

discovering dimensional leadership

D. Robert Troyer

For most of us, discovery is highly motivating. It's much more rewarding for us to discover or learn something for ourselves than to have someone tell us or sell us. We may not believe something at all unless we do the discovering. This trait shows in the way we act and do things day by day.

We have the responsibility to be current and use the most effective means of helping people accept and use new ideas and new information. We often say that someone certainly knows the subject matter, but he or she is ineffective in working with people. To put it another way—very few Extension staff members have left or been asked to leave the Extension Service because of technical incompetence.

This relates to the fact that each of us must accept the responsibility of how our behavior—or what we do—affects other people, and here the dilemma begins. Our behavior is seen differently by different people. For example, what is honest to one person is insulting to another, innovativeness may really be recklessness, open-minded may be nosy, sensitive may be soft-headed, and on and on.

Dimensional leadership takes this into account—that leadership is more than one-way, that it implies response. To lead, someone must follow. Because we have more than one following, we need different ways to lead. In fact, in Extension we think of numbers, many being led. So dimensions of leadership become many and varied. When we try to lead or influence people, response is based on their perception of reality and not ours. Therefore, we may regard ourselves as being very warm and democratic with an open door, but if our co-workers—professional or clientele—*think* we are hard-nosed and autocratic, they'll respond (behave) toward us according to their view not ours.

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Management experts have long been saying that sincerity and motivation have their place, but it really is behavior that's important. Intentions are O.K., but what we actually do is what really counts. This concept apparently explains, at least in part, the difference between an effective and ineffective leader. If people respond as desired, then the behavior of the leader has been effective.

Dimensional Leadership Workshops

Dimensional Leadership Workshops are designed to help participants discover and recognize different kinds of effective and ineffective behavior. When we acquire the skill and/or understanding of recognizing effective and ineffective behavior, we're in a position to decide to do things (behave) the same way or to change. This brings us to a point of an important concept of the Dimensional Leadership Workshop—the only person over whom we have control is ourselves. We can change our own behavior, but really can't control or change another person's behavior.

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What Is Dimensional Leadership?

It must be emphasized that Dimensional Leadership training isn't in itself a campaign to change behavior. Nor is it designed to determine *why* a person behaves as he or she does. Although sensitivity training is concerned with the *why* of behavior, Dimensional Leadership training never discusses or even refers to *why* people behave as they do. It *only identifies behavior and demonstrates what the most likely response to the identified behavior by other people will be*. Much more of our Extension behavior is effective than ineffective. The point is, to be more effective, staff members must be able to recognize behavior for what it is, how to cope with existing behavior, and then to act, behave, and lead in such a way as to become more effective in achieving desired objectives.

From time to time we have all been caught up in our own self-importance enough to get upset when individuals don't respond just because we say so. Yogi Berra of the comics illustrates this point with a bit of philosophy about baseball fans: "If people do not want to come to the ballgame, there is not much one can do to stop them."

Begin with Me as an Individual

Although success of any human behavior training depends on the interactions of a group, an attitude of self-respect must exist before respect of others will exist. Worden stated that "a person comfortable with herself is more likely to be comfortable and effective on the job."¹

Why is Dimensional Leadership training both important and relevant for us as Extension staff members? First of all, we're leaders, managers, and/or supervisors. Our success depends on how we relate to co-workers, clientele, committees, councils, boards, etc. Being able to recognize both individual behavior and group behavior as it occurs, then accepting this behavior for what it is, is very important if we're to be a successful leader. Once we become skilled in recognizing behavior, just as we're skilled in recognizing characteristics of soil, textiles, etc., then we can adjust leadership to fit the situation.

Dimensional Leadership training gives a practical experience of learning and recognizing the behavior that Maslow, Blake, Herzberg, McGregor, and many others have described as the result of their research.

