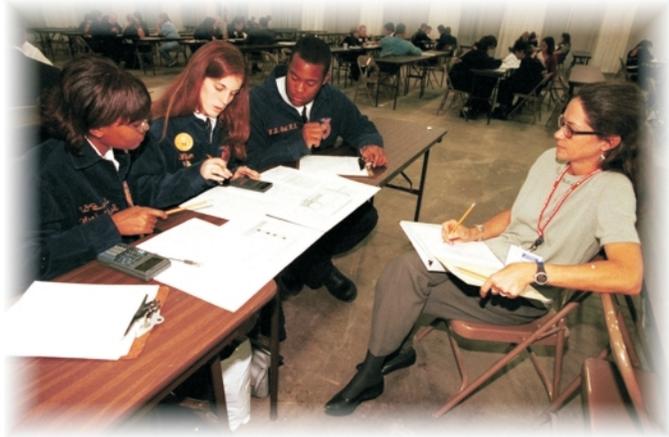


Opportunities in FFA

OPPORTUNITIES are everywhere! Taking advantage of all the opportunities available to us can be challenging; we have only so much time! The FFA organization provides a variety of opportunities for students to experience premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education. The entire organization is designed to help you build your skills and experiences so that you will be a better prepared candidate for leadership opportunities and successful career choices. Taking advantage of the opportunities you have available is up to you!



(Courtesy, National FFA Organization)

Objective:



Describe how FFA develops leadership skills, personal growth, and career success.

Key Terms:



career development
events
career success
critical thinking skills
leader

leadership
Made for Excellence
personal growth
personal skills

supervised agricultural
experience
technical skills
Washington Leadership
Conference

FFA: Premier Leadership, Personal Growth, and Career Success

The National FFA Organization was started a long time ago, but even then the focus of the group was on the development of three very important core areas. The founders of the organization knew that a successful youth organization should offer plentiful opportunities for young people to practice being leaders. The young people involved in the organization should have a chance to learn and grow, expanding their horizons beyond their local school. Finally, participation in the organization should expose students to the career opportunities available in the agricultural industry. FFA has continued to focus on these three core areas and offers a wide variety of activities to develop these skills!

PREMIER LEADERSHIP

Think of a group you are involved in at your school. It may be an athletic team, a musical group, a club, or just a class you are a part of. In that group, chances are there is someone you consider a leader—one person everyone turns to when decisions need to be made. Maybe that person is you! How do you become the leader that other people turn to when direction is needed within a group?

Leadership is a major focus of FFA activities.

Leadership is the ability to influence other people to meet individual or group goals. Leadership skills are in high demand in organizations and in the workplace. A **leader** is a person who helps other people or groups reach their goals. To become a leader, you need an understanding of the qualities that are essential in good leaders, and you need practice in conducting activities that will provide leadership experience.

You must possess and develop three types of skills to become an effective leader. The three types are personal skills, technical skills, and critical thinking skills. **Personal skills** are the traits that seem to draw people to a leader. People who are trustworthy, honest, responsible, and hardworking are naturally trusted with the responsibilities of leadership. This set of skills also includes being friendly and accepting of others, maintaining a positive attitude, and listening to other people's ideas, even when they are in disagreement with your own. Leaders know how to disagree without being disagreeable. These personal skills make leaders approachable and trusted to have everyone's interests in mind.



FIGURE 1. Leadership skills are essential for FFA officers.



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: FFA Conferences

Visit the National FFA Web site at <http://www.ffa.org>. In the left menu, select “FFA Conferences.” Review the different types of conferences available to FFA members. What grade level is most appropriate for each conference? Which of these conferences looks most interesting to you? Develop a table that lists all the available conferences, who each conference is for, and the grade level of the appropriate attendee at each conference.

Technical skills include the skills and abilities needed for a group to function properly. Among those skills are the abilities to organize effective meetings, speak in front of the group, and write effectively. Technical skills may also include the “how to” skills of a group that has a certain purpose. A leader on the parliamentary procedure team would have the skills needed to participate on that team.

