



SG vs. Administration

How to heal an ailing relationship

By Jamie Braun

You've just been elected Student Government president and you need to get your school's approval on an innovative new program you're organizing. Unfortunately, the previous SG members bashed heads with the administration, coming across as uncommunicative and disorganized, and now, administrators won't take you or SG seriously.

Want to get your relationship with the administration back on track? Follow these tips and you'll transform a struggling, stressful relationship into one based on trust, respect, and open communication—the difference between having a productive or unproductive year.

Break the Ice

Your first few meetings with administrators may be filled with uncomfortable silences and forced conversation; you don't know much about one another. You can make these meetings less tense if you come prepared with some basic information. Start with the university web site. Almost all members of the administration have a bio listing their alma mater, degree, previous employment, and past awards. Use this knowledge to help break the ice. "Plan a meeting with the individual and simply talk, not necessarily about SG or residential life but about his day," says Blake Zitko, SG president at **Ohio State University, Newark Campus**. "Not only will they notice you taking an interest, but you'll get to know their likes and dislikes." Find a way to connect with each key administrator and build rapport.

Build It Up

It's absolutely essential that you form a positive working relationship with your campus president, as he always has the final word on projects affecting your campus.

"SG doesn't have much authority on its own," says Michael Johnston, SG president at the **University of Miami** in Florida. "It's the contacts we make through the administration that help us get things done."

Scheduling informal meetings or writing personal letters can help you build a relationship that goes beyond the workplace. Johnston says a personal visit is his favorite means of communication. "You can't build a relationship via e-mail," Johnston says. "If you're within a half-mile from me, I'll come down and personally talk to you." Another suggestion is to invite the president out to a casual meal to discuss life in general; leave the office at the office. Actively engaging him in conversation makes working together easier and more enjoyable.

Open the Lines

Talk to your administrators regularly. A student leader who attempts to do everything by himself without the consultation of an administrator is doomed to fail. If both parties are actively involved in the decision-making process, it'll be much easier to get the university to back your programs. "The most important thing is maintaining contact and establishing regular means of communication and contact with key players in the administration," says Sue Wasiloeck, dean of students at **Duke University** in North Carolina. "One of the easiest ways to place that relationship in jeopardy is for the SG to make assumptions, and then to make decisions based on those assumptions. That really hurts SG's credibility."

Know Your Limits

SG officials often are elected on a platform outlining major issues covering everything from on-campus parking to tuition increases. However, narrow it down to one or two achievable projects for your term of office—stopping tuition increases is

usually out of SG's and even the president's control. "Spend time identifying your goals," says Juan C. Gonzalez, vice president for student affairs at **Georgetown University** in Washington, D.C. "Think to yourself, 'What will make you successful in nine months?'"

However, many of SG's most important projects take considerable time to achieve, says Karen Kenney, dean of students at the **University of California, Berkeley**. "Student leaders generally have a four-year view of the campus world. Creating the foundation for long-term change is an accomplishment in and of itself," Kenney says.

Work Together

To be effective, SG and the administration should "maintain a goal of cooperation rather than confrontation," Kenney says.

Show the administration you're a new, different, and more effective SG by setting goals for yourself and then exceeding them. Convince them that you really want to help your fellow students. Don't walk into a meeting with an attitude, demanding that things change that very moment. Treat members of the campus administration with respect. Instead of making demands, outline your proposition and give a list of several possible solutions. Be willing to accept any of them and to hear new ideas.

Follow Through

Since your newly elected SG is trying to distance itself as much as possible from the previous group, the administration needs to know that this new, committed group of highly motivated student leaders is ready to work for the student body. Not following through on your promises can destroy the fragile credibility of your organization and lose the support of the administrators. "Not showing up is the worst thing that one can do; they take note of the promises but remember the results or lack thereof," Zitko says.

Mending bridges requires a lot of time and effort on your part. Just remember that you're working to build a lasting relationship that'll serve future generations of student leaders at your college or university. **SL**



Learn more about building a good relationship at www.studentleader.com

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