



Intended Audience:

- 4-H youth adult leaders

Learning Objectives:

4-H you and adult leaders will:

- Understand Founder's Syndrome including characteristics, contributing factors, and its possible effects on the 4-H club, activity or group.
- Identify ways to build on the strengths Founders bring and reduce the negative impact Founder's Syndrome may have in 4-H setting

Target Essential Element(s):

Participants will gain insight and skills in *belonging, independence and generosity.*

Time: 45-60 minutes

Supplies Needed:

- PowerPoint Presentation/ Computer/ LCD Projector
- Markers and Flip chart
- Scenario cards
- Evaluations

A PowerPoint is an optional part of this written lesson. All information from the Power Point presentation is included in the lesson.

Do Ahead:

- Prepare scenario cards
- Review Power Point Presentation

Source:

Paula Rogers Huff. 2003. Founder's Syndrome and 4-H Leaders Organization. Department of Youth

LESSON BEGINS:

BACKGROUND (PowerPoint Slide 1):

Founders are so closely tied to an organization or project that they just can't accept change. Founders like things just the way they have always been – even when there are valid reasons to move forward.

Often things will go well for many years, even with a Founder in the midst. The challenge and opportunity arises when the Founder is confronted with change.

INTRODUCTION

We all have a little bit of Founder in us – from the kindergartener who won't eat his peanut butter sandwich if it isn't cut the "right way" to the CEO who clings to an out-dated marketing plan because she developed it.

We all like to succeed, and when something works for us – well, why not keep doing it? But can we recognize when it is time to move forward? Or do we start taking measures to keep things the same?

In this activity-based mini-workshop, 4-H leaders will explore the concept of Founder's Syndrome and how it may manifest itself in 4-H settings.

WHAT TO DO (PowerPoint Slide 2)

Who's a Founder? Could it be ME? Could it be YOU?

Instruct each participant to take a moment or two to think of an activity or event that they have been invested in, probably for quite a long time, maybe even so long that they think of it as their "own". It might be a program that they have watched grow – it might be a family holiday gathering that they have organized for years.

After participants have had a couple of minutes to think, instruct everyone to find a partner and share stories. After 3-5 minutes have each team join with another pair. Briefly ask each member of the group to share their story. Then have the group respond to the following questions: (Power Point Slide 3)

- How would they FEEL if someone came in and announced that there was now new leadership to their program, AND there would be major changes?
- Share what ACTIONS could be taken resulting from the feelings that were identified.

With the large group, develop a list of feelings and the behaviors that might result from the situation. Share the following statements:

- Founders are those who have provided key leadership to an organization's past, but have failed to change with the evolving needs of the organization. Volunteers and staff could demonstrate characteristics of Founders. (Power Point Slide 4)
- What can result is the organization, club, activity or event does not focus on why it exists but on the person that is in charge. The result is conflict and the intended purpose of the group not happening. (Power Point Slide 5).



Development Publication,
University of Wisconsin -
Extension

Authors:

Paula Rogers Huff,
Associate Professor, 4-H
Youth Development
Agent, UW-Extension
Oconto County

Sue Pleskac, Professor,
Volunteer Leadership
Specialist, University of
Wisconsin-Extension

→**Main teaching point:** Investment in a personally important program or activity creates feelings of ownership in many people. That strong sense of ownership may lead to resistance to change from outside and result in something we call Founder's Syndrome.

What are the Characteristics of Founders?

Instruct participants to take a moment to consider each of the following statements (Handout 1: *Characteristics of Founders*, PowerPoint Slides 6- 8)

Founders exhibit the following behaviors:

- Resist planning, policies and procedures
- Handpick committee or board members or officers
- Make decisions alone
- Promotes removal of those who disagree
- Does not make decisions in the best interest of the organization or group
- Works to control the group rather than promoting teamwork

Statements that may be said from a person demonstrating Founders type behaviors:

- We always did it this way
- We tried that and it did not work
- That is not the way we always did it
- I told you it wouldn't work
- Let me do that, I have done that before
- New people/kids do not understand
- Why do we have to do this?
- Everybody liked how it was done before

Have you seen this?

- Someone bullying another to go along with their idea?
- Someone using their status to persuade others in making a decision?
- Someone tabling a decision so that discussion cannot occur?

→**Main teaching point:** Founders often protect their prized organization by keeping things the same. The result of their behaviors keeps new people and new ideas from taking hold and moving the organization forward.

