

The Impact of the “Shoulder Tap”

by Meg Ferguson, Executive Staff Officer, Professional Learning

If it weren't for Rob Doiron encouraging me (more than once) to be the NSTU representative during the Each One Reach One Campaign, I wouldn't have gone to the rep meeting, nor to the NSTU's New Member Conference. Little did I know that the decision to attend each would bring incredible people and opportunities into my life.

The time of year where calls for nominations and applications will take place is nearing. Who will you encourage to put their name forward?

There is great power in the personal invitation. “Invitations hold an underestimated potential in contributing to transitions into shared leadership” (Slade). They signal to a person that you respect and value their skills and contributions. Slade states that this form of “shoulder tap” is underestimated and underutilized in their inclusive potential, and I agree wholeheartedly.

The beauty of our organization is that it is steered by our members who have important decision-making roles. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of opportunities to participate in NSTU matters, and it is getting tougher in some areas to fill all of those spots. Let's look at a few reasons why, as well as how to mitigate them.

Although our profession is growing in complexity and demands on time, members who volunteer for the NSTU find great satisfaction in working on behalf of members. This can include creating wellness opportunities, advocating for members' needs, organizing professional learning for their Local or professional association, and oh-so much more! If members feel able, that their time is valued, and that they have the proper supports, they are more likely to take part.

Running for Local roles is a chance for personal growth, stepping out of comfort zones, learning new skills, and making

a difference in the lives of union siblings. Let's urge colleagues to seize this opportunity, shape the organization's future, and explore new horizons.

The importance of the “shoulder tap” or one-to-one invitation can not be overemphasized. When you suggest to someone that you think they would be a good fit for a role regardless of the outcome you are having a positive impact on that person.



The NSTU salutes its women leaders for their hard work, dedication, and leadership. Sixty-one per cent of our provincial executive (shown in the photo), 63 per cent of our Local Presidents and 57 per cent of our RRC chairs are women. Check out @InformedOpinions @BalancePowerNow campaign to learn about increasing representation of women in our elected bodies. <http://tinyurl.com/5denkabb>

Who has leadership potential? Where would their interests and skills be best suited? Do not give up after your first attempt. Oftentimes, the seed must be planted and nurtured, to grow through the weeds of doubt.

Let's look at some interesting statistics in order to leverage the information:

- Approximately 78 per cent of NSTU members are women.
- Widely reported research by Hewlett-Packard that women must feel 100 per cent qualified to apply for a position, while men are more comfortable doing so at around 60 per cent.
- On top of that, “If you want a woman to run, ask repeatedly.” This could be even more important with unique voices not often found in leadership roles.

Regardless of gender or non-binary identity, opportunities should be afforded to develop skills, knowledge, and confidence in the members who do not look like those currently in leadership roles. Until we have more diversity at our tables, it will take conscious effort and repeated personal invitations.

Generating ideas to build capacity:

- What can we do to ensure more diverse voices will be brought to the table to deepen the scope and evolution of the organization?
- Who are you thinking of right now who would make a great Local President? Treasurer? VP of PD? Contact them and let them know that, and list why.

- How can we increase the number of members who understand how the union works as well as the many benefits and opportunities in our Local or Region?
- How can more people be a part of planning processes without having too many cooks in the kitchen?
- What strengths, skills, or knowledge base within your group that can be enjoyed by your Local in a talk or workshop?
- For rep training or member conferences, what skills or experience could Local leaders share? (PL can help with this!)
- How can we come up with leadership-type activities within the general membership / reps in order to develop skills and comfort-level needed to take on official positions?

All of this will strengthen NSTU democracy as it empowers members to have a voice in decision-making processes, as well as addressing underrepresentation. Consistently identifying new leaders (by title or by talent) builds trust, engagement, empowerment, solidarity, ownership – because people feel seen and valued. The sense that a person is contributing to something special, something “bigger than themselves” has benefits beyond the work itself.

What is the impact on your Local? It can avoid stagnancy and volunteer fatigue, provide fresh ideas, inspire a steady influx of new leaders, and improve accountability.

Who do you think would make a great committee member or Local/Regional/Provincial leader?

Tell them.

And tell them why.

Resources:

Cain Miller, Claire. “The Problem for Women Is Not Winning. It’s Deciding to Run.” *The New York Times*, 25 Oct 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/25/upshot/the-problem-for-women-is-not-winning-its-Deciding-to-run.html>.

Hogg, Bill. “Building Leadership Capacity.” *Bill Hogg & Associates*, <https://www.billhogg.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/BHAWHITEPAPER-BuildingLeadershipCapacity.pdf>.

Keith, Tamara. “Best Way to Get a Woman to Run, Ask Repeatedly.” *Jefferson Public Radio*, 6 May 2014, <https://www.ijpr.org/2014-05-06/best-way-to-get-women-to-run-for-office-ask-repeatedly>.

Slade, Samantha. “A Little Secret About Participatory Leadership: The Art of the Invitation.” *Enlivening Edge*, 25 Mar 2021, <https://enliveningedge.org/tools-practices/little-secret-participatory-leadership-art-invitation/>.