Finding the Balance?
Kathleen Flynn-Bisson, Health Educator, Center for Prevention and Outreach

Why did I say yes? Why did they choose me? Can I demonstrate my ability to motivate others? Have I demonstrated growth and potential as a leader? Can I balance academics and leadership involvement? Do I have what it takes to be a good role model?

These are all important questions to ask yourself, and chances are as a peer leader you have contemplated these questions, or similar ones, at one time or another. But there is another question that is often overlooked: how do I take care of myself while fulfilling all these aspects as a leader?

The key is balance -- Know who you are, know your strengths and weaknesses. What do you need to be able to function at your best in these challenging times? Know your limits when it comes to taking on additional responsibilities, and save time for the things you want, and need to do, not only what you should do.

Now that you know yourself, how do you protect your wellness? Wellness is much more than how you are feeling physically. Wellness is the integration of body, mind and spirit. Everything you do, think, feel and believe has an impact on your health. Evaluate all areas to maintain balance.

The Eight Dimensions of Wellness

Cultural - find the support you need to honor your cultural beliefs

Spiritual – stay connected to some power greater than you - you can’t do it all

Social – find time to play along with your responsibilities

Occupational – whatever your leadership role is, do your best and ask for help when needed.

Intellectual - your primary role on campus is to be a student, so you need to protect your academics.

Environmental – make sure you have those quiet times to relax and catch your breath.

Physical – great stress reliever – walk, dance, run, or take a class. Make sure you have some form of physical activity on a regular basis -- the best exercise is the one you will do.

Emotional – set up a support system for both roles -- your leadership role and your role as a student.

Taking Care of yourself is the key to being a successful leader. Healthy decisions start from knowing who you are and what you need.

A key element in taking care of yourself is Stress Management: pay attention to the early signs (fatigue, moodiness, sadness, stiff muscles). Know your stressors: assignments, exams, time management, procrastination, lack of time, family, job and relationships. Take action on a regular basis to reduce stress build up. It is almost impossible to remove all stress from your life, especially as a leader, learn to manage it, in a way that relieves it.

Enjoy: remember to take time to play, relax and laugh. Make sure you have at least one belly laugh a day. Laughter heals more than you know. If you can, try not to take yourself too serious -- use the phrase “How important is it?”.

You can be a leader and make healthy choices by:

• Finding balance
• Shoot for the gray, everything is not always black and white
• Put in the footwork and let go of the result
• Mistakes are part of learning (a rainbow is made from sunshine and rain)

Balance is the answer to making Healthy Choices - As a leader, As a student, As a person
When Group Members Misbehave: 
Managing Dominant, Emotional, and Change-Resistant People

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Have you ever been in a group, or tried to lead a group, in which fellow group members are domineering, use emotions to influence others, and/or are resistant to change? Such behaviors disrupt group process and prevent progress. This can happen especially when the group members are volunteers and members don’t have the talent, knowledge, or motivation needed to get the job done. It is worse when the group lacks structure; members have different ideas about the group’s purpose and what it needs to do. This is an opportunity for dysfunctional behavior. The challenge for the leader, members, or facilitator is to foster a cooperative, fact-centered, learning-driven team.

Leading an ill-formed group and making the group into a continuous learning team requires motivating members. Members need to feel a sense of urgency and excitement about working on a common vision. Members need to share the same vision, see it clearly, and understand they have the same primary goal, whatever their individual secondary motives for being in the group happen to be. Members need to understand what tasks are required to achieve the vision, their individual roles and assignments, and the extent to which they are held accountable as individuals, and a team, for carrying out these roles. So the leader needs a plan to motivate members, structure the work recognizing how members depend on one another, and evaluate the process and outcomes. The leader needs to build consensus around the common vision, integrated tasks, and measures of accomplishment for feedback and improvement. Members need to understand that they can do more if they work together.

Consider ways that leaders and members interact in groups and exert influence on each other. They rely on their force of personality, method of influencing fellow-members, and willingness to learn and change. Unfortunately, some leaders and members are dominant. They are forceful, loud, outspoken, and hard to ignore. They voice their opinions and influence whenever there is a void in the group process. Others may prefer a participative environment. They listen and learn from their fellow members.

