



STUDENT WORKER OR STUDENT LEADER

Most students often confuse being a student worker versus being a student leader.

Both are necessary.

Yet many consider themselves to be student leaders when in reality, they are mostly a student worker.

Do you know the difference?

Can I truly call myself a student leader if I'm not leading anyone?

There's a key similarity between a student worker and a student leader. Both require that the student does the job he or she was elected or selected to do.

During a half-day training for the student leaders at a local junior high school, I began talking about the differences between a student worker and a student leader.

A student worker is one who has a job to do and gets the work done. A student leader also has a job to do and also gets the work done. The difference (which will be outlined in this ebook) is how each one goes about getting the job done and doing the work.

It's important to note that I'm not going to be bashing the idea of student workers and praising the notion of student leaders. Both are important and necessary. The reason I'm writing this is to clarify the differences. I also want to encourage the student worker who desires to become a student leader (because most students move from worker to leader, rather than the other way around).

If you're reading this, you've more than likely been elected or selected to handle certain responsibilities. It's up to you. But how will you go about accomplishing the tasks and projects that lie before you?

At the beginning moments of each student leadership year, the differences between a student worker and student leader are harder to detect. But with each passing event, it becomes more and more evident which path a student is choosing.



ARE THEY WATCHING OR FOLLOWING?

Where is my focus?

Most students entering into student leadership positions find themselves asking an important question: What should I be focusing on?

The answer to that question will begin to determine one's leaning toward being a student worker or student leader.

A student worker will tend to focus on the tasks of the position. She will find other people to assist in the process of completing tasks.

STUDENTWORKER

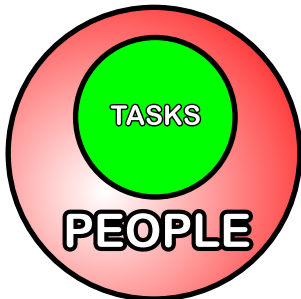


A student leader will focus on people. She will begin to bring people together to invest in them and to allow them to use their strengths in order to complete the tasks that are required. In many instances, a student leader won't begin to work on tasks until all the right people are on board.

The student worker sees people as a means to completing tasks. The student leader sees tasks as a means to developing people.

A student worker knows that she will need people at certain times throughout her student leadership year in order to complete the tasks that the position requires. People are necessary because the student worker can't do it alone.

STUDENTLEADER



A student leader knows that there are certain tasks that need to be accomplished throughout her student leadership year, but waits to see who can be brought on the team and shapes the tasks accordingly. People are necessary because the leader won't do it alone.

Where is your focus? On tasks or on people.

AN OVERVIEW

The following chart provides an overview of some of the key differences between a student worker and a student leader. Each of these will be discussed further in the pages that follow.

In the area of:	A STUDENT WORKER...	A STUDENT LEADER...
INVOLVEMENT	Does it all by himself.	Involves others in getting things done.
STRENGTHS	Tries to do it ALL well.	Realizes what he can do well and delegates weak areas to others.
RESPONSIBILITY	Feels responsible for the task.	Feels responsible to his people.
FOCUS	Tries to work on his weaknesses.	Focuses on his strengths.
SUCCESS	Feels successful by what he personally accomplishes.	Feels successful by what his people accomplish.
LEGACY	Does the job then moves on.	Develops others to take over when he leaves.

As you look through the comparisons, try to identify which one more aptly describes where you are at.

Is there something that you can do to move from worker to leader?

What's holding you back?

The Difference of Involvement

A student worker does the job all by herself.

A student leader involves others in getting things done.

It's easy to tell the difference here. At the completion of an assignment or task, a student worker will talk in terms of "me." A student leader will describe getting the task or project done in terms of "we." One takes the task and gets it done. The other gets the task done by involving others in the process.

It is only when I engage others in the process and guide them toward the accomplishment of the task or project that I begin to exercise leadership.

Once again, it's not to say that one way is better than the other. Somehow, the job must get done. If I am responsible for it, and I do it myself, I can rest assured it gets done. But I will not be leading, I will be working. It is only when I engage others in the process and guide them toward the accomplishment of the task or project that I begin to exercise leadership.

Offentimes, it's simply easier to do it ourselves. We get in, do it, and we're done with it. But if we fall into the rut of only relying on ourselves, we will miss the opportunities to engage others, to get others involved, and to learn what it means to lead.

Think back over the past couple of weeks - was your position all about "me" or did it involve "we?"

