

# Tips from *The Stuff of Heroes!*

ToolTip #4  
Mar 2003



The following is an excerpt from *The Stuff of Heroes*, by William Cohen, a retired Air Force major general. In the book Cohen includes dozens of inspiring stories from the military and business that he feels prove that you'll succeed as a leader if you adhere to the following eight "universal laws" of leadership.

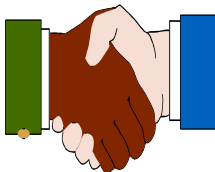
As you read or apply these principles, remember in neighborhood associations it is better to think in terms of community building rather than of "leaders and followers". Unlike the business world with "bosses" or the military with officers, every resident is a potential "leader". However, although these tips are geared toward businesses or the military with a hierarchical order, these principles may be applied to neighborhood associations in a modified way. (*Neighborhood suggestions are added after each "law".*)

- 1. Operate with complete integrity.** The Basics: Keep your word, and do the right thing - even if you're the only one who knows you're doing it. And always pick the difficult right over the easy wrong.



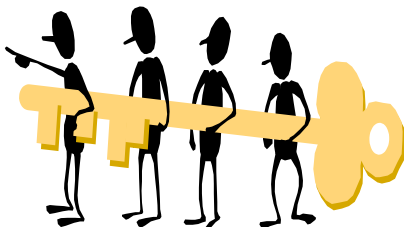
*Trust is a basic component in every neighborhood association and trust will not happen without integrity on the part of the leaders, City staff, or anyone else involved in your association. Not only should you be accountable, but they should be too.*

- 2. Become an expert in your field.** "Expert power" provides one of the major sources of a leader's authority because people feel safe following those who "know their stuff."



*For a neighborhood leader, your "expertise" is in knowing the neighborhood. If you are in touch with the people, understand the problems, are aware of the assets in a neighborhood, and know how to work with other, residents will have greater confidence in your leadership.*

- 3. Tell people what you expect.** Use compelling language to describe the organization's vision, goals and values. Develop a plan for getting where you want to go and launch it. Then listen for feedback that may signal the need for a strategic change.



*This is one that may not be appropriate for neighborhood associations as it is stated. A neighborhood association's visions, goals, values, and plans need to come from all the residents. A true leader will be able to assist the association in finding the "compelling words" and encourage all members to "listen for signs" that there may be a need for "a strategic change"..*

4. **Mean it when you commit.** You'll inspire your followers if you show them you accept the risk that commitment brings. You do that by sticking to your path in adversity and solving problems that seem impossible to others.



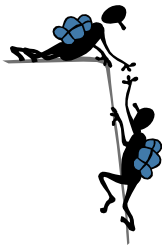
*This is very true- especially for voluntary organizations like neighborhood associations. It is especially important to remember the "in adversity" part. As volunteers, its too easy to say, "This isn't fun anymore. And they don't need me anyway" and quit. If one person does that, it's easier for others to follow.*

5. **Expect the best.** Maintain self-confident vision of what you want - success - not a negative view of what you don't want - possible failure. Positive thinking has power, but only if you fuel it with enthusiasm.



*This rings especially true in volunteer organizations. If leaders aren't excited and energized about what they are doing, then how can they expect others to be?*

6. **Care for your followers.** Put your follower's needs at the top of your priority list. If things go wrong, "take" two things - charge and responsibility. And when things go right, share two things - the glory and the profit.



*Again the language is off but the concept is good. Sometimes it takes a good leader to get through the tough times. But when credit is given, its everyone's. Remember, to really improve neighborhoods, it takes a lot of residents' participation.*

7. **Put others first.** Think of your followers before yourself. Celebrate their success by giving them as much credit as possible. And share their pain even if it's inconvenient, difficult or costly in time, money or other resources.



*Another one that applies more to businesses. However, always remember, as a community leader you do not always represent yourself. When we are passionate about our idea about what the neighborhood needs, it is sometimes difficult to do this.*

8. **Do what the word "lead" implies - get out in front.** If you're not willing to do what you ask your followers to do, don't ask them to do it. Successful leaders thrive on action. Weak leaders hide behind their desks and issue directives.



*Again true. Most successful neighborhood associations are "action oriented" whether it be to improve the neighborhood or host spectacular events. Working together for a cause strengthens the association plus its links to other organizations. Don't be afraid to take chances!*