

# Perspectives on Leadership: Getting into Position

by *LeaNora Ruffin*

In less than two months, NALP will launch another nomination cycle for Board and elected leadership positions. Coming as it does like clockwork each November, it's easy to overlook the significance of this season to the association and, perhaps, to YOU. As a leader, you probably have plenty of opportunities to take on more responsibility and might be less than enthused about taking on more. But if you've talked to any current or former leaders of NALP, you already know that this is different. NALP leadership affords you the opportunity to work with some of the most talented professionals in our industry on meaningful work that makes a difference in our daily professional lives. So, with that knowledge in mind, will this be the moment you throw your hat in the ring? What will make this year different? And, most importantly, how will you get into position to say "yes" to the call for nominations?

The first step on the road to YES is to check your thinking. Do you believe that you're too busy or unprepared? Have you thrown your hat into the ring before but experienced disappointment with the results? Regardless the situation, negative or defeatist thoughts will zap your emotional strength, making it difficult for you to make a quality decision. To get unstuck, focus on the big picture. If you were to say yes, how would it benefit you and your organization? Direct your thoughts to factors you can control such as your level of preparation and your support network. To boost your confidence, review your record of personal and professional success.

Once you've cleared away some of the mental and emotional clutter, it's time to start moving into position by following some or all of these strategic steps.

**First things first.** Increasing your leadership profile will take time, commitment, and focus. It is a long-term strategy, not a short-term goal. To maximize your chances of success, make the decision to prioritize your professional development. On a regular basis, assess where you are now and where you would like to be in the future and set measurable goals. To identify your skill gaps, get consistent feedback on your performance from those inside and outside of your circle of trust. To stave off boredom and complacency, incorporate a few stretch moves into your daily grind such as taking on a new assignment, writing a *NALP Bulletin* article, joining a section, reaching out to a NALP member you'd like to know better, or cultivating a new sponsor for your goals.

**Leverage your growth spurts.** As a busy NALP professional, you know what it's like to be called into action at a moment's notice. The changing landscape of our industry has required you to get creative and to maximize limited resources. As a result, you've learned how to be confident in the face of crisis, confusion, and change. While it was not easy, these experiences have provided you with a new set of refined skills and competencies. Rather than lamenting about the good old days or wishing for better days, use this growth spurt. Leverage these skills to your advantage. Armed with a deeper skill set, ask yourself: What opportunities are you looking forward to pursuing? Where do you see possibilities to add value to NALP, your organization, or your community?

**Say it loud.** The bottom line is this: if you are seeking greater leadership opportunities, you can't be the only one who knows about it! Leaders often make the mistake of assuming that those who are in a position to sponsor them are aware of

their leadership goals. Nothing could be further from the truth! In the hectic flurry of the average day, even the most dedicated supporter can miss the opportunity to pass on a well-timed recommendation. The only cure for this is an old one — be the squeaky wheel! If you're interested in running for a NALP position or want a bigger assignment, say so NOW. Consider with whom you might share your goals and be specific about the help you need. Once these individuals have been identified, let them observe your solid leadership qualities — initiative, problem-solving, and commitment — in action. Now is not the time to hide your light under a bushel — let it shine!

**Learn from your defeats.** This is a hard truth: your failures are the most unlikely mentors you'll ever have. But if you are brave enough to look at them, they will illuminate a pathway forward and through your blind spots. We see this principle in action in the professional sports arena. Athletes consistently review the tape of games they've lost in order to get better. Similarly, the best leaders are comfortable identifying areas for improvement. So what's the disappointment or defeat teaching you? Having gone through this negative experience, what do you know about yourself now that you didn't know before?

**Nominate another leader.** Leaders recognize leadership in others. From time to time, you've probably thought about NALP members who would be excellent Board or elected leaders. This November, do your part to continue NALP's tra-

dition of excellence by nominating those NALP members. If you are struggling to come up with names, think about members of your city group or law school consortium. Recall section leaders, advocates, and conference speakers. Who consistently demonstrates professionalism, organization, integrity, and passion for NALP's mission? Keep a running list now so you'll be ready to submit your nominations in November!

Getting into position for greater leadership can be an exhilarating process. If you do the work, it often leads to immediate shifts in how you think about yourself and how others think about you. Who knows? Armed with deeper insight on your strengths and a stronger network of support, you just might surprise yourself and answer the call this November!

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