Contributing Factors to Founders Syndrome

There are multiple contributing factors as to why Founders Syndrome occurs in an organization or group (Handout 2: *Contributing Factors for Founders Syndrome*, PowerPoint Slide 9 and 10). These include:

- Lack of new volunteer leaders
- Traditions in the 4-H club or activity
- Lack of new opportunities for volunteers or staff
- Relationships between individuals
- Paid staff turnover
 - Expectations low for staff member to stay
 - Volunteers feeling obligated to step up.
- Lengthy tenure of paid staff or volunteer in a specific role
- Lack of teamwork between paid staff and volunteers with one side doing more service for the other
- Lack of support from partners of the organization.

→**Main teaching point:** In 4-H settings, Founder attachment can become even stronger in the absence of new volunteers with new ideas, staff turnover, and long-term staff that doesn't implement policy and procedure. Other contributing factors to Founder's include traditions in the 4-H club or activity, relationships between individuals, and community ties and expectations.

Strengths and Challenges Founders Contribute (PowerPoint Slide 11)

Encourage the participants to identify the specific challenges and strengths Founders bring to organizations. On flip chart paper, have the group brainstorm responses to the following questions. Do one question at a time.

1. What challenges do Founders bring to a group?
2. What strengths do Founders bring to a group?

→**Main teaching point:** Founders bring both challenges and strengths to a group. To help organizations go forward, it is important to identify characteristics of founders and to develop strategies that help a group or organization go forward.

Taking a Closer Look at Founders (PowerPoint Slide 12)

Divide the group into small work teams and distribute Handout 3, *Founders Scenarios* to each team. Have each team read through the scenario and answer the questions. Assign one scenario to each team. Instruct them to read the scenario and identify the characteristics of founders that is present in the scenario. Then have the teams respond to the questions provided. **NOTE:** Remind participants to be respectful in their discussions. These scenarios may remind them of situations or people, so ask them to respect those with whom they volunteer by not drawing parallels to people that they know, or identifying others by name or description. If a group gets done early, have them work on an additional scenario.

When the teams have finished discussing their scenarios, have one or members from each team report back to the large group, reading their scenario and presenting their conclusions.

TALK IT OVER:

Reflect

- What effect can Founders have on programs, including 4-H?
- What conditions make it possible for Founders to flourish?
- What made this activity difficult for some of us?

Apply

- What are some possible ways to limit the effect of Founders?
- What are some ways to prevent Founder's Syndrome from occurring in the first place?
- How does an organization move past Founder's Syndrome? How does it create an organization that welcomes new ideas and new people?

→**Main teaching point:** Anybody can be a Founder, especially under the right conditions. Founders become strongly attached to programs that they have created or kept going under tough conditions. There are multiple strategies that can be implemented to help a group or organization go forward with Founders. These fall into 4 categories: decision-making, group by-laws or operating guidelines; communication, and focus on the individual .

Strategies to go forward: (PowerPoint Slides 13- 17)

Focus on Decision Making

- Are there a variety of perspectives at the table?
- Do policies and by-laws provide steps to solving conflicts and making decisions?
- Are the groups making decisions representative of those in the club, activity or program?
- Is there a system to get input from those the decision will affect?
- Is there a plan how decisions will be implemented by the group?

Focus on By-Laws and Operating Guidelines

- Is there a term limit for members?
- Are there role descriptions for members?

- Is there youth membership and leadership?
- Are there guidelines for replacing members?
- Are there ground rules for the group?
- Are roles and responsibilities reviewed annually?
- Is there a recruitment plan for new volunteers?
- Is there orientation and training for volunteers?
- Is there a system to help volunteers try new roles in the organization?
- Are there behavior guidelines for youth and adult members?
- Are volunteers recognized for their positive contributions to the mission?

Focus on Communication

- What communication strategies are in place between volunteers and paid staff?
- What new communication strategies could be added?
- Are both paid staff and volunteers taking responsibility for communication?
- How are new policies and guidelines communicated in the organization?

Focus on Individuals

- Are there new ways individuals can contribute?
- Is there common ground on issues?
- Who are the champion volunteers that have a vision for moving forward?
- What new systems could be put in place to serve as model for individuals to see?

TALK IT OVER

Reflect:

- How do we make sure we are including others in the decisions being made?
- How do we make sure we are listening to others?
- How do we make sure we are including new volunteers and members in the group while respecting those that are long term volunteers and members?

Apply:

- Describe two changes in decision making, operating guidelines, communication, and with individuals that will be made in the next 6 months that will strengthen the entire organization.

(PowerPoint Slides 18- 21)

Founder's syndrome can prevent an organization or a group from focusing on their mission and purpose. The goal of any strategy is to help members of the group to gain a new perspective and get back on course. Consider a kaleidoscope. When the kaleidoscope is viewed in one light and then the end is turned, the picture changes. A new beauty is formed. When the kaleidoscope is moved to another light, a new picture is viewed. Stepping back to identify the actions and behaviors of individuals that are preventing the total group from going forward can help the group find ways to build on their strengths, support the person exhibiting the negative behavior and find new ways to reach their goals!