Format of This Training

The overall objective of the workshop is to help each individual become a more effective worker (leader). Immediately, it's easy to see that this objective would be difficult to measure at the conclusion of the workshop. So, seven specific, measurable activities are carried out during the workshop to help achieve the overall objective. These seven activities are:

1. Learn the Dimensional Leadership Model—four major categories of observable kinds of behavior:
 - a. Dominant-hostile (power).
 - b. Hostile-submissive (survival).
 - c. Submissive-warm (sociable).
 - d. Dominant-warm (growth).
2. Learn a system of critique—by identifying the kinds of behavior in the four categories.
3. Learn to size up your own and "other person" strategies—by observing and practicing different individual behaviors in a realistic problem role play.
4. Learn to size up team strategies—by observing and practicing different behaviors in a group situation.
5. Learn new strategies—by experimenting in small groups.

6. Learn to achieve greater leadership flexibility—by trying something new where failure doesn't affect performance appraisal.
7. Set leadership and management improvement goals based on learned and observed behavior.

These objectives are based on the premise that:

1. Leadership and management are applied behavioral sciences.
2. Anyone who wants to be a more effective leader and/or manager can be, if he or she learns management and leadership principles—and applies them.
3. We must accept the responsibility for how others respond to our behavior.
4. *Most* people behave in the same way *most* of the time—their behavior is predictable.

Dimensional Leadership Training Workshops consist of four parts:

1. Introduction—learning four general types of behavior through demonstration and practice.
2. Interaction of participants on a one-to-one basis. Role playing of realistic problems and situations.
3. Interaction of participants on a group basis (group role play).
4. Discussion of observed behavior so each individual can develop a plan for improving his or her effectiveness as an Extension staff member.

Videotaping and playback is the major technique used for individuals and groups to observe, review, and discuss behavior that took place. If there's a question or disagreement, the videotape can be played back as many times as needed for participants to reach consensus. The videotape is also a means of self-discovery. When reading behavioral science literature or when hearing a discussion on leadership styles, a tendency exists for us to relate behavior styles or patterns to others, not ourselves. But we see ourselves on videotape—there we are . . . that's us—it provides a non-threatening atmosphere to analyze how we act and re-act. Many persons for the first time realize they have strengths they should use more and perhaps some weaknesses they should change or eliminate.

The experience in Iowa and Indiana indicates that participants actually discover more strengths in their behavior than weaknesses. One home economist in Indiana said, "I had

considerable anxiety about attending the workshop, but returned with the feeling of more self-confidence than before.” The beauty is that it occurred in a non-threatening atmosphere, with peers, where open discussion and trust were at a maximum.

The workshop is structured so that about 80% of the time is spent by the participants in their team rooms (5 per team). It is a workshop in the truest sense of the word. *General sessions, which make up the other 20% of the time,* are for giving instruction, clarification of activities, communication between teams, and reviewing motivation and communication principles. Very little, if any, new content is presented that Extension professionals haven’t had in either formal or in-service training.

Dimensional Leadership training won’t, in itself, solve all the interpersonal relation and communication problems of any Extension staff. Yet in Iowa and Indiana, we do feel that the concept is basic and valid. The workshop demonstrates the positive results of open communication and individuals working as a team.

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Some Observed Results

Program critiques of Dimensional Leadership Workshops are completed at the close of each workshop. Of the 332 individuals who have participated in Indiana, 95.8% rated the workshop good, excellent, or exceptional.

Administrative staff have participated in the workshops, as well as field staff members. In fact, we have a policy that the area director or administrator (supervisor) must participate before those whom he or she supervises.

Of course, many evaluative statements have been made by participants. An agriculture agent, who had been with an agribusiness firm several years before becoming an agent, said, “It [the workshop] stands among the highlights of my experience to date and was the finest training session I ever attended.” A youth agent said, “. . . it has been the most growing, meaningful, and awakening workshop I have ever attended.”

We have found that inexperienced agents and experienced agents complement each other in this workshop. Most experienced agents learn that inexperienced persons have good ideas and vice versa.

Several office staff groups in Indiana are now scheduling a minimum of one-half day a month away from the office for an uninterrupted staff conference. Those who have committed themselves to these regularly scheduled staff conferences are finding that the trust, respect, and honest communication among staff members have increased significantly.

If trust, respect, and honest communication among staff members seems to be a problem or needs improvement where you work, you may want to consider a Dimensional Leadership Workshop.

- Footnote**
1. Phyllis Worden, "The Extension Job: Who Stays—Who Goes?" *Journal of Extension*, XIII (May/June, 1975), 3-10.