

Structuring, Managing and Utilizing Students

Introduction

A successful team structure ensures communication between all students, mentors, and team parents. This guarantees that the team will not be run by one person, but by the students and mentors that comprise it. A FIRST team can be compared to a small business, they both need a stable structure and a solid managerial unit.

Team Structure

Leadership Roles

Every FIRST team should have an organized, driven group of student leaders who direct team members to complete goals. It is important for the team to have multiple leaders, so they can oversee the different aspects of the team and ensure projects are completed on time. Leadership roles should be earned by the most involved and experienced members. The Holy Cows leaders must submit an application and be formally interviewed by the mentors and current leaders. Our team is run like a business, where mentors act like CEOs, guiding student directors whom oversee a team of managers. A manager of director for every single aspect of the team is not recommended because work can get caught up in the jurisdictional bottleneck.

Mentor/Student Relationship

It is important that there is an open line of communication and interaction between mentors and students. The mentor should act as a guiding force rather than a controlling one. Mentors are a part of the team to guide students and set a positive example.

Establishing Leadership in Parents

Team parents are a major help with team organization. Be sure to ask parents for their help, and do not be afraid to use them as a resource. Parents can contribute their time as mentors, and facilitators. On The Holy Cows, we have a very dedicated team mom who all organizes food and carpooling schedules.

Recruiting Students

Strong recruitment methods will ensure the sustainability and growth of a successful FIRST Robotics team. A team needs to portray a strong presence on their school campus to draw students to their team. Make sure to not allow your FIRST team to become your school's best kept secret. Build up your team's reputation on campus through presenting at school/community events, posting fliers, and involving the team with the school's student body. Most importantly, ensure that the students you are trying to recruit know what they can do on the team, and how being on a FIRST team can benefit them. Many students who join The Holy Cows come from two feeder middle schools where the "Cows" give periodic presentations at community events. Students also hear about The Holy Cows via word-of-mouth as many students on the team share their experiences to their friends, knowledge of the team spreads throughout through the student body.

Recruiting students in an organized and professional manner creates a more composed team. The Holy Cows use a Google Form to collect information such as name, grade level, contact information, and parent contact information. In this way, a constant connection can be made to the student, and an accurate roster can be maintained.

Running a Team Meeting

Team meetings should be frequent and held all throughout the year, not just during build season. An agenda should be established for each team meeting in order to ensure that the meeting has a specific goal in mind.

Here is an example of an agenda for this season's first team meeting, with the goal of welcoming rookies in mind.

- Welcome to Rookies (10 Minutes)
 - Registration
 - Introduction
- FIRST Introduction (15 minutes)
 - Play FIRST Video
- Holy Cow Introduction (40 minutes)
 - Leader Introduction
 - Team History
 - Policies and Rules
- Team Jobs (30 Minutes)
 - Public Relations Jobs
 - Engineering Jobs
 - Team Member Job Interest Survey
- Q and A
- Team Builder Activity

Sustaining Student Involvement

It is important to keep new students on the team involved in projects so they learn the skills that ensure the team's sustainability. A program should be implemented that allows rookies to learn skills and concepts which veteran team members have already learned. The Holy Cows, have implemented a program affectionately termed "Calf-to-Cow." Rookie members, or "Calves," are grouped veteran members, or "Cows," who show them the ropes of the team. In addition to this program, two internal VEX teams were created to train members the basics of game strategy, cooperation, and robot design. By participating in these programs, new members can see all aspects of the team, giving them an opportunity to find their place on the team.