Leaders and members can also vary in how they try to influence their fellow group members. Some rely on emotional appeals, emphasizing potential gains or losses. Alternatively, they may rely on cognitive and rational appeals, presenting objective information and facts to support a position.

Some leaders and members are resistant to change. They become naysayers in the group, adapting only grudgingly when necessary and making only the slightest adjustments. Other leaders seek new knowledge and information and enjoy trying new ways of working together.

Consider two possible patterns that represent opposite extremes. (Of course, other combinations are possible too.)

**Dominant, Emotional, Change Resistant**

A forceful leader may concentrate on warnings about possible losses (dire consequences from not acting) or gains (the benefits they can achieve). This leader may adapt the message and strategies only when challenged in some way, for instance, when insufficient resources require delaying a goal. Other forceful members of the group may exert their influence, creating discord and preventing progress. Members who are conscientious may cow-tow to authority, join factions that create conflict and split the group, be passive aggressive (appear to accept decisions but don’t act on them), and/or feel frustrated and cynical. Such a group develops patterns of interaction that follows the leader’s authority or results in stagnation and intransigence. Often this results in the dynamics of the group suffering from groupthink, where the followers blindly follow the leader with confidence even when it is dangerous or even disastrous to do so.

**Participative, Fact-centered, Learning-oriented**

A participative leader may concentrate on providing factual information and remain open to involvement of others, engaging them in the process of conceptualizing and clarifying the vision, sharing ideas, collecting information (facts and figures), educating each other, trying different strategies, and building an effort that members feel is as much their own as the leader’s. Other cooperative members of the group are respectful of each other and are open to divergent views. Dominant members of the group may try to usurp the leadership role or create conflict. The group develops and practices patterns of interaction that allow them to learn continuously from each other ready to experiment, shift goals in new directions, and try new tactics. The participative leader is especially adept at encouraging effective brainstorming since he or she is nonjudgmental and open to new ideas during group discussions.

The components of a high performing team (talent, task structure, and time) are often not under the control of the group leader. As a result, the challenge of turning an ill-formed group into a high performing team depends on how leaders’ and members’ use of personal, message, and
learning as they interact and attempt to influence each other. Participative leaders who deliver messages based on data and fact, and who are open to new ideas, sharing, and experimenting, are likely to be more effective at engaging members shaping a continuous learning team, than those who dominate, use emotional messages, and are only open to change-resistant learning. Here are some steps leaders, group facilitators, and members can take to create a team developing a joint vision, making task assignments, and evaluating progress in a way that is participative, fact-centered, and change-oriented.

- Understand not only the nature of the mission as it currently is set forth, but how this mission may currently be in need of transformation in the future.
- View problems from different perspectives.
- Recognize individual members’ strengths and weaknesses.
- Find new talent and invite them to join the group.
- Assign tasks that members are able and want to do.
- Encourage members to develop the skills that the group needs.
- Take time out in group meetings to discuss how the group is doing. Focus on how members treat each other, communicate ideas, and acquire new knowledge and skills.
- Find other groups that are working well and learn from them. Sit in on their meetings. Talk to their leaders and members to find out how they operate. Invite them to attend your group meetings and give you advice. Energize, structure, and track group activity through participation, fact-finding, and learning from each other.

CHILL Peer Educators: Up to the Challenge!
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The challenges inherent in assuming a position as a student leader are numerous. Students must reconcile their new authoritative role with that of their preexisting role of friend, classmate, and cohort. They must be able to effectively serve as examples to their peers, organizing and executing projects, delegating responsibilities, and solving problems and overcoming obstacles in a manner that renders them authoritative but still approachable, knowledgeable but receptive to acquiring new information, a mentor, but still a friend. Student leaders must become skillful in convincing others to join their cause or participate in the activities they are promoting or in genuinely inciting an interest amongst their peers with regard to various issues.

Some students may experience additional challenges as they explore and assume their roles as leaders, especially when the area in which they are assuming leadership is itself fraught with difficulties. A particular example of such students is the CHILL peer educators.

Trained and supervised by the Health Education Office, under the auspices of the Center for Prevention and Outreach, CHILL peer educators engage in outreach efforts designed to heighten awareness of, and provide education with regard to mental health and wellness among their fellow students. Through campus-wide depression screenings and interactive workshops, CHILL peer educators help Stony Brook students understand that mental health disorders are a relevant issue on the college campus, gain reliable information about mental health and wellness, and ‘bridge the gap’ that often exists between professional resources that exist on campus and the student body. In essence, CHILL peer educators are student leaders in the area of mental health education.

