

Leadership Development

With recovery I find my place in my community.

~A Restful Mind

What Makes a Good Leader?

Dual Recovery Anonymous founder Tim Hamilton was recruited in 1994 by the Massachusetts Clubhouse Coalition to bring his experience, strength and hope to our Clubhouse community. As a leader in recovery, Tim shared his vision of peer support. He has inspired the development of leaders in the dual recovery community in countless ways!

Here are some strategies regarding good DRA leadership in the spirit of Tim's work:

Leadership Positions

As a community we discover leaders through our group conscience, reaching out to those individuals who provide consistent support where it is needed and encouraging those who volunteer to do service. A leader may be someone who is *or* is not in dual recovery. They may be hired to help strengthen DRA communities or they may be a volunteer. Regardless, they are a person who does well at organizing the community through their inspired focus. The leader may promote and/or facilitate DRA meetings, they may hold a special position for a specified term such as Secretary, Treasurer, Greeter, Coffee Maker etc., and they may have long-term recovery or be struggling with their addiction. There are no hard and fast rules about leadership, only that the person is willing to do service and share responsibilities.

Using the Format as a Guiding Light

One of the key aspects of a DRA meeting is the Format. The DRA Format was developed to both organize the meetings and provide education regarding the fellowship. The Format presents key material at the beginning of every meeting and is important for the newcomer and old timer alike. For a DRA leader, the format is the formula they use to facilitate the meeting. Ideally, the leader of the meeting, or the "chair," reads the opening of the Format and passes around different excerpts for others to read as well. A co-chair may share in these responsibilities and hopefully, leadership will change from meeting to meeting. Ideally, meeting participants should take turns chairing the meeting. A strong meeting leader can help ensure that this happens, encouraging new people to chair and step in when help is needed.

Developing the Meeting Content

Once the opening portion of the Format has been read, it is time for the unique content of the meeting to begin. A DRA meeting typically breaks down into one of four types of meetings: a Discussion Meeting, a Fishbowl Meeting, a 12-Step Meeting, or a Gratitude Meeting. These general methods leave plenty of room for each community to be creative about their topics and content. For example, most discussion meetings begin with a passage from a Hazelden daily reader. It is up to the leader to choose the passage as well as the method of sharing. The group may go around the table in order or use a show of hands, remembering that participants can always "pass" if they so choose. There are as many variations of meetings as there are meetings themselves and it is up to each community to develop a system that resonates with the group conscience. The leadership can help ensure that this happens.

Good Time Management

A well-organized meeting is key for people in recovery. An hour is typically the allotted time for a 12-step meeting and helps those of us in DRA to participate in a predictable and consistent program. With just two people we can get our meeting started on time and provide the members who may be showing up a little late, a safe and reliable place to land when they get there. We can use group conscience to end the meeting when everyone is done sharing remembering that if we end early, we may be preventing our late arrivers from having their meeting. This is something the leadership should keep in mind when they decide to close the meeting ahead of schedule. Another leadership challenge is finding a way to remind people to “share the air.” A well-attended DRA meeting should end on time as well and a large group of participants may need some gentle encouragement from the leadership to keep track of the time.

Holding a Business Meeting

The DRA format provides a place for “Announcements” at every meeting. For many groups, this section is used for business as well. It is a time to talk about group finances, volunteer positions, and any other business topics that may arise. However, it's not always a good idea to talk business at the beginning of a meeting, especially if the conversation is going to be lengthy. For this reason, leaders may suggest to end the meeting early and hold a business meeting; the last ten minutes of a DRA meeting is a great time to talk about important topics as a community. If the group is very large, leaders may ask if people would like to stay for a business meeting after the one-hour DRA meeting is over. Deciding as a group is the key, it is never a good idea to hold a business meeting at another day and time or to talk off-line with a few people about important issues that are in need of community discussion and involvement.

Steering the Meeting

In DRA, good listening is a key tool we use to help us with our recovery and to keep cross talk to a minimum. However, it may be necessary to intervene from time to time when others are sharing. Sometimes a leader may need to speak up using words of encouragement and gentle reminders even when it is not their turn to talk. It is the leader's responsibility to reflect the values and beliefs of the group conscience and to step in when it is necessary while using good judgement. Finding a graceful and tactful way of steering the meeting is an important skill for a leader to develop. This type of skill comes with practice and collaboration with other leaders in the community. It is the leaders' role to inform participants on issues like: how to share an appropriate length of time, staying on topic, and remembering to be sensitive to others. Leaders in the community direct the tone of the meeting and help the participants to feel safe, respected and cared for.

The Key to Conflict Resolution

Listening skills are especially important when addressing conflicts that may arise in DRA meetings. A strong leader has the capability of listening to the concerns of everyone involved in the meeting and can offer the participants an opportunity to resolve any issues. Interpersonal conflicts and differences of opinion can sometimes lead to high intensity. It may work out to address disputes during the meeting and sometimes it may be better to wait and talk after. The overall well-being of the group should be the main priority and if the community cannot come to a consensus or people are at odds, taking a break from the topic can help.

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