EVALUATION

Have participants complete Handout 4 *Going Forward with Founders Evaluation*.

ENHANCE

Have group members bring copies of their group's by-laws or operating guidelines. In small groups, review each document to identify guidelines and rules that prevent volunteers and member feel welcome and included. Identify those guidelines and rules that could bring lead to Founder's characteristics in an individual.

Characteristics of Founders

For each statement below, discuss what the possible effects might be on the organization.

Have you seen this?

- Resists planning, new policies and procedures
- Handpicks committee or board members or officers
- Makes decisions alone
- Promotes removal of those who disagree
- Doesn't make decisions that are in the best interest of the organization or group
- Works to control group rather than promoting teamwork

Have you heard this?

- We've always done it this way.
- We tried that and it didn't work.
- That is not the way we've always done it.
- I told you it wouldn't work.
- Let me do that, I'm the one who always does that.
- New people/kids just don't understand.
- Everybody liked how it was done before.



Contributing Factors for Founders Syndrome

For each statement below, discuss what the possible effects might be on the organization.

- Traditions in the 4-H club or activity
- Lack of new opportunities for volunteers or staff
- Relationships between individuals
- Paid staff turnover
 - Expectations low for staff member to stay
 - Volunteers feeling obligated to step up.
- Lengthy tenure of paid staff or volunteer in a specific role
- Lack of teamwork between paid staff and volunteers with one side doing more service for the other
- Lack of support from partners of the organization.



Founders Scenarios

Scenario 1

Aunt Bea has been the knitting leader in Mayberry County for as long as anyone can remember. She is a pleasant woman who loves to help kids and get them knitting. She spends each summer planning what she will teach in the coming winter months. Aunt Bea has gotten much recognition over the years for the work that she has done in the 4-H knitting project, and she proudly displays the appreciation plaques that have been awarded to her. In the minds of many county residents, Aunt Bea IS the 4-H knitting project. The only time Aunt Bea gets a little testy is when it is suggested that she broaden the project support by involving new leaders – both adult and youth.

- **What effect might Aunt Bea's hold on the knitting program have on youth leaders who want to get involved? How about the effect on adult leaders?**
- What structures could the county have put into place years ago that would have prevented Aunt Bea from taking such strong ownership of the 4-H knitting project? How might volunteers and staff in the county help Aunt Bea move toward accepting new leaders?
- Assuming you had a close relationship with Aunt Bea, what could you personally do to help her to move toward accepting other leaders in the knitting project?

Scenario 2

Ralph was the 4-H agent in Melodious County for thirty years. Ralph loved his job, and the 4-H families loved Ralph. He was the first one at the fairgrounds – he unlocked the gates in the morning and locked them back up at night. He made coffee and brought donuts for each 4-H Association meeting, along the meeting agendas (which he meticulously prepared himself). He drove to each member's home to personally check the animal tags before the fair. If you ever forgot to bring your supplies to a project meeting, you'd likely find that Ralph had extra in his truck – just in case. Ralph's retirement party was the best ever. Three generations of 4-H members returned to Melodious County to share their stories of Ralph and reminisce about his contributions to the 4-H program. Ralph made a promise that night that he would always be part of the Melodious County 4-H program. He will be there to help the new 4-H Youth Development Agent.

- How has Ralph helped to create a Founder's situation in his county?
- How might Ralph's actions have affected the 4-H volunteers in Melodious County?
- What challenges might the new 4-H YD agent face?
- What could you do, as a volunteer aware of the situation, to help move the county program forward?

Scenario 3

Agnes has been the leader of Hillside Hawks for as long as anyone can remember. Agnes is great at recruiting new members to 4-H but they don't stay long. The average age of the 4-H member in their club is 9. The club membership has dwindled over the past several years, even though, as Agnes points out, she is always there to support the youth. She makes the agenda for the club meetings, calls all the members to remind them when the next meeting will take place, and arranges community service projects and club outings. Hillside Hawks, Agnes says, is one big happy family. However, several of the parents have spoken to the 4-H educator expressing their frustration with Agnes' leadership. They would like more leadership opportunities for their children, including having the kids run the club and make decisions.

- What could past parents have done to help avoid this likely Founder's situation?
- What are the options for the club?
- What could you, as a parent in the Hillside Hawks, do to help improve the leadership opportunities for youth?

