



SONS OF THE
AMERICAN
LEGION

Volunteering in a Challenging SAL Environment

The volunteer environment of the Sons of The American Legion has never been more challenging than it is right now. Factors that would have been exceptional not long ago—more individuals to pull from (i.e., Deeper Bench), less time to volunteer, demanding lifestyle, and constantly changing technology—are an everyday fact of life.

More than ever, our national commissions and committees depend on the quality of our chairmen. Successful leadership depends on broad-stroke preparation based on principles you can apply in any situation, however volatile.

Here are some foundational principles that will make you a more effective leader:

Be both flexible and persistent. To be an effective leader, you must learn to balance being unbending and adaptable. SAL national chairmen should know how to go with the flow without losing direction, moving their commission/committee forward with resiliency and alertness.

Delegate, but don't be demanding. Sometimes, our national chairmen may feel they need to control everything. Allow others to do their job and do it well. When you delegate wisely and often, you develop leadership skills, confidence, and trust within your team.

Set direction but make it compelling. Every member needs some degree of movement. Set specific and measurable goals with your members, then regularly monitor their progress against their goals and contribution toward organizational objectives.

Communicate with honesty and clarity. Our chairmen need to communicate enough and often enough. Make an effort to inform, report, and communicate concisely so your members can work without information gaps.

Be accessible and available. At its core, your leadership is all about your members. When someone needs you, it's time to set aside your work and any other distractions and focus on the member standing before you, emailing or calling you on the phone.

Don't just solve problems; create lasting solutions. There will always be problems, and there will always be a need for our chairmen to develop timely solutions that endure. Avoid settling for quick fixes that often cause more significant problems down the road. Focus on healing the cause of the problem instead of treating the symptoms.

Consistently recognize the achievements of others. Every member wants to do a good job. And when they do, they want recognition from their chairman. Recognizing and rewarding members for a well-done job is enough to set you apart as a leader. Recognize these members by presenting them with a certificate of appreciation from your Commission/Committee when you give your report at our NEC meetings.

Lead From Within: We want our chairmen to grow and be influential leaders. Start today to cultivate these skills. Then, when the time comes, you'll be prepared to steer your commission/committee and the members in the right direction.

Growing in Your Role as a National Chairman

(SAL NATIONAL COMMISSION or COMMITTEE)

Given our new direction, leadership growth is mandatory, not optional. If we fail to grow, it's not a matter of staying where we are—we become stagnant and fall further behind.

Growing as a chairman requires that you give up the things familiar to you, take new steps, and do things in new ways. Those actions are what change is made of. The reward lies not in what we get from growth but in what we become because of our growth.

Here are some daily habits you can take to grow as a leader:

Develop a repertoire of skills. To be the best chairman you can be, you need to constantly master new competencies instead of relying on your existing skills. Growing leaders are continually updating and expanding their skills and knowledge.

Learn through your experiences. The more you experience, the more you know. That means that even the most difficult challenges present an opportunity to engage in that experience, learn the lessons it holds, and apply your new knowledge to whatever comes next.

Challenge your comfort zone. It's tempting to lull yourself into always doing the same things in the same ways with the same people at the same time with

the same results. But that picture has no room for stretching yourself to improve. Get comfortable being uncomfortable because that's how you grow.

Focus on the future by being present today. It can be hard to get unstuck when you're stuck in the past, but when you're focused on the present, you know that everything you do today will affect the future. Our national chairmen should understand that the gift is the foundation for the future of our SAL organization.

Set the bar high. Volunteer chairmen may wonder, "How can I get there faster, quicker, and in a shorter time?" But leaders serious about growth are constantly raising the bar for themselves, not just for others. They keep the bar high and do everything they can to reach it consistently.

Look within. As we move forward with our new direction, our chairmen should start in a position of new leadership direction where you're more concerned with your external qualities. Still, as you grow in leadership, you rediscover that leading is an internal quality. To show outwardly, you first must learn to lead from within.

Keep asking questions. Our chairmen are always encouraged to ask questions. Many believe leadership is about knowing all the answers, but that's wrong. Authentic leadership is about being inquisitive. When you stop asking questions, you stop growing.

Leverage your weaknesses. It's easy to play from your strengths, but when you become better acquainted with your weaknesses and learn to leverage them, you're positioning yourself to grow as a leader.

Embrace failure. All of us fall at some point; getting up again counts. Being able to weather disappointment and recover is a sign of growth—and the source of some of the most important lessons you'll ever learn.

Work with a coach. The best way to grow as a chairman is to have external support. A SALCA member can help you to become a better version of yourself by guiding you through important decisions, keeping you grounded in difficult times, and helping you understand your purpose and goals. Most importantly, they can help you learn faster from your successes and failures.

Lead from within: Growth is the great separator between those who succeed and those who don't.