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Administrative evaluation : what will it take to succeed?

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Administrative evaluation : what will it take to succeed?

Abstract

What is a leader? According to Guthrie and Reed (1991), " A leader is an individual who accepts the authoritative expectations of others to responsibly guide the activities and enhance the performance of an organization." As education changes, the leadership role is taking on new dimensions. What will it take for me to become an effective educational administrator? As I look back on my coursework, the one issue that continuously appeared was the idea of establishing a vision. The key point made in each class was that to be an effective leader, an administrator needed to develop both short and long term goals.

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What is a leader? According to Guthrie and Reed (1991), " A leader is an individual who accepts the authoritative expectations of others to responsibly guide the activities and enhance the performance of an organization" (p. 10). As education changes, the leadership role is taking on new dimensions. What will it take for me to become an effective educational administrator ?

As I look back on my coursework, the one issue that continuously appeared was the idea of establishing a vision. The key point made in each class was that to be an effective leader, an administrator needed to develop both short and long term goals.

Sandra J. LeSourd, a professor in the Teacher Education Department at California State University - Fresno and Marilyn L. Grady, professor, in the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Nebraska - Lincoln, researched K-12 principals to measure their attitudes towards visionary leadership. Through a selection process, 200 principals were selected. The communities that the principals

represented included rural, small town, midsize and metropolitan areas (1991).

The 200 principals were sent attitude surveys that divided attitudes into five dominant qualities of visionary leadership. The survey contained 24 vision items and 11 distractor items (the distractors presented administrative characteristics of the principal as a manager and were included to reduce response bias).

Results from the survey showed that 80%-90% of the principals responded positively to items that measured attitudes towards visionary leadership. Their attitudes implied that they were inspired by their convictions, motivated to achieve goals, valued a shared school philosophy, believed in the importance of innovation and had an image of a better school in the future. Looking at the distractors, the principals also agreed with some of those items indicating the principal as a manager rather than a visionary. From these two results, it could be inferred that some principals have definite values and beliefs but are

reluctant to impose their ideas upon the school.

As a prospective administrator, I realize that I must be able to reflect on my values, beliefs and philosophies to establish my own vision. In establishing this vision, it should help direct the organization to where it is going and how it is going to get there. With a clear vision, I will know what I want, communicate those intentions to my staff and allow the staff to take part in the development of those ideas. As an administrator, I will then know when and how to stay the course and when to change.

Glen Ovard (1990) suggests that to maintain vision, an effective leader must be like a "Fire Walker". Ovard tells the story of witnessing a fire walking exhibition on the Fiji Islands.

A fire was built in a pit approximately 15 feet long and kept burning for hours until there was a bed of red-hot coals. Around the pit, were people from many parts of the world, all waiting for the fire walker. Emotions ranged from passive indifference to high expectations, from doubt to belief, from speculation to those who thought they could do better without ever trying to walk the bed of coals. A hush came over the crowd. A Holy Man and his disciples approached from a nearby sanctuary where they had been meditating and preparing themselves. The Holy Man took off his

loose robe, and except for his loin cloth, stood naked before the crowd. He stepped forward with his bare feet poised at the edge of the pit. He looked over the heads of the onlookers and doubters and with deep concentration he slowly walked across the bed of coal and reentered his sanctuary. (pp. 1-2)

Ovard could not help wonder about the fire walker's concentration. Was his mind focused on the past, the present or the future? How does one walk on red-hot coals of the present and still maintain the vision of the future? Ovard believed perhaps the stability of vision for the future comes through meditating and holding fast to long-standing values and guidelines. One's values play an important part in how effective a leader will be. If a leader has low value standards, they will not have a clear vision and will be undirected. Decisions will be based on momentary needs instead of goals and objectives for the future.

Human Relations Skills

As a beginning administrator develops their vision, many characteristics must be acquired. One of those characteristics is human relations skills. Administrators need to acquire a variety of human relations skills so they can relate to

students, staff members, superiors and community members. These skills should include: relating to people, the ability to react with sensitivity to the needs and interests of individuals and effective listening. Polite (1990) states, "One quality that makes a leader different from poor leaders is the way they relate to people" (p. 158). With the minority population in the United States increasing every year, it will be drastically important for an administrator to have good human relations skills. Administrators and prospective administrators must work on skills that relate to: oral communication, oral presentation, sensitivity, decision making, stress management (when dealing with individuals as well as work), planning and organizing, delegating power, problem analyzing and judgment. When administrators lack good human relations skills, they lose the confidence and support of students, staff and community.

