

## LEADERSHIP

Nancy Baldwin Carter, Omaha, Nebraska, n.carter@cox.net

**QUESTION:** “There is some question about what all is expected and not expected of the leaders of our group. We have a couple of new members who have come in and seem to think that we don't ask for or take suggestions from anyone and that we are a three run group which we are not. We ask for help but none is really offered and I have tried as well as the two others to get people to be more forthcoming.”

**ANSWER:** Effective leadership is a great challenge these days with many support groups facing the changes our aging members require. Generally speaking, leaders are chosen for such traits as their innovative vision, their ability to speak to the emotional needs of the group, and the atmosphere of fairness and inclusiveness they create.

Many groups operate well through committees developed to carry out special tasks. A key here is for each committee to fully understand its function. If a steering committee or board has already established parameters, these should be stated clearly, but once a committee has been given a job, it must also be given complete authority to carry out that job.

Another tip some leaders use when they haven't gotten the hoped-for response to a general request for participation is to approach individuals one-on-one. Often it's not enough to say to a group, “We really need some help with the newsletter. If you'd like to participate, please sign up on your way out.”

It may take a call to Sue to ask if she'd use her writing talent for a column about anesthesia, a chat with Frank and Betty and Chris to see if they could stamp and label before next Friday, and a talk with Kelly about drawing a handicap parking cartoon. Getting specific usually yields results—and this might be just the job for a “casting” committee. Being singled out says something about our value to the group. The trick is to be sure everyone gets singled out.

Here's something we all know: Laughter is infectious—members love having fun with a project. Keeping things light relieves stress and often turns a chore into enticing play.

Today many support groups are shifting focus. Now we not only help those newly-diagnosed with post-polio syndrome, but we also have begun to explore what our groups can do for those who are aging with the late effects of polio. This brings with it the freshness and excitement of a new beginning.

\* Nancy Baldwin Carter and Joan L. Headley are co-authors of the chapter "Support Groups: Keeping Them Active and Useful" in Lauro Halstead, MD's new book *Managing Post-Polio: A Guide to Living and Aging Well With Post-Polio Syndrome*. Watch [www.nrhrehab.org](http://www.nrhrehab.org).

### **Why call the column LEADERSHIP?**

The symbol for infinity represents the boundless creative energy and limitless resourcefulness displayed by post- polio group leaders everywhere.

\*\*\*\*\*