Like other developing student leaders, CHILL peer educators must address the aforementioned issues. However, the area in which they assume leadership, mental health, is an area that is accompanied by its own special set of challenges. The area of mental health, especially disorders and their treatment, is a touchy subject for many. Stigma, or prevailing negative attitudes about an issue, predominates. Promotion of mental health and wellness can be met with derision and condescension, for mental health is not always viewed as an integral part of one’s overall wellness, and opinions of mental health can be dictated by negative stereotypes. CHILL peer educators are often faced with the task of heightening awareness of issues that are traditionally taboo, swept under the carpet and not acknowledged. They engage students in frank discussions about sensitive topics that are often ignored or distorted by popular culture.

As a CHILL peer educator, I have obtained invaluable leadership skills that I was unable to draw from other leadership roles I have assumed, including how to communicate with a diverse group of students, how to approach sensitive topics with respect and integrity, and how to listen without judgment. Some say that these will enhance one’s resume and attractiveness to graduate schools or the workforce. However, I know the satisfaction and happiness that I get from reaching out to my fellow students and contributing to making the campus a positive place for students to thrive is worth far more than any job or graduate school admission offer. Whether or not CHILL will make me a better employee or student, it has made me a better human being.
Wolfie’s All Star: 
Interview with Lakshmi Ramsoondar

Lakshmi is a senior at Stony Brook University majoring in Political Science and Asian American Studies. Lakshmi has made many contributions to the Stony Brook community by becoming involved and taking on a variety of leadership opportunities. Lakshmi is a SRA (Senior Resident Assistant) for James College, a student ambassador, an Orientation Leader and a campus tour guide. She is also a member on the Academic Judiciary Committee, a member of the community service club and an Academic Peer Advisor.

Why did you get involved in these clubs and organizations? 
Freshman year I decided to get involved in the Langmuir Hall Council as I adjusted to college; sophomore year I was elected vice president of hall council and enrolled in the LEAD (Leadership Exploration and Development) program. These experiences then opened the doors to other leadership opportunities which led to my other positions on campus.

Has being a student leader helped benefit your academics or improved student life? 
Being a student leader has helped me improve my academics because it has required me to become more organized as I have more on my ‘plate’. The more I became involved everything became easier for me after my freshman year. Becoming a student leader has also improved student life, because to me being part of something is fun and exciting, and I have enjoyed my time here at Stony Brook being apart of it.

What does being a student leader mean to you? 
In my experience being a student leader means helping others; it is not hard to attain but you have to exert effort in order to achieve your desires. A true leader motivates and inspires others around them to want more out of life.

Using the skills that you have acquired as a leader-
How do you think they will help you in the future? 
As a leader a skill that I have acquired to be most important is the way I present myself. This is an important skill that will transcend into the future as a professional.

How would you describe your basic leadership style? 
Give specific examples of how you practice this? 
As a leader I let others voice their opinions and I do not take over. When I became the SRA of James College, I gave my suggestions and did not impose my ideas on my new staff members from my previous building.

Who made the greatest influence in your life as a leader? 
My mom has been my main influence; moving from Trinidad to the US was a challenge, but my mom always found ways to make it ok. I think that being an agent of change is important and my mom was able to do that. As a Stony Brook student Miriam Rios II, Kathleen Gillon and Heather Robertson, have all been great resources for me and therefore great influences.

What is the most important tip you can give to developing leadership skills? 
The most important tip I can give to developing leadership skills is be open to new things and be mindful to others in all aspects of life.

What is the most frequent mistake you see made by leaders? 
I notice that leaders often assume that others know exactly what they’re doing by focusing on their ideas and not fully explaining their goals for the implementation of their ideas.

The Emerging Leaders Magazine provides the campus community with information and resources on current leadership topics and opportunities as well as spotlight student leaders and their achievements.

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If you are interested in submitting an article for The Emerging Leaders Magazine, contact Jasmine Colon at mjcolon@notes.cc.sunysb.edu for more information.

For more information on leadership opportunities, visit the Leadership Nexus at http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/nexus/