

## 10.1 CASE STUDY

### Next Step

Next Step is a student organization run by graduate students in the School of Communication at a large West Coast university. The mission of Next Step is to provide students with opportunities that will help them prepare for the workforce or for more schooling. Some of the annual events that the group sponsors are résumé development workshops, a professional development day in which people from the community discuss their career paths, and workshops on interviewing skills.

Next Step has two annual bake sales to raise funds to pay for expenses such as renting meeting space, compensating speakers, and providing refreshments at group workshops. After a lukewarm fall semester bake sale, some Next Step members suggest finding a new fund-raising method, arguing that bake sales cost members money and require a lot of work for little profit.

Next Step's president, James, decides to put new fund-raising initiatives on the agenda for discussion at the group's next meeting. At that meeting, Brenna, a marketing and graphic design major, proposes that the group sell T-shirts as the winter semester's fund-raiser. Brenna believes that the college population likes to buy T-shirts and is confident that she can create a design that will appeal to students. Mallory, also a marketing major, volunteers to help promote the T-shirts. Group member Mark offers to use his employee discount at the screen shop where he works to have the shirts printed affordably.

Other Next Step members voice approval for the T-shirt fund-raiser, and the discussion moves to talking about designs for the shirts. James assigns Brenna and Mallory to survey students on their interest in buying the shirts and at what price. Brenna will also develop mock-ups of the shirt's design and bring them to the next meeting while Mark is assigned to get pricing options.

James leaves the meeting feeling positive about the direction the new fund-raiser is going, but as he loads his book back into his car, he overhears a conversation nearby. Next Step's treasurer, Nichole, calls the plan to sell T-shirts "stupid." She states she personally would never order a shirt from a student group and that Next Step is going to lose money printing the shirts. Ursula, Next Step's secretary, agrees with Nichole, calling other Next Group members "a bunch of Kool-Aid-drinking nerds" and remarking that nobody is going to buy those shirts. James is shocked. Not only does he not remember Nichole or Ursula voicing any objections to the plan at the meeting; he doesn't remember them saying anything during the meeting at all. James is concerned that two Next Step officers would talk so negatively about the group and wonders if it is fueled by the shift to selling T-shirts or something else. He makes a mental note to build an anonymous vote into the next meeting to make sure that members who don't like the idea have an opportunity to oppose it without being put in a public position.

Meanwhile, Brenna, Mallory, and Mark succeed in canvassing students, finding a reasonable price for T-shirts, and developing attractive mock-ups for Next Step members to consider. James feels confident that the positive outcome of the T-shirt committee's efforts will help Nichole and Ursula change their minds about the T-shirt sale.

However, the next day, James is working in a cubicle at the student center when Nichole enters. Before he gets a chance to leave his booth to say hi to her, Next Step's student liaison Todd comes up to Nichole and says, "Can you believe how much work those brownnosers are putting into selling T-shirts? Honestly, it's so dumb—at least no one expects us to pitch in though!" As student liaison, Todd has a pivotal role in the group and is responsible for promoting the group's efforts at other student meetings and for recruiting new members. His comments further alarm James.

James decides to act, and approaches Nichole and Todd, who were unaware that he was nearby. James makes small talk, and then reminds them about the Next Step meeting coming up in two days. Nichole rolls her eyes and says she knows about the meeting. James

asks her if everything is OK. Nichole responds, "Everything is fine. I just think that it's silly to get so involved in this T-shirt sale. We all have a lot going on for school, and this group is really just something to put on my résumé. I don't understand why we can't just stick with the easy, mindless bake sale." Todd nods in agreement and says, "Yeah, James, you can't tell me that you became president of a student group because you believe so much in its mission. We both know it's just because you want to look good when you apply for jobs this summer." Although taken aback by their attitudes, James responds that he believes in Next Step's mission and will make sure any and all concerns' regarding the fundraiser are raised at the next meeting.

As he prepares for the upcoming meeting, James concludes that there seems to be a division, at least among the board's officers, between those who are excited about the group's mission and efforts and those who are not supportive. He wonders if other Next Step members share the attitudes expressed by Nichole, Ursula, and Todd or if they are in a minority. If they aren't, thinks James, and the division goes deeper, what does that mean for Next Step?

## QUESTIONS

1. This chapter discusses several reasons that out-groups form. What is the best explanation for why Ursula, Nichole, and Todd appear to be out-group members? What impact are they having on Next Step? Do they have legitimate concerns? Discuss.
2. How could the initial meeting about fund-raising strategies have been conducted so that all members were included in the decision?
3. Of the six strategies for how leaders should respond to out-group members, do you think that certain strategies might be more appropriate or effective in this situation given the verbalized feelings about Next Step from the out-group members?
4. How could other members of the group besides James help to build the group identity and sense of cohesion in Next Step?
5. In this situation, do you think it is worth the time and effort to try to include Ursula, Nichole, and Todd? Defend your answer.