

## Alternative leadership roles for YRUU groups

*You're familiar with the usual leadership roles of president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer, but these aren't the only possible leadership roles. Below are descriptions of alternative leadership roles, drawn from my experiences with various UU organizations that use consensus, including young adult networks and youth groups. I have also included ideas on leadership from the book *Drawing Down the Dark: Magic, Sex, and Politics* by Starhawk.*

*Terms for presidents, vice presidents, etc., typically last for a year. Terms for alternative leadership roles can be more fluid: someone in the group may agree to be facilitator for a month, or just for one meeting; coordinators stay in their leadership roles until their project is complete; mediators step in when needed; and so on. This way, many more people in the group get leadership experience. As a result, the group grows stronger because power shared is power multiplied. —Dan Harper*

### Facilitator

The facilitator keeps everyone focussed on the *content* or *subject* of the meeting. Most often, you think of facilitators as people who lead business meetings—see separate handouts on facilitating business meetings. During a discussion, crosstalk, or fishbowl, the facilitator makes sure everyone gets heard. S/he makes sure extroverted people who love to talk give equal time to quiet, introverted people. During a meeting where a group is just playing games, one or two people facilitate the meeting by leading the games. Again, they make sure everyone is included, and they keep the meeting moving along.

Facilitators have a sense of fair play. They lead by promoting fairness and equal access, and by keeping the group focussed on the subject at hand.

### Recorder

The recorder records what goes on in a meeting. If the group needs to brainstorm, the recorder is the one who stands next to the butcher paper and writes everything down. At a business meeting, the recorder records who has agreed to do what (sometimes known as “job jotting”). The recorder makes a record of all the decisions that the group reaches. If the recorder doesn't understand something, he or she will repeat back what he or she heard before writing it down (by so doing, the recorder often clarifies a difficult matter for others, too).

The recorder has good listening skills, and is willing to write things down. The recorder leads by keeping the group on track, and by reminding people what they have committed to doing.

### Coordinators

Once a decision is made by the group, it needs to be carried out. Coordinators carry out decisions—they translate decisions into action. A coordinator doesn't do everything him/herself, s/he just makes sure it gets done. The best coordinators are very good at delegating. They coordinate the work of other members of the group.

For big projects, like a large conference or major social action project, you might want to have several coordinators with different areas of responsibility, such as transportation coordinator, site coordinator, worship coordinator, affinity group coordinator, etc. (At a conference, the dean is the person who coordinates the coordinators.) Starhawk points out that while coordinators learn a great deal in a short time, they also can get burned out quickly. Be sure it's not always the same people who get chosen as coordinators.

Coordinators can take care of details and know how to delegate. They lead by implementing decisions, by getting things done.

### Energy Monitor

An energy monitor watches the energy level of the group. When people get bored or tired, the energy monitor steps in with an “energy break,” a short, silly activity that gets people up and moving and laughing so that they can return to the meeting refreshed and relaxed.

Starhawk suggests that an energy monitor also “remains aware of levels of tension and

anxiety. S/he may interrupt the meeting to suggest that people breathe, that feelings be acknowledged, that personal attacks be stopped” —important when emotions are running high.

A good energy monitor is sensitive to other people’s feelings, to their emotions, and to the energy level of the group. S/he leads by promoting the emotional well-being of the group and individuals in the group.

#### Mediator or peacekeeper

When conflict arises, a mediator helps manage the conflict. A mediator is good at remaining calm and objective in the midst of conflict, and good at helping people listen to each other. It’s not necessarily a formal role, but most groups have people who happen to be good mediators. Anyone who remains calm during a given conflict can function as a mediator or peacekeeper.

A mediator or peacekeeper can also help when conflict arises between a youth group and the wider congregation. S/he remains calm and keep the lines of communication open. Ideally, s/he has started keeping peace with the wider congregation before trouble happens, establishing lines of communication that are already open, by attending meetings of the congregation’s governing board, giving sermons, writing newsletter articles, talking to adults informally at social hour, etc.

Some group members may be trained as mediators. But anyone who can remain calm, and listen carefully, can act as a mediator or peacekeeper. These folks lead by keeping peace, and helping everyone to work together towards a common goal.

#### Worship leader

A worship leader can be a part of every meeting. S/he can begin a business meeting by leading a simple chalice-lighting, reading some opening words (an invocation), or similar ritual. S/he can begin social meetings by leading a check-in. During social action, s/he can lead a brief check-in (for example, asking everyone present to give a one-sentence “emotional weather report”), and can raise the spiritual power of the group.

The role of the worship leader overlaps the role of the energy monitor in small groups. But a worship leader concentrates more on spiritual matters than on purely emotional matters. Note that a worship leader is not necessarily a worship coordinator.

A good worship leader is creative and has a sense of the dramatic. S/he leads by focussing the group’s spiritual energy, and helping the group come together into a unified whole.

#### Honking from behind

We’re talking geese here, not automobiles. The geese at the back of the flock are the ones who honk, encouraging the ones who are flying out in front. Youth who honk from behind have taken on leadership roles in the past. They help newer leaders, sometimes by giving advice, sometimes by encouraging remarks, sometimes by just participating in a positive way.

Eventually, geese who honk from behind fly back up to the front of the flock to lead. The same thing happens with youth groups: those who have been hanging back can step forward to take on new leadership roles.

#### Touch group leader (or affinity group leader)

Sometimes a larger group will break into smaller groups. For example, there might be a hundred or more youth and adults at a district YRUU conference. To keep people from getting lost in the crowd, everyone at the conference is assigned to a touch group with maybe eight or ten people; touch groups play together and have work assignments together. The touch group leader helps people in the touch group get to know one another, gets them bonded, helps them open up to each other and affirm each other. Some social action projects work best when people split into affinity groups. Large youth groups often split into touch groups to facilitate deeper sharing. Small youth groups often function as if they were touch groups.

A touch group leader plays hard, listens well, shares power, and leads the touch group through the 5 stages of community building towards deep sharing.