BRIGHT SPOTS: An Exemplar Study of SCA Leaders

GREAT LEADER PRACTICES FOR BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Search Institute has identified five elements that make relationships powerful in young people’s lives. These five elements of developmental relationships emerged as central to the practices of SCA leaders in this study:

- Express Care
- Challenge Growth
- Provide Support
- Share Power
- Expand Possibilities

The real art came in knowing how to balance these elements, tailoring the mix to suit a particular participant or group, in a particular setting, at a particular point in their journey through the program.

GREAT LEADER PRACTICES FOR ENSURING EMOTIONAL SAFETY

“I used to put more of the focus on literally getting the work done, but it quickly became clear to me, if you’re so far outside your comfort zone, you’re considering leaving or barely getting through the day, you’re not—not no one’s winning. . . . Years ago I switched gears to emotional safety being my absolute priority.”

—SCA LEADER

Getting to Know Participants Individually. Leaders who created a relational culture spent time listening to participants and getting to know them individually. Part of getting to know members included leaders structuring one-on-one spaces.

Dependable and Consistent. Participants appreciated leaders who were “always there for me” and “did what they said they would do.”

Being Transparent and Proactively Addressing Conflict. Some leaders created structured space for the entire group to proactively deal with conflict, including community meetings where participants could solve problems and “discuss and evaluate how we’re doing.”

Showing passion for the work and the setting. Participants noted that their leaders’ positive attitude and love for the work rubbed off on them. One said, “That passion she brings can spread into our day-to-day attitude when we come to work.”

Self-reflection. Leaders who “walked the talk” reflected on their own attitudes and behaviors just as they asked crew members to do the same.

GREAT LEADER PRACTICES FOR SCAFFOLDING GROWTH

Clearly articulated high expectations. One crew leader said, “I just expect that they can.” Participants appreciated crew leaders who “don’t underestimate us.”

Encouraged participants to stretch. Participants appreciated leaders who “know what we’re capable of and push us to make sure we can reach that” and “pushed me to situations I wouldn’t necessarily be in on my own.”

Framed mistakes as a natural part of learning. This encouraged participants to reflect on what went wrong and what they could do differently in the future. A participant said s/he learned that “when you try something new, you’re always going to make a mistake . . . but you’ve got to get over it. You will see it, acknowledge, find a solution and keep going.” Leaders said this creates an environment where people want to try new things.

Encouraged people to share their ideas and act on them. Leaders commonly used a morning “circle up” as an opportunity for participants to raise questions and share their ideas for effectively accomplishing the day’s work.

Stepped back and stepped in. While stepping back to let participants struggle and solve problems on their own, leaders in this study kept an eye on them, gauging when they might need help. A participant said leaders were “always willing to come over and help us, and . . . backed off if s/he thought we could make some progress on our own.”