Scenario 4

Jennie Smith is the fourth generation 4-H leaders of the Happy Hollow 4-H club that was started by her great-grandfather Ernest Smith in 1946. Since that time, every Smith in the county has been through the 4-H program as a member of Happy Hollow 4-H. But things are changing in Happy Hollow. Jennie's club enrollment, which has been steadily declining over the last few years, is at

the point that they may not have enough members next year to be a club. Jennie's neighbor has just sold their farm to a developer and moved to Florida. A developer subdivided the lot, and 20 new families built homes and moved into Happy Hollow. Jennie distributed flyers to the new families in the hopes of gaining new members, and three new families showed up at the last 4-H meeting. But Jennie is not happy with the new members. They have so many questions – and they seem a little pushy. The new kids want to do things other than meat production, even after Jennie explained that Happy Hollow has always been a meat production club. They asked if the meeting date could be changed, so that their friends who have softball on the meeting night could attend (Happy Hollow has always met on Thursday evenings). They aren't sure that they want to do record books and wondered if they had other options. Jennie thought she wanted new members, but now she is not so sure. The meetings aren't going to run the way they are supposed to – why there is even a 12 year-old who wants to be treasurer!

- What are some of the factors that helped move Jennie toward being a Founder?
- Jennie is having a difficult time dealing with possible changes to the way that the Happy Hollow club operates. How might you as a leader in the county help Jennie adjust to changes in her 4-H club?
- How can leaders like Jennie (and the rest of us!) avoid expecting things to remain the same, year after year? Is there a way to learn to welcome change? What has helped you move forward in your programs?

Scenario 5

4-H Camp is near and dear to everyone's heart in Wilderness County. Generation after generation of Wilderness County youth have packed their bags in June and headed up to beloved Camp Moose Track. Just smelling a campfire brings tears to the eyes of many residents as they remember the camp food, songs, and the good times they had at camp. All that is at risk now though – Wilderness County has a new 4-H Agent and she is changing things. The parents and kids like some of the changes – better food, counselor training, and strictly enforced waterfront regulations. But some of the others see it as taking away some harmless fun, although the agent has referred to the activities as hazing. The counselors are upset – they want camp to be exactly as it was when they were campers. Some of the volunteers agree with them.

- Why do you think that these counselors at camp Moose Tracks are so attached to the old ways of doing things?
- **What role can tradition have in the creation of Founder's Syndrome?**
- Can youth really be Founders? How can we as leaders help youth to learn to welcome needed change?

Scenario 6

The 4-H Dairy Project in Winding River County has four leaders. That number has remained stable for ten years. Those four leaders are feeling the strain, and are overwhelmed by the work that needs to be done. They went to their 4-H Youth Development Educator looking for ways to recruit new leaders. The Educator sent out a call for project volunteers in the newsletter—and found five new leaders. These leaders are anxious to join the 4-H Dairy Project leadership team.

Six months later, the project is back to the original four leaders. The 4-H Youth Development Educator met with the committee to discuss the situation. He was told that the new leaders didn't have the level of expertise that was needed, and that they were always questioning things – like the required educational points and the committee structure. They had even suggested holding meetings at various locations around the county – instead of at Dewey Jones' house, where they have always been held. The veteran leaders said they tried to show the new leaders how to do it right – they even went to the new leaders' project meetings and helped. Now the new leaders aren't showing up to committee meetings anymore. "We need new leaders!"

- What might have prevented the development of this Founders' situation?
- How do you think youth may have been affected by the power struggles they witnessed in this project?
- How might the 4-H organization encourage new leaders in the project, given the strong ownership that the current committee feels toward it?

Going Forward With 4-H Founders Evaluation



Please complete the following **Going Forward with 4-H Founders** evaluation. The results of the evaluation will be shared with those who work with the program. Your participation in this evaluation is voluntary and confidential to the extent allowed by law. Your responses will be combined with the responses of all other participants and you will not be individually identified on any report prepared. If you have questions, please contact Sue Pleskac, 4-H Volunteer Leadership Specialist or Paula Huff, Oconto County 4-H Youth Development Agent. Completion of this evaluation implies your consent to participate.

Please answer the questions by circling the number that indicates your level of understanding of the topics listed before and after the training.

1 = Very little understanding 2 = Understand somewhat 3 = Clear understanding

NOW -- After the training		THEN – Before the training
1 2 3	1. I understand what Founders are	1 2 3
1 2 3	2. I can identify characteristics of Founders.	1 2 3
1 2 3	3. I can identify Founders within the 4-H organization I am involved with.	1 2 3
1 2 3	4. I can identify characteristics of Founder's Syndrome in myself.	1 2 3
1 2 3	5. I can identify factors that may have contributed to Founders' Syndrome	1 2 3
1 2 3	6. I can identify strategies that prevent Founders' Syndrome.	1 2 3
1 2 3	7. I can identify different ways that can help prevent the development of Founder's Syndrome and strengthen my organization.	1 2 3

- Did you learn new information from the presentation? Yes _____ No _____
- If yes, list one or two things that you learned from the presentation that are important to you.
- How will you use what you learned in this presentation?