You'll be surprised how much more you can accomplish when you involve others.

The Difference of Strengths

A student worker tries to do it all well.

A student leader realizes what he can do well and delegates weak areas to others.

Excellence is more than just a one time event. It is an ongoing process - a lifestyle. The effective student worker who holds excellence as an important value for his work will strive to do everything by that high standard.

Unfortunately, none of us is good enough to do everything at a high level of effectiveness or efficiency. Trying to do everything the best that you can doesn't always translate into something being done the best it can be done. Simply put, your best may not be the best.

In no way is that meant to sound harsh or condescending. My point is that each of us have abilities and gifts that help us accomplish things at a high level of excellence. But we also have blindspots and weaknesses that produce work that may be average and mediocre at best.

A student worker who attempts to do everything himself must realize that there will be things that he does really well and things that are done just to get by.

Student leaders see the same areas of excellence and average within themselves and look for others who possess the ability to bring the average areas up to excellent. A student leader works to produce the best possible results based on a combination of gifts and abilities of those who are a part of his team.



But I can do it all myself!

A student worker who attempts to do everything himself must realize that there will be things that he does really well and things that are done just to get by.

Both a student worker and a student leader may say, "I can do this." But student leaders begin to exercise their leadership abilities when they add, "I can do this, but is there someone else who can do it better and more efficiently than I can?"

Ultimately, this is a lot more positive than it is negative. It's easy to see how a student can see this as a negative because one feels inadequate that he can't do everything that the job, task, or position requires. But the overwhelming positive is when a student leader is freed up to invest more of himself in the areas of his giftedness and strengths. He does this by bringing others on the team to function in the areas of the student leader's weaknesses.

In a recent conversation with one of my student leaders, we approached this topic from a slightly different perspective. The student leader showed me how he was capable of doing ALL the aspects of the job at a high level of excellence. His statement to me was that if he were to pass along various responsibilities of the position, that it would be a negative thing in two ways:

- 1) He feels ultimately responsible for the work that is to be done and believes he is the best one to do it. To pass off the work would appear to him that he is shirking his responsibilities.
- 2) He is the one who can produce the highest level of work. To pass of the work would lessen the quality.

They call it a student leadership position for a reason.

So you can see the dilemma. Here we have a situation where a student is placed into a leadership position, but doesn't necessarily need to lead anyone (except himself) and can still accomplish the responsibilities of the job.

Is he really a student leader? I don't think so. I think he's a student worker.

Here's my response: My desire is to see this student grow in his leadership capabilities. I am going to encourage this student to invest in and bring more people into the tasks of the position because I am willing to make a tradeoff. I'll let the quality of work slide in an effort to develop and build this student's leadership effectiveness. I am willing to sacrifice a more certain outcome for a more risky one.

I think the easy way out is to admit that he can do the job and do it well. He doesn't have to rely, teach, equip, or involve others. But that's not the intention of that position. It is to be a leader, a facilitator, a gatherer of people toward some common purpose. In fact, this student and I came to the realization that at certain levels, his strengths are much better suited as a student worker than a student leader. Not necessarily a bad thing, but I want to help him develop his leadership skills.

So what about your situation?

Do you struggle to make the leap from worker to leader because you are really good at doing the job?

How can you become more inclusive?

There is some truth to the adage, "If you want it done right, do it yourself."

It is easier and less time consuming to do things yourself than it is to train somebody else to do it.

But leadership is not primarily about getting things done "right."

Leadership is about getting things done through other people. Leaders work through others.
- *John Maxwell*

The Difference of Responsibility

A student worker feels responsible for the task.

A student leader feels responsible to her people.

When you were chosen for your position as a student leader (whether elected or selected), there were certain responsibilities that were both natural and necessary for you to accomplish. There were certain tasks that needed to get done by the person who held your position.

The goal is to invest in someone else.

As an example, let's say that one of your responsibilities is an annual awards ceremony. One of the differences between a student worker and a student leader can be identified in the way one approaches the event. The student worker will begin to create a large to-do list of all the things that need to be accomplished for a successful event. The student leader will begin by identifying key people that she can bring on board to create a successful event. At the outset, one focuses more on tasks, the other more on people.

The student worker may begin to see that she needs to get some assistance from other people because the tasks are too great for one person to accomplish. But the focus will still be on the accomplishment of the task. The goal is getting something done.

