

Important Thoughts About Organizations for Potential Leaders

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The organization in which I currently work is Millbrook School, an independent college preparatory boarding school in Millbrook, NY. The school consists of 315 students and about 80 faculty members.

As a member of the Admissions Office, I have some experience articulating (or attempting to) what it is that makes Millbrook unique from other schools. The easiest answer is that we are, to my knowledge, the only school in the country with an accredited zoo on campus. This, however, does not provide an answer to this assignment, nor do I think it the best answer for a prospective family or student. What makes Millbrook unique from other boarding schools is the tight and supportive community. By community, I mean both students and faculty. Importantly, this special culture is built and maintained by the students, with faculty members acting as influences but not founders. As we are a school, and a boarding school in particular, I think it relevant to include students as members of “my organization.” Two characteristics that students and faculty share that shape the community at Millbrook are: vision/purpose and norms. Focusing more on faculty, I would also add structure as a third characteristic.

Millbrook’s vision, as our Headmaster often expresses, is to be the “best small, independent, college preparatory boarding school in the country.” Now, if you are familiar with the boarding school world, you know that, by many (most?) metrics, this is not the case, yet. The repetition of this goal, however, emphasizes its seriousness to the students and faculty. That is the vision. As a college preparatory boarding school, our purpose is to offer a safe, challenging, and supportive community in which students are able to achieve their best selves in academics, athletics, arts, etc. in preparation to continue this process after Millbrook. This is

the goal that we present to prospective families and the one for which students enroll.

Students and faculty share this investment in each student's well-being and development.

The shared vision and purpose are made possible by a shared set of norms. It is the norms that make the vision and purpose possible. Obviously, it is up to the faculty to explicitly present and enforce basic norms, but as I said before, it is the students who truly create the culture of Millbrook. I believe this enables life at Millbrook to feel genuine (insomuch as any high school student is completely genuine). The upperclassmen, primarily 12<sup>th</sup> graders, establish the culture each year but do so with a heavy influence of their prior years at Millbrook. In this way, a strong student culture, and accepted norms, feeds itself.

Finally, I believe that faith amongst the faculty is essential if Millbrook is to achieve the vision and purpose that I previously outlined. The faculty is structured such that there is a faculty member in charge of each area of campus and many faculty members involved in each, be it academics (dean - department chairs - teachers), residential life (dean of students- head of residential life - dorm head - dorm parents), or athletics (athletic director - coaches). While this seems somewhat bureaucratic, when it works right, it enables faculty to compartmentalize different portions of their job, and it is (or should be) clear who to turn to when one needs guidance in one area of another. As a result of this structure, each faculty member will act as a leader and follower over the course of each day

I believe that the characteristics I've outlined above are essential for Millbrook's success. Our organization is at its best when each student and faculty member is conscious of these characteristics and consistently holds themselves and their peers to these standards. A fourth characteristic that I would like to add for the faculty, but don't think we have yet

achieved it, is positivity. Frequently, I feel that people find common ground in complaints and ease in conversing in the negative. So, to conclude, if I were giving advice to someone who was new to Millbrook I would encourage them to buy into the vision and purpose of our headmaster, to spend time with the students outside of class or practice to understand their values and role in shaping Millbrook's culture, and to assume good will and adopt an attitude of optimism when dealing with students and colleagues.