Critical thinking skills give a leader the ability to assess problems and consider solutions that provide the best outcome for the group. Effective leaders consider all sides of problems and realize that the best solutions may come from persons other than themselves. At the same time, leaders with good critical thinking skills are constantly thinking of creative solutions to problems. Leaders realize that not every decision will be popular, but good critical thinking skills give leaders the ability to present choices that are in the best interest of the group.

The FFA organization is a wonderful place to develop leadership skills. That is because so many activities provide the practice that young people need to develop those skills while under the watchful eye of their FFA advisor. The advisor serves a role in the leadership development process by coaching students as they become better leaders.

Many local, state, and national activities are available to FFA members to develop their leadership skills. Schools within a region or section may gather to have a leadership training school, where officers and others learn about the skills they need to become better leaders. A state FFA association may host an FFA leadership camp, a state FFA convention, a regional Greenhand conference, or any number of activities designed for the development of leadership skills by FFA members. The National FFA Organization holds **Made for Excellence** (MFE) conferences, the **Washington Leadership Conference** (WLC), and the National FFA Convention, to name a few of the many activities designed with student leadership development in mind. Your advisor can tell you about the requirements for attending these activities.

PERSONAL GROWTH

Members of FFA often have new experiences through their travels and attendance at conferences that make them better members of society. **Personal growth** occurs when people better themselves by seeking to learn something new, consider viewpoints they haven’t thought of before, or help others. Personal growth can take place right in your own classroom! However, the opportunity to experience something firsthand often creates a learning experi-

ence that really stretches the imagination and changes your way of thinking! Citizenship is a component of personal growth that is often stressed in FFA. Members are encouraged to participate in activities that prepare them to be contributing members of their community. In many ways, personal growth is tied to leadership, as good leaders are constantly seeking to consider new perspectives, improve themselves, and help others.

CAREER SUCCESS

Agricultural education and the FFA organization exist to prepare young people for the opportunities that lie ahead. **Career success** is possible when young people have had exposure to, and experience in, a variety of careers that interest them. Agricultural education courses often expose students to an array of careers through classroom experience. FFA takes that exposure a step farther by encouraging students to pursue careers that interest them.

Supervised agricultural experience (SAE) programs allow students to learn the technical skills needed in jobs or careers they may hold during their school years. The FFA organization takes SAE a step farther with the proficiency award program. This program rewards students on the local, regional, state, and national levels who conduct outstanding SAE programs. Through this process, many students learn the skills needed for success in related careers and get the valuable experience employers seek when hiring employees.

Career development events (CDEs) allow students to apply what they've learned in the classroom in a competitive environment. Career development events exist for a wide variety of activities, with public speaking, livestock evaluation, food science, parliamentary procedure, and dairy foods being just a few. The events are designed to expose students to a few of the skills used in specific careers while also developing skills that will be used in any career a student selects.

Career success, like personal growth, is very closely tied to leadership. Qualities developed as a leader prepare a student to experience success as a student and later as an entrepreneur or employee. The FFA experience is designed to prepare students for what lies ahead—postsecondary education, career placement, or entrepreneurship—and provides the skills needed to succeed in those ventures.

Summary:



Agricultural education and FFA prepare students for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through a variety of activities, conferences, award programs, and career development events. Participation in FFA activities provides valuable experiences that prepare students for their future and develop leadership skills that will be used throughout the students' lives.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. Define *leadership*.
2. List the three types of skills that effective leaders possess, and describe what each type of skill contains.
3. Name two conferences that are available to FFA members on the state or national level.
4. In what ways can FFA participation increase a student's opportunity for career success?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Interview a former FFA member in your community. Ask about the person's most memorable experiences in FFA while he or she was in school. Did the individual participate in any CDEs (formerly referred to as contests) or have an SAE program? Ask what the person learned that is used in his or her work today.

Web Links:



National FFA Conferences

http://www.ffa.org/programs/conferences/html/conf_members.html

National FFA Career Development Events

<http://www.ffa.org/programs/cde/index.html>