

As members of the Parent Teacher & Student Association, or PTSA, we share the common mission to “make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children.” As student members, we participate not only in activities to advance this mission for others, but for ourselves. That’s likely why many of you are here today - you’re engaging and learning to advocate for yourselves. You are all leaders. As student leaders, there are numerous events, meetings, and club activities that you all likely help plan frequently. To help you better manage those events, I’d like to share with you three I’s of involvement: invite, include, and inspire. By implementing these you can metaphorically open the eyes of your members and lead them from being distant and spectating to attentive and involved. The first step is to invite.

In my experiences as a Utah PTSA Student Leader and as an officer in multiple clubs at school is that there are many students with free time and no club commitments. Almost every time I ask them why they don’t participate more, they explain that they simply don’t get invited. It isn’t that school announcements and flyers aren’t going out, but the most effective way of involving these students is to invite them directly, in person. Whenever possible, take the extra time to personally extend invitations to your peers for the events and activities you organize. It makes a big difference, which I’ve seen personally at my school. Every few months our Key Club holds a blood drive, and we consistently have about 50% of the total donors sign up on their own. But the other half are all people that myself and my friends have individually approached and asked to participate. It can seem scary sometimes to invite people, but I promise that doing so will make a difference in the involvement you see in your activities. But just inviting isn’t always enough; you have to include people.

Inclusion is the second major component of involvement. I personally wouldn’t advocate for something that I didn’t think people would benefit from, and that can be a deterrent from your members involving themselves. It’s important that any event, activity, or meeting be engaging and inclusive. Make sure there is something for your members to do. People don’t bother to come to something when they don’t feel needed, so it’s always helpful to incorporate interactive and inclusive aspects to your activities and make sure everyone has some level of responsibility and usefulness. Some kids are initially averse to participating, especially when action is involved, but it’s the best way to help empower them and teach them to act. By adding a simple component of inclusion, people are less bored and are pushed to grow, which will be a huge benefit to them for years to come.

Finally, try to inspire. Inviting and including people is a great start and will likely help many of you see more involvement in your commitments. But the most important thing that will make the biggest impact on your members is that you inspire them. Share your experiences with the activity or event you’re doing, and make real connections with those you’re leading. When you’ve successfully invited, included, and inspired them, they will almost always begin taking initiative and become more passionate about what they’re doing. These steps work best when done in this order so that reluctant students have time to adjust and don’t get overwhelmed by the many different programs and opportunities available to them. I recommend that you all work with people as personally as you can and be patient in trying to help them. I would mention though, that of all the people I have recruited to clubs, organizations, and activities using these principles, not one has ever regretted it. When you earnestly invite, include, and inspire those around you, you do them a great service. They will learn useful and important leadership and teamwork skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives. As some of the best and most involved student leaders of Utah, you have a lot of power to help open the eyes of others. Please keep furthering the PTSA mission by advocating for yourselves, and teaching others to do the same. You are all forces for good.