The student leader realizes that there are numerous tasks, but focuses on signing up the right people - matching strengths and abilities with tasks and assignments. The focus is on developing people and a team, putting people in the right place for them to succeed. The goal is to invest in someone else.

Tasks for people or people for tasks.

In the end, both the student worker and the student leader work toward creating a successful awards ceremony. A student worker will feel satisfaction because the awards ceremony was successful. Success, in this instance, is measured by the accomplishment and success of the event.

The student leader will feel satisfaction because she created a team of people that flourished in the areas of their strengths and worked together to achieve something meaningful. The measurement of success here is based on the value it adds to people's lives.

How do you view your job description?

Do you see people as a way to add value to your tasks?

Do you see tasks as a means to add value to people?

Which do you focus on more: tasks or people?



The Difference of Focus

A student worker tries to improve his weaknesses.

A student leader focuses on his strengths.

Marcus Buckingham, in his book, Now, Discover Your Strengths, writes the following:

“This fixation with weakness is deeply rooted in our education and upbringing. We presented parents with this scenario: Say your child returns home with the following grades: an A in English, an A in Social Studies, a C in Biology, and an F in Algebra. Which of these grades would you spend the most time discussing with your son or daughter?”

77% of parents chose to focus on the F in Algebra, only 6% on the A in English, and an even more minuscule number, 1% on the A in Social Studies.” (p123)

Buckingham later writes, *“Many of us avoid the exposure of building on our strengths. Instead, we stay in the workroom patching up the cracks. It is diligent, it is humble, and society respects it. Unfortunately...patching up your weaknesses will never lead you to excellence.” (p149)*

The student worker will soon discover that he can't do everything well. This realization will push the student worker to try and shore up those areas where he feels weakest. Perhaps it's in the area of communication - "I can't speak well in front of a crowd. I must spend more time trying to get better at that!"

What areas of weakness are you continually tempted to try and improve upon?

The student leader delegates and manages others in the areas that the student leader is weak.

How will you exercise your strengths today?

While it's important to develop good communication skills, not everyone is gifted as a public speaker. In fact, a student worker may come to the end of the time in his position and find that he is only an average speaker.

But what if the student worker is an outstanding organizer? Rather than focus on gaining greater momentum in the area of organization, a student worker tries to spend more time on the area of public speaking because that appears to be his most glaring weak spot. This takes away from the time the student worker can invest in his organizational skills. And the group loses out because this is where they could most benefit from the student worker's expertise.

The student leader, on the other hand, understands that the position that he holds is more than one person. It calls for leadership. That means additional people - people who have different strengths and abilities than the leader. So the student leader focuses on the strengths that he can bring to team. Then (and this is KEY!) the student leader delegates and manages others in the areas that the student leader is weak.

If the student leader isn't good at public speaking, but he has strengths in the area of organization, the student leader spends the majority of his time exercising his organizational abilities. The student leader will find people that have strengths in the area of public speaking and get them on the team.

Whom do you know that has strengths in the areas where you are weak?



Being well-rounded is a myth.

When a student leader focuses on his strengths...

1. He gives his best to the organization.
2. He makes room for others to exhibit and operate out of their strengths.
3. He leads with greater confidence.
4. He recognizes that he can't do everything.
5. He does excellent work.

A student leader realizes that there is no such thing as a well-rounded leader, there are only well-rounded organizations.

A student worker often operates from the perspective that he must become well-rounded in order to be effective. Unfortunately, this is a false notion.

A student leader realizes that there is no such thing as a well-rounded leader, there are only well-rounded organizations and teams. That is why a student leader strives to operate out of his area of strengths and places people on the team that add complementary strengths.

Does your team offer a diverse complement of strengths?

What kind of strengths are missing on your team?

The Difference of Success

A student worker feels successful by what she personally accomplishes.

A student leader feels successful by what her people accomplish.

In my office, I have a shelf where I keep mementos and various “trophy” type awards. These are special keepsakes that remind me of past projects and positions that went well. So well, in fact, that people were happy to commemorate them for me.

Success can be defined in a variety of ways:

“Success means having the courage, the determination, and the will to become the person you believe you were meant to be.”
-George Sheehan

“Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.”
-Herman Cain

“Success is doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.”
-Jim Rohn

Each person carries an idea, a perspective on what one defines as success. Personal success can be based on any number of things. In fact, what constitutes success for a student worker will be different than what a student leader sees as successful.



There's a fine line between success and significance.

Success is something I can achieve on my own. But it lasts for a moment. Significance is an investment that has a lasting return. A student leader strives to make a significant impact in the success of others.

