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What I believe about leadership and education

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What I believe about leadership and education

Abstract

Every administrator at every school is different and every administrator has a different vision for their future. It is our job as educators to lead each student down the correct path. If one student's goal is to go straight to the work force after graduation, we as educators need to do everything we can for him/her to make sure he/she has the skills to be prepared. The same is true for the college bound student.

Successful leaders are those who have a vision of where their school needs to go. If a school did not have a vision, it would be no surprise to anyone if that school got lost on the way. A successful leader will get faculty, staff, parents, and members of the community together to talk, discuss, and collaborate to figure out what identity the school will want in the future. It is important that the vision be communicated to all stakeholders. A successful leader will support and sustain the vision of the school in good and bad times.

WHAT I BELIEVE ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION

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The spring semester of my senior year in high school was the first time I thought about being an educator. I was a cadet teacher for Mr. Christensen's 7th grade Physical Education class. At the time I did not know what my major would be in college. One day I asked Mr. Christensen *the* question, "You get paid to do this all day long?" Wow, what a great job I could have.

Mr. Christensen came back with a statement I will never forget. He said, "Adam, I don't get paid much and I feel like I live in the school, but there is nothing else I would rather be doing than teaching you and these other students right here and right now." This was the first time I ever thought about being an educator.

I believe today's school systems are the stepping stone to broaden a student's horizon. I believe teachers have the most important job in the world. Most people outside of education may disagree, but they are on the outside looking in. I made this statement to one of my friends who just happen to be finishing his last rotation in medical school. I told him without teachers at every level, how would you acquire the skills you now have to be a doctor? After a little persuasion he agreed. Every administrator at every school is different and every administrator has a different vision for their future. It is our job as educators to lead each student down the correct path. If one student's goal is to go straight to the work force after graduation, we as educators need to do everything we can for him/her to make sure he/she has the skills to be prepared. The same is true for the college bound student. We need to give him/her the skills for success.

When it comes to educational leadership, the principal is the one who everybody looks up to. Education has dramatically changed within the last ten years and it is very clear to see our world is changing. Our society is becoming diverse in race, culture,

language, and family lifestyles. The change in society does not make the job as a principal easy. There is now an increased focus on accountability and student success, so much focus that it is driving some principals out of the business. Are the goals of the No Child Left Behind legislative act so unattainable? It will be a challenge, but a successful principal will not back down from the challenge of being accountable.

Successful leaders are those who have a vision of where their school needs to go. If a school did not have a vision, it would be no surprise to anyone if that school got lost on the way. A successful leader will get faculty, staff, parents, and members of the community together to talk, discuss, and collaborate to figure out what identity the school will want in the future. It is important that the vision be communicated to all stakeholders. A successful leader will support and sustain the vision of the school in good and bad times.

Another trait of a successful leader is someone who has knowledge, understanding, and is committed to the school's goals. This instructional leader has to be goal oriented. It is important to have specific short and long-term goals in place. These goals and strategies should incorporate the principles of effective instruction, discipline, research, professional literature, district data, and other relevant information to the district. An instructional leader is also someone who knows the fundamental purpose of schooling. This leader is someone who will prepare students to become contributing members of society.

A successful leader is one who can facilitate the visions and goals of the school district. A successful organizational leader is one who promotes the success of all students by managing the daily operations of the school by providing a safe, efficient, and

effective learning environment. A successful organizational leader is one who accepts responsibility for his/her school district. In every school there may be issues that come up where the principal may not be aware of, but that does not stop an angry parent from calling your up and telling you what they think. A good principal is one who accepts responsibility and takes care of the problem efficiently and effectively.

A successful administrator is one who can collaborate and make data-driven decisions that will positively affect the vision and goals of the school. A collaborative leader is one who will know the emerging issues and trends that impact the school and the community. This leader will use all of the resources available to him/her. A successful leader is also one who is a visible and a positive role model of the school and the community.

Being an administrator in today's world will not be easy. Education has changed and will continue to change. Being a successful administrator is not something that will happen overnight, it is something achieved by years of hard work and understanding.

Instructional Leader

Principals must exhibit qualities of a strong instructional leader to lead those around them. A successful school administrator has many levels of responsibilities that come with the role of being an instructional leader. A successful administrator will practice being an instructional leader by being a critic/provocateur and by sharing leadership.

