a column on choosing and organizing your chapter officers. As we spoke to Lisa Siano for this article, several other themes were interwoven with the information: how to motivate your DECA chapter and, what Lisa regards as the lifeblood of the chapter, community activities, especially fund-raising for charities. This article will be followed by a column picking up those threads in the May issue.

Thank you, Lisa, for sharing your ideas with us.

Chapter III of the Chapter Management CD that came with your planner discusses chapter officers in depth.

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“Tell the kids what you expect and they usually go beyond what you ask them to do. If you set the standards high, they’ll surprise you.”

Lisa Siano is the chapter advisor at **Houston High School** in **Germantown, Tennessee**. When the suburban Memphis school opened, she persuaded the principal to start a marketing program, and in 1991 she started the DECA chapter. It now has 125 members.

Electing officers

In Houston High School DECA, members elect the officers, but the process has some clear parameters. The juniors (first year marketing students) run for the offices in the spring. They are elected in May, after the ICDC. The offices are the traditional ones: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and historian. (There is also an executive board, as explained below.) This officer team is the core of the chapter. People who want to be officers fill out an application and write an essay. Then they give a speech at the last chapter meeting of the year. The entire chapter membership, including the graduating seniors, votes on the officers. This process is patterned after their state election of officers. It elevates the process above a popularity contest.

High expectations

Lisa is not shy about letting people know what she expects. When she started the chapter, she was hesitant about asking kids to join. “If you have that little question in your voice,” she says, “it doesn’t work.” So she moved beyond the soft sell. Chapter membership is mandatory for her marketing students. Not only that, “Every student who comes into the marketing program has to turn in an application and come to speak to me or they don’t get into the program.” She sends them a letter saying, in effect, “If you’re a couch potato, you don’t need to be in DECA.” Why does she take this approach? “DECA has so many positives. The organization gives the teacher so many tools. Our kids need this opportunity.”

“Those who choose to run for office know what they are required to do before they commit to the process. Each officer must sign a slip agreeing to come to all DECA functions. As long as they stay motivated, they help me motivate the rest of the chapter. And DECA is the motivation.” Lisa’s no-nonsense approach to her members’ involvement demonstrates what she believes is a basic truth. “Tell the kids what you expect and they usually go beyond what you ask them to do. If you set the standards high, they’ll surprise you.”

Activity as motivation

After the officers are chosen, they have a meeting to develop a tentative plan of work where they select activities for the coming year. Choosing these activities is crucial for the chapter, since they run about one event a month, including four major charity events each year. Lisa says they are considered the “special events team” for their school. Officers do not meet during the summer except to attend functions for the chapter, like hosting a charity event or performing public relations functions for groups when they are asked. The chapter has a set of official blazers for the officers, and they discuss what skirts/pants, etc., to wear with them for a homogeneous, professional look.

Executive board representatives for first-year classes

When the school year begins, all the new students (level one) elect executive board members, that is, one board member from every period. These board members become representatives or liaisons of the first-year classes, giving lower-class members a say in what the chapter does, and also training them to assume leadership positions the following year. The junior liaisons motivate each class to get involved in the DECA activities and make regular reports in their classes. Even if your program does not have mandatory membership, this class representative system might help motivate kids to get involved when they see exciting things going on.

Meetings

Officers don’t have regular meetings, although at the beginning of school they will meet every two weeks or so. If they are running a special event, they will meet after school. But the entire chapter meets once a month during the school’s half-hour “club schedule.” Lisa rarely holds meetings after school; they are not well attended because members are involved in so many other things. Meetings before classes (6:30 a.m.) may be difficult, but they are held whenever they are necessary and officers know they must attend.

About leadership training specifically, Lisa says, “My policy is that everyone is a leader.” She encourages chapter members to do team-building and cooperative activities. If the chapter plays a game, it is so they can appreciate everyone’s talent. These kinds of activities also build communication skills through interactivity—students have to speak and direct others.