

Self-Concept and Leader Tenure

Continuance or discontinuance of the leader role is
largely a matter of personal orientation

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THE HIGH percentage of 4-H leaders who drop out each year is a continuing problem for Extension. Sabrosky reports that about one-third of the volunteer leaders of 4-H Clubs discontinue at the end of one year.¹ In a Michigan survey, Allen found a 27 per cent dropout after one year.² Because of the high dropout rate, Extension agents spend a considerable amount of time recruiting new leaders. Are there any guidelines that agents can use that might lower the rate of dropout? On the basis of the results of a study conducted by the Institute for Extension Personnel Development, Michigan State University, we suggest that there are.

The role of 4-H leader, like any other volunteer role, is easy to withdraw from. Continuance or discontinuance of the role is largely a matter of personal orientation. Therefore, an adequate assessment of an individual's personal orientation should give some idea of how likely he or she is to withdraw from volunteer roles, e.g., that of a 4-H leader.

Research has demonstrated that measures of an individual's self-conception can predict his behavior.³ In March of 1961, Dyer administered the Twenty Statements Test to 207 Michigan 4-H

¹ Laurel K. Sabrosky, "Northeastern Region Study of First Year 4-H Leaders, 1961-62," Federal Extension Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, ER&T-9 (1-64), 1964.

² C. Dean Allen, "Personal Values and 4-H Club Adult Leadership" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Education, University of Chicago, 1963).

³ Carl J. Couch, "Self-Attitudes and Degree of Agreement with Immediate Others," *The American Journal of Sociology*, LXIII, (March, 1958), 491-500; Thomas S. McPartland, John H. Cumming, and Wynona S. Garretson, "Self-Concept and Ward Behavior," *Sociometry*, XXIV (June, 1961), 111-24.

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leaders.⁴ The test is an open-ended one that requires the person to describe himself by answering the question "Who am I?" Approximately three years later, in May of 1964, 4-H agents of each county were sent a list of names of the 4-H leaders who completed the questionnaire in 1961 and were asked to indicate which leaders were still active in 4-H work.

Responses on the Twenty Statements Test were analyzed to determine level of *community orientation* and *commitment to the 4-H leader role*. Community orientation is the degree to which a respondent identified himself by referring to local groupings. Responses of this type included, "I am a resident of . . . (local community)," "a neighbor," "a good neighbor," and "I am aware of my community responsibilities." Commitment to the 4-H leader role was acquired by noting how early in the list of twenty "Who am I?" responses the leader said, "I am a 4-H leader," or its equivalent. This position in the list of twenty responses was referred to as the *saliency* of the role for the individual. The saliency "score" ran from one (for first) to 21 for no response.

For the total sample of 207, it was found that those leaders who were above the median on saliency of the "4-H role" and below the median on "community orientation" tended to remain as leaders. Conversely, those below the median on saliency of "4-H leader role" and above the median on "community orientation" tended to discontinue as 4-H leaders.

A more detailed examination of the data indicated that this tendency was especially pronounced among leaders of relatively short tenure—three years or less. Of the 93 leaders with three years or less tenure, there were 19 who were above the median on community orientation and below the median on commitment to the 4-H leader role. Of these 19, only two were still active in 4-H at the end of the three-year period. The other 17 had withdrawn. There were 12 leaders who were below the median on community orientation and above the median on commitment to the 4-H leader role. Of these, nine were still active at the end of three years. Of the other 62—those who were either below the median on both dimensions or above the median on both—approximately half had discontinued (34 of 62).⁵

Once a person has been a leader for four or more years, their or-

⁴The tests were administered by Delwyn A. Dyer. We wish to thank Dr. Dyer for his assistance and for making the tests available to us.

⁵For a more detailed analysis of the result see Gerald W. Brog, "Self-Concept in Relation to 4-H Leader Tenure" (unpublished Master's thesis, Institute for Extension Personnel Development, Michigan State University, East Lansing, 1964).

ientation on these two dimensions, as measured in this study, isn't very predictive of whether or not they will drop out soon. In short, for leaders of short tenure, a high degree of community orientation by the new leader appears to go with withdrawing from the role of 4-H leaders, while a high commitment to the 4-H leader role is associated more with the person's continuing.

The results of this study were obtained from a limited sample. However, these data indicate that new 4-H leaders who are low on community orientation and low on commitment to the 4-H leader role are as likely to continue as leaders as are those who are high on community orientation and high on commitment to the 4-H leader role. The data also suggest that new 4-H leaders with a self-conception that is high on community orientation but low on commitment to the 4-H leader role are very likely to discontinue within three years; whereas those low on community orientation but high on commitment to the 4-H leader role are likely to continue as leaders.

Can Extension agents lessen the amount of time they spend in recruiting 4-H leaders? Our results suggest that, by recruiting leaders that have high commitment to 4-H and a low degree of orientation to other community activities, the rate of turnover may be lowered.

TAKEN AS A WHOLE, men will only devote their enthusiasm, their time, and their energy to matters in which they have a personal interest. But their personal interests, however powerful they must be, will never carry them very far or very high unless they can be made to seem noble and legitimate in their own eyes by being allied to some great cause in which the whole human race can join.

—ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE.

IT IS GENERALLY recognized that the most effective way to incite an intelligent person to tackle with the greatest zeal a demanding job is to allow him (granting his competence) the opportunity to exercise his own powers of judgment, organizational skills, and decision-making.—PAUL F. ANGIOLILLO in *Improving College and University Teaching*, XIII (Winter, 1965).