Being a critic/provocateur

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) made organizational renewal a pressing issue for school leaders who face mounting pressure to meet more demanding

educational goals. Mai (2004) described several leadership strategies that can help school administrators meet these rising standards and goals: namely, the roles of critic/provocateur. The role of a critic/provocateur is one of the hardest jobs in any profession. A critic/provocateur casts a critical eye on the way schools operate, even though there may have been success in the past. One challenge for school leaders is to raise critical questions when others prefer to go with the way things have always been done.

For school wide success it is very important for school administrators to be critical of others around them. When David Farr, the CEO of Emerson (a *Fortune 500* company), brings in a leadership team from one of its operating companies for a planning session, the tenor of the conversation is often confrontational (Mai, 2004). When the leadership team comes together there are two rules that govern the discussions. The first rule is that no personal attacks are allowed. The second rule is the discussion must always lead to a recommendation. This plan could also be used in the school setting. The goal of a critic/provocateur at the school setting is to probe deeper thinking and questioning of all stakeholders. The school district and the school principal are only as good as the staff around them. Successful principals will take the ideas their staff relays to them in staff meetings. Sometimes in those meetings, confrontations may take place. The principal's job is to question the thoughts of others, but to respect the voice of the person speaking. The principal's job is to also remind colleagues about the rationale behind debate and disagreement. Most people shy away from confrontation, which makes some people afraid to voice their opinions because of their anxiety. Again, the principal's job is to establish a non-threatening forum where teachers' ideas can be

challenged and people are comfortable and feel praise and reward by voicing their opinions.

Shared leadership

Every school or business needs a leader who will facilitate growth; in the school system that leader is the principal. With the everyday demands the school principal deals with, it is hard to be the instructional leader all the time. I believe the school community is better off when leadership is shared within the entire community. A professional community is one “in which teachers in a school and its administrators continuously seek and share learning, and act on their learning” (Hord, 1997, p. 144). The principal should be the leader of leaders rather than the sole leader and where the entire school community develops habits of continual learning (Crow, Matthews, and McCleary, 1996). The principal needs to learn to share responsibilities of the school to those around you. Let teachers take control of their learning environment.

The concept of shared leadership is one of the most neglected elements of professional development for teachers and administrators. One problem area of sharing leadership is school principals need to learn to delegate without guilt. In schools, if others aren't entrusted to act, the principal's successes are limited to only those tasks he/she can complete on their own (Lovely, 2005). Anybody who has been involved in education knows this is almost impossible.

In all school buildings the teachers are the largest and the most influential group in the school and I believe they should have large amount of input on the some of the decisions the principal makes. A principal can gain useful information from new

teachers, whom have taught for a year, to experienced veterans. Everybody can contribute in some way.

Some people may view shared leadership as a sign of losing control or a sign of weakness, this just is not the case. Delegation is an ethical responsibility principals owe to themselves, their staff, and the organization itself (Lovely, 2005). Delegation provides the principal more time for other endeavors such as be an instructional leader and planning; and working with other aspects of being a principal such as returning phone calls, discipline, and communication. For teachers, delegation means building self-esteem, creating ownership, and promotes an overall positive school climate.

Iowa Standards for School Leaders

As school administrators attempt to be the best instructional leaders as they can, they must build their skills from an established foundation. This foundation is built on the Iowa Standards for School Leaders. Five of the six ISSL standards play a part in an administrator becoming an instructional leader. The six ISSL standards are: visionary, instructional, organizational, ethical, and collaborative leadership. By being a critic/provocateur the school principal sets a learning environment that always strives to never settle on mediocrity. A critic/provocateur has a vision where they see the school going and to achieve this vision, constant change and evaluation is needed. A successful instructional leader will also use all of the resources available to him/her to achieve success. The most important resource is using the knowledge of others in the school district. If all members of a school community take ownership and pride in their school, then everyone will be working towards the same goal. When people really feel apart of an organization, ownership will take place.

Leader of Discipline

Principals must exhibit the qualities of a firm disciplinarian in order to gain the respect and trust to those around them. One way to earn respect and trust of teachers and students is to provide a safe and secure learning environment. A successful administrator will also be a leader of discipline by not being the sole leader of discipline, but by instilling a school wide approach of discipline.

