

NATURAL LEADERS INITIATIVE

Building Community Leadership Through Your Own Work

Tompkins County has many “everyday leaders” — people without formal leadership titles who act in creative ways to improve community life. There are many more people who have good ideas and could become leaders with a little support. This diverse group of “everyday leaders” are a huge, untapped resource for our community as whole.

But to recognize the leadership potential that is here, we need to look beyond what many think “leaders” look like. Then we need to support the growth of these “everyday leaders.”

There are many ways to develop leadership in the work you do every day. Here are our Top Ten.

1. Help people feel “seen” and “valued.” Care about who they are, what their interests and strengths are, what they like doing.
2. Listen to people’s ideas (and help others to listen). Take their ideas seriously. Write them down. Use them.
3. Help people shift from surviving day-to-day to setting bigger goals. Encourage them to want “more.” Believe they can do “more.”
4. Find something that needs doing (related to people’s interests, strengths or goals) and invite them to help out. Start small; build from success to new challenges.
5. Offer people experiences and opportunities that reinforce their abilities, strengths and sense of themselves as competent.

6. “Open doors.” Invite people to accompany you to a new place (event, gathering, speaker, celebration, etc.). Let them know how much you’d value their company.
7. Expand networks. Introduce people to others who care about the same issues they do. Meet the people they know.
8. Support people to tell their stories to others and to speak out on decisions that affect their lives.
9. Recognize and value the expertise “everyday leaders” can add to your organization.
10. Start with #1 again! Expect to invite and re-invite and re-invite participation. Don’t give up when people can’t respond to your invitations right away.

This list was developed by Margo Hittleman, Coordinator, Natural Leaders Initiative, and Margaret Firenze and Wayne Gooden, members of the first Natural Leaders Initiative cohort and 2008 NLI program assistant interns.

The **Natural Leaders Initiative (NLI)** supports everyday leaders — particularly those from low/moderate-income communities and communities of color — to put their ideas into action, learn new skills, meet others who care about improving the community, and grow as leaders. NLI also helps community boards, committees and organizations build their capacity to recognize, recruit, support and retain new leaders from under-represented groups.

NLI is a joint project of the Greater Ithaca Activities Center (GIAC), the Multicultural Resource Center, Tompkins Community Action and Cornell Cooperative Extension –Tompkins County.

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