For the student worker, success can be identified by doing the job well. There are certain expectations, qualifications, and responsibilities that need to be accomplished. A student worker has a job to do. If that person does the job well, perhaps even better than those who have done it before, then that person may walk away from the experience feeling successful. The level of success is based on their personal performance.

On the other hand, the student leader will gauge her own success by the results produced from those whom she leads. If the leader's team fails, she fails. Even if she has done everything that was required and fulfilled personal responsibilities, the failure of the team will feel like a personal failure.

What's ironic is that a student worker will receive accolades for a job well done, while a student leader will pass out the recognition to the team for a job well done. A student leader feels successful because the people that she works with are successful. A student leader will pass the credit on to her people. A student worker will receive the credit herself.

It's not that one's right and one's wrong...it's just different.

As I look at the trophies on my shelf, the ones I find most meaningful are from the times I was a part of something bigger than myself. I encourage students to strive for leadership rather than workership because a student leader strives to make a significant impact in the success of others.

How significant in your own personal success?

The Difference of Legacy

A student worker does the job then moves on.

A student leader develops others to take over when he leaves.

One of the most overlooked aspects of a student leadership position is in the area of how a student leader leaves. We spend a lot of time in the preparation and implementation of the position. We are conscious of commitment levels and the ability to accomplish the tasks of the position with excellence.

But what happens when it's time to step aside?

A student worker and a student leader will handle the final days a little differently.

A student worker will work hard to do a task, project, or assignment. But when the job is done, the student worker will move on because the work is completed. If there's nothing left to do, then there is no reason for the student worker to stick around. In fact, the mindset of the student worker is to move forward from the completion of a task or project. It's time to tackle the next task or project that lies ahead of him.

A student worker may take the time to evaluate his own performance.

How could I have improved?

What could I have done differently?

What have I learned that will help me in the next task or project?

Will you leave well?

A student leader understands that part of his responsibility is to develop other student leaders. The legacy a student leader leaves behind will be felt by the one who steps in behind him. Student leaders take the time necessary to develop and equip the ones who are next so they can be successful. Even though the tasks of the position may be complete, a student leader's job isn't finished until the next student leader is adequately prepared and trained for the assignment.

Every person who steps into a student leadership position will have to step away at some point. When it's time to leave, a student leader will consider the following:

1. Have I left the position better than I found it?
2. Whom have I invested in to continue the duties of the position?
3. Will anything be easier for the next person because of the work my team and I've done this year?
4. What will I be remembered for - the tasks I accomplished or the people I developed? Or both?

These are the issues that center around the idea of legacy. An effective student worker will be remembered for doing a good job. An effective student leader will be remembered for raising up good people. There is definitely some overlap here. Both the student worker and student leader will be measured and judged by how they leave their position.

Everyone has to leave at some point. The question is, Will you leave well?



The Path from Student Worker to Student Leader

My hope is that by reading and reflecting on the ideas written in this short ebook that you will begin to identify ways you can move into the arena of student leadership. While student workers are vital to the success of most student organizations, there is a growing need for the people elected or selected into student leadership roles...to lead.

In summary, the student leader will be the one who is able to:

1. Focus on people.
2. Focus on strengths.
3. Focus on growing yourself and others.

Take some moments to reflect and review your own focus:

- What is the one things that I can begin to do to move from student worker to student leader?
- Who are three people I can bring onto my team; people I can invest in and develop?
- What is one thing that is holding me back from moving from student worker to student leader?

It seems to me that the best leaders are students - always learning...always growing. In fact, I've discovered that there isn't much difference between leaders who strive to be the best students and students who are striving to be the best leaders. There's a lot to learn when one is leading others. studentlinc helps you get to the next level. One of the goals of this project is to give student leaders the confidence to be who they are while they strive to become something more.

At the heart of studentlinc is the leadership blog. This part of the website is continually updated with relevant articles, practical insights, and easy-to-apply resources for both the student leader and those who work alongside student leaders. The rest of the website offers:

- organized links to specific articles
- downloadable tools that are reproducible for immediate use
- practical Ebooks that will help student leaders make the most of their experience
- opportunities to bring real, hands-on training to your group of student leaders



Tim Milburn is the founder of studentlinc and is dedicated to developing lifelong leaders one student at a time.

He currently writes and speaks to a wide variety of student groups on the topic of student leadership. He makes his home in Eagle, Idaho with his wife and four children.

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