Safe and secure schools

Creating a safe and supportive school environment is essential to a student's academic and social success. There are multiple elements in establishing an environment where a student would feel safe, valued by others, connected to those around them, and responsible for their behavior. The key to providing a safe and secure school is prevention; preventing violence in all forms, from bullying, to protecting students from others who may bring a weapon to school. According to the U.S. Department of Education and Justice, who issue an annual report on school crime and safety, the 2004 report show a significant decrease in violent crimes in school (Devoe et al., 2004). This can be directly related to secondary school violence prevention programs.

The basic principles to reduce violent behavior are the same principles which promote healthy development and learning for all students. An effective approach will balance security and discipline with positive support, skill building, parent and community involvement, and an overall improved school climate (Furlong, 2005). A successful incorporation of these principles as a foundation of school policy will not only help to reduce school violence, but will also improve academic and social performance.

Implementation

Safe schools will only happen if the school administration can develop a plan that is well organized. The first step in organizing safe and secure schools is to have the school district form a needs assessment team. This team will collect data to assess the strengths and weaknesses of school safety. The needs assessment team will also need to garner the support from the school and the community. The needs assessment team should consist of a wide range of stakeholders: administrators, faculty, parents, students, and members of the community. The needs assessment team will create a comprehensive plan, based on the qualitative data collected, to maintain a safe and secure school. The plan should include strategies at the building level as well as strategies for each classroom and individual. Once the system is in place, it is important that every stakeholder is involved and is receiving support from the administration. Support can come from formal staff training on strategies to prevent violence, to an informal classroom walkthrough by the principal. All members of the school should receive training on the prevention of violence, including bus drivers, maintenance workers, and cafeteria workers (Furlong, 2005).

The bottom-line in preventing school violence is that all stakeholders need to be involved. All classified and certified staff needs to be trained on how to stop and prevent violence. As a school community we can no longer look the other way and ignore violence in any form. The administration needs to develop a climate which allows each teacher and student to fully engage in learning. Violence prevention, from an educational perspective, is one that takes steps to understand the function of a student's behavior and develops a plan to help the student learn appropriate skills.

School Wide Discipline

No school will be successful if the principal is solely responsible for the discipline in the school building. Take former Boston Celtic basketball star Bill Russell. Russell measured his success not only by his own play, but how he made his teammates play. According to Russell, "Our performance depended on both individual excellence and how well we worked together. None of us had to strain to understand that we had to complement each other's specialties; it was a simple fact. We all tried to figure out ways to make our combinations more effective" (Senge, 1990, p. 233). This is the same in education. It is easy for school leaders to fall into the trap of becoming the single problem solver of "fixer" of all student behavior. This will make the job of the principal very difficult or almost impossible to achieve. This is why a school wide approach to discipline is most effective.

Within the plan of a school wide approach to discipline lie many elements, with the first element being expectations. Discipline requires more than just a list of rules. Rules need to have clearly listed expectations which are understood by everybody in the building. Students need to see discipline as being fair, consistent, and clear. When developing rules be sure to invite parents in to collaborate with the staff in a joint effort. This will build the commitment and trust level within the community. Parents and administrators must work together to help students understand rules, so students can be personally accountable for what they choose to do and what not to do (Protheroe, 2005).

Developing an effective approach to school wide discipline is a complex process. Horner et al. (2005) identifies traps administrators need to avoid while designing an

effective discipline system. One trap administrators sometimes fall into is that getting tough is enough. Getting tough is great, but it not effective without a proactive system for teachers to support appropriate behavior. Students need to know what is expected of them *before* the principal “drops the hammer”. Another trap to avoid is focusing on the difficult few. Any teacher can testify that 90% of office referrals deal with less than 10% of the student body. Although an effective disciplinary system usually addresses this small number of students, the discipline plan must build school wide competence. Administrators also need to avoid the quick fix. Building an effective school wide discipline program takes time. Effective change does not happen overnight. A reasonable period of time to commit to a program is three to five years. A successful administrator will never solely rely on discipline program that was effective in another school. The system that works in one school will not necessarily work in another. The principal needs to address the needs and goals of the school district.

