

# How to Succeed in Leading With or Without Really Trying

By Mary Jane Gatchel

Noah Webster would undoubtedly cringe were he here on the OU campus to witness the use and application of the word "leadership." Although the traditional connotation of leadership is in itself broad, student leadership here has acquired or developed its own style. In existence on our campus are countless honors, honoraries, and elite positions reserved for "leaders."

The largest network of committees and activities are found in the Union Activities Board which sponsors events like the Popular Artist Series, Baby Contest, Easter Egg Hunt, Sooner Scandals, Spring Break trips, Union movies, and such. There are honorary organizations like Omicron Delta Kappa and Peet for men and Pipers, Tassels, and Mortar Board for women. And there is the Student Senate.

It is the recognizable group of people on campus who hold positions with groups like these with whom we are concerned. No, leadership is not an easily identified quality of character possessed by all such students. In fact, it is very rare. "Leaders" here develop under pressure. And the process which produces them is just as interesting as its product.

Even as early as summer rush certain incoming freshmen are pegged as future leaders and hence good prospective rushees. The clue to their future is often membership in the University Scholars or President's Leadership Class. It may be a four-point or a high ACT Score. Or it may be any number of indicators,

from Girl's State to a football letter listed on their "High School Honors and Activities" list. Sometimes assumptions made on these facts prove much too premature. At times they are reliable indications of a student's potential and motivation. The important point to remember is the early date at which some students are screened for leadership potential.

If the student in question does proceed to pledge to a Greek house, he will become accustomed to filling out all sorts of applications.

The activities chairman in a Greek pledge class is often responsible for picking up application blanks whenever a committee advertises for members. The Greek houses are made up of committee people, and membership and positions in organizations help the house accumulate activity points. If there were no activities, there would be no points, so there must be plenty of activities if groups are to accumulate points. These application blanks are available in places like the deans of students offices, the Union Activities Board office, and the Student Senate office. Usually they are passed out during pledge meetings and filled out en masse. If an upperclass member in the Greek house chairs a committee, this information is announced with the suggestion that anyone who applies for a position with him is likely to get it. Thus, the road toward leadership and awards begins early.

Although encouragement to participate in campus activities should be applauded, what sort of encouragement would best benefit the new student? If he is ready to accept responsible positions, he could no doubt profit from a ready opportunity. But if he has not yet developed either the personal desire or the maturity to accept these responsibilities, should they be thrust upon him? Should he be made vice-chairman of publicity just because his fraternity "big brother" is chairman? Sometimes a push

given a little too early is fatal to future involvement.

Nepotism has its effects elsewhere. What about the independent student for whom no such openings await? Is it not reasonable to assume that this inequality of opportunity from the beginning might seriously affect his attitude toward campus participation? Perhaps this is the question asked by some administrators who in the past have shown paternalistic attitudes toward selected independent "leaders."

Moving on, we find the freshman leader-candidate's first year filled with a long list of campus-wide activities.

A typical spate might include membership on the Dads' Day mailing committee, a position as a Popular Series ticket salesman, publicity committee member for Homecoming, vice chairman of the Student Senate spirit committee, and as a Greek Work Day area chairman.

All of these will later be listed on applications for still more positions of a similar nature. If our campus leader has also managed to maintain a comparatively high grade point, say 3.5, in addition to his campus participation, he is in line for Top Ten Freshmen. This recognition is bestowed on twenty leaders from the freshman class the following fall. Not only is it an honor, but it is also an impressive addition to the "leader's" brag sheet. Higher goals are always in mind, if not in his mind by now at least in the aspirations of his house or dorm which will simultaneously gain recognition as he accepts his next award.

As this process continues, our student leader does gain experience and knowledge of the system. He knows which positions offer top rewards, which committees take little time or effort, who runs campus elections, and how to get the chairmanship of his choice. He has been through so much

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*Mary Jane Gatchel, '68ba, writes from experience. The caption under her picture in the campus leaders section of the 1968 Sooner Yearbook reads: "3.26 [grade point average], History [major], Howdy Week Co-Chairman, Student Senate, Tassels, Pipers, Who's Who, Public Relations Advisory Council, Model UN, Chi Omega.*

# Reflections of a Greek

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towers," it becomes difficult to find a pragmatic reason for its existence, and administrative collars become tighter at the thought of this segregated extension of college living. Greeks point with pride to their "open" clauses of constitutions, the IFC heralds the coming of OU's first black fraternity, and the Delta Upsilon take the only step toward salvaging the system by pledging a black student. The rest of us squirm or stand firm knowing that even if our group chose to pledge a Negro, alumna support would be shortly withheld and "mothers clubs" would disband. The sad fact remains that answers to social problems are not found in trophies won, at orphan party "functions" at Christmas when the haves give to the have-nots, in proving that a house is not discriminatory by having a black professor to dinner, or in the hazing process (which fraternities still carry on somewhat undercover) as a preparation for Vietnam.

