

The Case of the Overcommitted Freshman

GABRILLA IS A NEW STUDENT AND WANTS COLLEGE TO BE EVERYTHING IT COULD POSSIBLY BE. HER FATHER TOLD HER ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF GAINING GOOD LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE IN COLLEGE, AND GABRILLA WANTS HER RESUME TO BE AS STRONG AS POSSIBLE WHEN SHE GRADUATES. SHE BELIEVES THAT TO SUCCEED IN THE WORLD, SHE HAS TO BE AGGRESSIVE AND REALLY STRIVE TO BE INVOLVED.

DURING FALL SEMESTER, SHE JOINED STUDENT GOVERNMENT, GOT A 10-HOUR WORK-STUDY JOB FOR THE VP OF STUDENT DEVELOPMENT, ACCEPTED A POSITION AS A WRITER FOR THE SCHOOL PAPER AND MET A BOY THAT SHE WAS VERY INTERESTED IN DATING. SHE TOOK 18 HOURS IN THE FALL AND DID PRETTY WELL (B AVERAGE) IN ALL OF HER CLASSES. SHE WAS CHOSEN TO BE THE CAPTAIN OF HER BUILDING'S INTRAMURAL TEAM BECAUSE OF HER CHARISMA AND ABILITY TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ORGANIZING THE TEAM'S PRACTICE SCHEDULE EVERY WEEK.

YOU HAVE NOTICED THAT ALL OF THE STRAIN FROM HER ACTIVITIES IS BEGINNING TO WEAR HER DOWN, NOW THAT THE SPRING SEMESTER HAS STARTED. SHE IS FREQUENTLY ILL, HAS STARTED SLEEPING THROUGH HER MORNING CLASS, IS GETTING PRETTY STRICT WITH THE GIRLS FOR MISSING THEIR FLOOR'S IM PRACTICES, AND HAS STARTED TURNING PAPERS IN LATE BECAUSE SHE DOESN'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO FINISH THEM.

WHEN YOU SUGGEST THAT SHE CUT BACK ON SOME OF HER ACTIVITIES AND TRY TO GET MORE REST, GABRILLA TELLS YOU THAT SHE WAS JUST INVITED TO SPEAK AT A CAMPUS RALLY IN A FEW WEEKS. NEW STUDENTS DON'T USUALLY GET CHOSEN FOR SOMETHING LIKE THIS, AND SHE'S HONORED THAT ALL OF HER EFFORTS TO EXCEL AS A LEADER ARE BEGINNING TO PAY OFF. THIS IS THE TYPE OF THING THAT COULD REALLY FILL OUT HER RESUME AND LOOK GREAT TO POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS. HER DAD IS ALWAYS TELLING HER TO BUILD HER RESUME AND THIS WOULD BE A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO DO JUST THAT.

- > *Does Gabrilla have realistic expectations about how much she can handle?*
- > *What would you do if you were a leader on Gabrilla's floor?*

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Gabrilla is making some mistakes in her life and leaders should be able to recognize that and be willing to step in and intervene. However, what does that intervention look like? Here are a few potential options, but in the end, it's going to fall on you to make these decisions.

Convince Gabrilla to decline the opportunity to speak. She's obviously already incredibly busy and doesn't have time for more responsibilities without causing other areas in her life to suffer as a result. Sometimes as hard as it can be, the best thing is just to say "no" and that's a great lesson for Gabrilla to learn. On the flip side though, this is a great opportunity and Gabrilla probably won't want to hear that truth.

Challenge Gabrilla to give up a different responsibility so she has more room for the speech. A slight variation of the first choice in that you're still trying to convince Gabrilla she has too much on her plate. In this scenario though, Gabrilla chooses to give something up instead of saying "no" outright, which might be more appealing decision. However, having to weigh the pros and cons of everything she's involved in will require extra time that Gabrilla doesn't have. It will also require her to step down from something she's already committed to. This can be much harder than just saying "no" to something you've never committed to in the first place.

Sit back and wait for Gabrilla to fail. Sometimes, the best thing for someone like Gabrilla is to realize her overcommitment by failing at something she took responsibility for. In situations like this, the leader stands by and is ready to step in and mend the broken pieces once that failure takes place. Another positive for this option is that it gives Gabrilla the chance to succeed and she very well could balance this new responsibility with everything else she is already doing. On the downside, the risk with waiting for people to fail before you step in is that you'll never know how big and far-reaching that failure will be. Is it worth the risk, and how can you work to lessen that risk?

In the end, whatever you decide to do in this situation with Gabrilla, it's pretty important that you take the time to speak with Gabrilla about developing her character and not just her gifts. What does that conversation look like?

OVERSIZED GIFT

LEADERS ARE OFTEN GIFTED. THEY CAN DEPEND ON THEIR GIFT FOR SUCCESS, TO THE NEGLECT OF THEIR CHARACTER. LEADERS SABOTAGE THEMSELVES WHEN THEIR GIFT IS BIGGER THAN THEY ARE.

As flattering as it is to be asked to volunteer, lead a team, give a speech, etc., it's important that leaders continually evaluate their character development as well as their gift and skill development. This becomes increasingly harder as leaders grow and mature, especially because people of character are so hard to find in today's society.



As you focus on your character and develop your skills as a leader, you will stand out and be asked to take on more responsibility. That increased responsibility gives you a bigger platform from which to be recognized, and greater challenges with which you can further develop your skills. This creates an even bigger temptation to rely on the gift and not your character. The paradox of character based leadership is that the more you focus on developing your character, the greater you will be tempted to rely on your natural talents and gifts instead.

Sometimes you are the one that's being given new opportunities to use your gifts and sometimes it's the people that you're leading who have those opportunities. First and foremost, leaders need to be a model of what it looks like to rely on your character instead of your gifting. At that point, you have the moral authority to truly lead those students who are under your scope of responsibility.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

Gabrilla is obviously gifted and able to handle a pretty substantial workload. However, at some point we all reach our breaking point. Take a moment and think about the following questions:

- > *How do you determine when your expectations are realistic?*
- > *What signs in your life let you know when you've taken on too much responsibility?*
- > *When was the last time you declined an opportunity for more responsibility?*
- > *As you think about giving up the shiny new opportunity so you can develop your character instead, what do you think makes it so hard?*
- > *How do you know when you are relying on your gifts instead of your character to lead?*

Sample Only