The role of the principal in developing a school wide approach to discipline is: to be a planner, a collaborative leader among staff members, an educator to students and staff, and an ongoing evaluator. An effective principal is one who is highly visible to staff and students, and is one who practices what they preach. An effective principal is one who is liked and respected by students and staff, rather than feared (Protheroe, 2005).

School Climate

Building a positive school climate is important for every administrator, new or veteran. Creating this positive school climate will enhance the learning for all stakeholders. Administrators can build this climate by building relationships with teachers and by “coaching” teachers when they need help

Building Relationships

Being a successful administrator means building successful relationships with peers, teachers, parents, and students. It seems in education that the higher one climbs up the career ladder; the lonelier it gets at the top. Teachers sometimes are isolated from other colleagues, while principals are isolated from other principals who may be in different buildings. It is a fact that isolation has become a part of organizational culture of schools across the nation (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2003). Even though isolation is accepted in our school districts, teachers and principals do not thrive in an environment where they are left alone with little or no adult interaction.

It is all about relationships. In order to reduce the sense of isolation, administrators must realize leadership is all about relationships. My contention is that if you build your relationships on trust, you will substantially reduce the isolation you may experience. Successful administrators know they cannot do the job alone, it is a team effort. Successful administrators also know they must build a relationship with every stakeholder in the organization, not just a chosen few. Fullan (2004) said, "Leaders must be able to build relationships with and among diverse people and groups, especially with people different from themselves." Every teacher in a school building has a gift or a specialty. It is the building principal's job to find each individual teacher's specialty and use it in school leadership.

Administrators can take many steps to reduce the isolation teachers and principals may feel. Build relationships with your teachers. Teachers need and want guidance from the principal. They want to know they are doing a good job. A successful administrator will recognize the successes teachers have. The principal needs to make sure to get out

of the office and try to see every teacher at least once a day. The principal's visibility shows the staff support and shows the staff they care.

Build relationships with classified staff. It is very important the principal builds an immediate relationship with office staff, lunch personnel, bus drivers, custodians, coaches, bus drivers, etc. The office personnel are kind of a principal's "pseudo assistant principal". The office personnel are the men and women who are in charge of running the behind the scenes work and everyday duties of your school: announcements, phone calls, tardy slips, lunch tickets, etc. It is important to keep them happy. Encourage them to work with you and recognize them for their achievements.

Build positive relationships with your immediate supervisor and fellow principals. Your supervisor can assist you where there is a problem or a crisis. Once the foundation of a relationship is made, you will not hesitate to ask for help. Your supervisors usually have been in the business longer than you have, and they are a great source for knowledge. It is also important to build a network of colleagues you know and can trust. Talk regularly about topics that maybe be affecting your schools. Find out what is working and what is not working in your schools. Many administrators feel confident if they know they can confide in others. It is a good feeling to have someone to share experiences with (Burmeister & Hensley, 2004).

Being a Coach

Some of the most rewarding experiences I have had in education were during my years being a coach. I have found it very rewarding to go to practice in rain, sleet, or snow and motivate young women and men to do their best in practice. I was constantly coaching players on fundamentals, technique, awareness, team work, and coaching them

to do the right thing, all of the time. I truly believe that my experience of motivating players on the athletic field will carry over to being an administrator. Instead of coaching young athletes, I will be motivating and coaching my teachers in the classroom.

According to Quaglia and Quay (2005) there are conditions that need to be built into the educational environment for all members of the school community to reach their fullest potential.

- 1.) Belonging. Every school employee needs to feel the sense of belonging. Belonging increases intrinsic motivation by fostering self-confidence and community investment. It is the principal's job to make all teachers feel that they belong.
- 2.) Heroes. Heroes are the every day people in people's lives who motivate them to excel. Principals can take over the role of hero, by being a hero to students and to staff.
- 3.) Sense of accomplishment. By taking time to recognize accomplishments of faculty and staff, principals can create a community of individuals who are motivated to persevere through tough tasks. Have a recognition day for the staff. Throw them t-shirts, stickers, apples, etc. during teacher meetings to recognize them for their efforts.
- 4.) Fun and excitement. Teachers who find their work fun and exciting are usually self-confident, curious, and prepared to meet everyday challenges.
- 5.) Curiosity and creativity. Being curious and creative challenges the staff to create new ideas in the classroom.
- 6.) Leadership and responsibility. This gives the staff a chance to share their ideas and become a stakeholder. Principals who promote leadership teach their faculty to become good decision makers.
- 7.) Confidence to take action. The principal needs to build the confidence of the staff and encourage them to set goals for the future. Setting goals allows for teachers to have something to work toward.