In line with writing this article I asked an independent friend to do some Greek thinking and together we decided that the Greek system is a training ground for suburban living. Those who are planning a life of bridge club, marriage to a college sweetheart, a family, and a nice middle-class home in suburbia, getting along with in-laws, etc. (and what Greek isn't?) are made to order for the Greek system. And my friend finished, "For that kind of boredom you have to have conditioning." Reactions to this on a campus are understandably varied. Independents who also desire to be Establishment are annoyed by the Greek facade because it dwarfs their own. Others who react against the Establishment by assuming nonconforming roles will naturally detest this extension of suburban exclusiveness, and those who want to "get ahead" independently resent the value system that parallels that of the Greeks in campus politics and activities.

Another friend, a veteran of a fraternity, in criticizing my critique, commented that this article sounds as if it were written in 1959. However,

I hold that this is not because my criticism is out-dated, but rather because the system is. Of course it is much less difficult to expound upon the fallacies of the Greek system than to offer constructive ideas for its betterment. However, there are some obvious things that should be done. Needing immediate attention is a system of deferred rush whereby students cannot pledge until they have attended the University at least one semester and preferably one year. This would eliminate much of the frustration and tension and distrust, which I saw first-hand as a counselor in a freshman dormitory, and leave all entering students to sink or swim from the same starting point.

Next, all fraternities and sororities should be integrated racially, which would mean inclusion of both black and foreign students. Possibly also some sort of mandatory seminars and programs of social action could be initiated so that the Greek system would be less socially and more academically oriented. Further, fraternities and sororities should be more accessible to campus ministry, professors, and students who are non-members.

Certainly the problem of the Greek system is not one easily solved. Those who have recognized the inequities of it and have tried to effect change usually become discouraged after batting their heads against walls of indifference. Others who realize the plight the Greeks are in usually say, "It's dying anyway," and bother no further about it. The fact remains that the Greek system is invalid and impotent in its present form and must be changed to endure. □

## How to Succeed

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by this time that his ability simply to remain in the running itself qualifies him as a leader in the eyes of many. It is not surprising to note some changes in the leadership group during the junior year. Either some learn faster than others or some hear another drummer. Previously successful leaders seem for no obvious reason to drop all activities and lose any interest in honors for which they

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would possibly be in line. To fill their vacancies a few faces appear, for the most part deserving souls who for one reason or another missed out on earlier glory.

From the junior year on, it becomes largely a matter of endurance and holding the status quo. The prolific number of awards passed out at this time are indeed an encouragement.

Availabilities include Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities, Sooner Yearbook Personality, the Letzeiser Medals, and various special awards sponsored by individuals and business firms. There are scores of possibilities.

By this time those who have been in the race all along have such an enormous list of qualifications, compounded year by year, that they rule out any outside competition. The end comes and we once again have a group of "leaders." It is obvious to the large majority why some were chosen. They came to college with great potential and the motivation to be a campus leader. Some found opportun-

ity at their doorstep, others had to come in through the back entrance. But each, due to his outstanding personal qualifications, was able to profit from experience and proceed to honor and position he undeniably deserved.

What about the process he has just survived, though? Has he achieved status because of it or in spite of it? Has he progressed due to the pressure placed on him by his associates or might he have learned more at his own pace? Have his desires and whims been challenged and yet been free to react or has his motivation been placed in the student leader mold and baked to a prescribed degree? Has he developed the courage to open new frontiers or is he a "leader" who follows the crowd in return for their support? Has he acquired the understanding to continue a leadership role or does he merely know the system of rewards on one university campus?

As for the few who really are leaders, what have they gained from their college experience? Certainly the recognition they receive cannot be worth the struggle. Their status declines as they realize the number of less deserving persons who are accorded equal public honor.

Of course, reward should not be of primary importance to the campus leader. His positions of responsibility in the college training ground should ideally prepare him for future positions as a community, state, or national figure.

The process of leadership production can be told through the story of one campus leader. This enterprising young man went through much the same process described above. In his freshman year he pledged a fraternity. The next year he was elected to the Student Senate.

Everyone knows there's more to a

campaign than posters, handbills, and two-minute speeches. A wise candidate knows how to pull the proper strings and how to attract the block votes.

A personal friend helped him obtain an important chairmanship. In his junior year he thought the time was right. He ran for Student Body President, and with a few extra ballots, achieved his goal. He found opportunities and took advantage of them. He was recognized and honored as an outstanding campus leader. He soon became a reflection of the environment which pressured him instead of an individual in his own right. His leadership training taught him that it was much more rewarding to follow an established pattern than to fight the system. Today he has aspirations toward a top position in our society. How well is he prepared to meet the challenges of today?

Naturally, not all campus leaders are as stereotyped as the one above. Our university has produced many fine leaders in the true sense of the word. And, often, the system has encouraged leadership potential to develop. It appears, however, that these leaders, generally speaking, develop in spite of the system and not as a result of it. If the university community is to be the ideal model for future society and not the mirror of outmoded ones, perhaps we should rethink the process which produces tomorrow's leaders. □

## Styles

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dealing with strangers, relations between the races, or international politics. For example, peaceable openness has long been a credal virtue in our

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