Being a Visionary Leader

A visionary leader is one who gives a school a direction of where they want to go and how they are going to arrive at the destination. A successful administrator will develop, articulate, implement, and steward the school district's vision.

Creating a Vision

What is a vision? A vision is a blueprint of a desired state. It is an image of a preferred condition that we work to achieve in the future. A vision is a journey into the unknown. A vision is essentially intangible. It cannot be touched, felt, or seen, but it is essential that it exists. Creating a vision may run into many road blocks and detours before the final destination is achieved. A vision is what a school can accomplish. It is a powerful force that guides, cajoles, directs, and facilitates.

As an administrator it is important to develop a vision for your school district. The development of a vision not only calls for excellence, but establishes an educational environment and culture. A vision unifies a school and increases the emotional support of those in the organization. A vision is important because it will serve as a guide for the school's administrators, faculty, students, and support staff. A vision will help establish the climate for the school district because expectations, goals, and purposes are clear. A vision attains results, and as it does, teachers and students will become aware of their accomplishments. This will lead to teachers and students experiencing a sense of pride.

The process for establishing a shared vision is complex, time consuming, and stressful. A shared vision is a "target which beckons" or "a guide to a desired future state" (Bennis and Nanus, 1985). In order to identify your vision, it must include two

essential elements. The vision must identify the skills and knowledge students need to prepare them for life after high school; and the vision *must* be future-based (Casey, 2005).

To create a compelling vision that will be shared by members of the school community and the community at large, a vision committee must be in place. The task of the committee will be to identify skills and knowledge which students will need to maximize their chance of success after high school. The results of the committee will give school administrators and staff a direction in education for that school for years to come (Casey, 2005).

Aspiring school leaders can find compelling examples of how to create successful visions and schools by looking to sports. Professor Dianne DePasquale (2005) of California State University or Northridge has developed five principles to create successful schools:

- 1.) Never, ever give up.
- 2.) Have a vision.
- 3.) Be a team player.
- 4.) Share leadership.
- 5.) Think positive.

Never give up. Pete Carroll came to the University of Southern California (USC) as the head football coach and inherited a team that went several years without a winning record. Coach Carroll decided he needed to make long-range plans for success, a vision. Coach Carroll's vision started out by recruiting the best football players. Coach Carroll's vision included making himself available and visible for his players. This created instant rapport with his players and staff. Within two years Coach Carroll and the USC Trojan football team won the National Championship. This analogy can easily be implemented

in education. Recruit and hire the best teachers. Hiring the best teachers is a direct reflection of the principal's leadership. Be accessible to your staff. Have an open door policy and an open ear for your staff.

Another sports analogy of creating a vision for success is from Venus and Serena Williams. Venus and Serena Williams are two of today's most dominating tennis stars. When they were little girls Venus and Serena had a vision of being the best tennis players in the world. The two women had to persevere through growing up in the violence ridden community of Compton, California. Tennis lessons took place at the local park where their parents were their tennis instructors. Before every practice the tennis courts needed to be swept to clear the courts of broken glass from the night before. The girls played daily on the asphalt court that had grass growing through the cracks. The girls were persistent, strong, and talented. The Williams sisters soon began winning junior tennis tournaments. "Who was ever going to believe that two black girls from Compton could become the best in the world? But we didn't stop playing, no matter how wacky our dream seemed to other people (DePasquale, 2005, p. 24)." Serena and Venus did not give up on their goals or the vision. The end result is the current successes the sisters are know having.

Success comes in many shapes and forms. As an administrator it is always important to remember that every student has potential, no matter where students come from, no matter what disability they may have. Never, ever give up on people. It is the job of the school leader to find each student's potential and then give students the skills and tools to maximize that potential.

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