Communication Skills

I believe good communication skills are the most important characteristic that is needed to establish a vision. It is by communication that a clear picture of the future can be

viewed. It is the responsibility of the administrator to develop communication with both their internal publics (teachers, students, support staff, central administrators and board members) and with their external publics (parents, community members and business leaders). It is by lack of communication skills that an administrator can lose their job. I have seen many times, in the school district in which I work and in various newspaper articles, that administrators have been replaced or moved into a different position because of poor communication skills. Communication is most important when change is occurring. Change creates uncertainty among members in the organization. Information reduces that uncertainty and that can only be done through communication. Blue (1989) believes that communication must occur both formally and informally. Informal communication can be accomplished by walking around to see what the staff members are doing. To be effective, an administrator must realize that there must be two-way communication. They must learn to listen. Blue states,

"Administrators must develop consistent leadership styles, build coalitions, and above all, improve communication skills".

(p. 42)

Empowerment

Another characteristic that needs to be acquired is empowerment. Empowerment plays a key role in how effective an administrator will become a team builder. Empowerment refers to the degree to which power or authority is effectively granted or withheld from individuals. An administrator must be willing to break away from the bureaucratic position and lean towards the professional position. Vann (1992) states,

Principals who are sure and confident in their abilities as instructional leaders are willing to share power with staff members because they know that by sharing, they become even more powerful leaders. A strong, sensitive and effective principal is one who retains vivid memories of what life is like in the classroom, and who understands that leadership is not so much a consequence of power as of positive human relations skills.
(p. 31)

I agree with Vann's statement. Many times administrators forget what it was like in the classroom. I feel that when I become an

administrator, I will need to look back to my classroom situations and remember that staff members are professionals and need to be treated as such. In working with teachers, I feel it would be best to use a bottom up leadership style. Delegating power would be the best way to empower staff members. DuFour and Eaker (1987) believe that administrators must develop skills that are essential to successful empowerment: delegating, stretching the abilities of others, and encouraging educated risk taking. Some possible areas that an administrator could empower their staff are: (a) development of curriculum, (b) assessment of student achievement, (c) selection of instructional material, (d) planning and presentation of staff development programs, (e) determination of instructional styles and strategies, (f) scheduling, (g) hiring of new staff, and (h) mentoring.

Through empowerment, an administrator must be assertive. They must show confidence in what they are doing and at the same time being positive. They can not be too over-bearing. At times, they must show humility. An effective administrator must show their human side.

Leadership Style

Leadership style is another characteristic that I believe needs to be developed before establishing goals and objectives, as an administrator. I realize that every administrator has a different leadership style that works for them, but there are key components that are necessary for all administrators to succeed. Scarnati (1994) believes the essential elements of leadership are contained in nine interrelated rules: (1) practice honesty and integrity, (2) work to eliminate fear - fear hinders communication in an organization, inhibits professional growth, and destroys confidence in administration, (3) demonstrate care and understanding - no matter how angry, cold or disagreeable a person may be, there is still the need for encouragement and recognition, (4) accept responsibility - share the credit when things go right and acknowledge responsibility when they go wrong, (5) develop a service mentality - the primary function of an administrator is to facilitate, to manage and to orchestrate, (6) develop loyalty - administrators should not

break faith with their colleagues or undermine decisions through the use of innuendo, nonverbal communication, gossip or hidden agendas, (7) be flexible and adaptable, (8) develop listening skills and (9) practice humility. I believe all nine elements are essential to every administrator no matter what leadership style they use. I would add a tenth element, that being organization. I feel an administrator needs to be highly organized in order to accomplish their agenda and to function as an effective administrator. How an administrator implements these elements, along with their personality, will determine an administrator's leadership style.

As a first year administrator, if I can start to sharpen my human relations skills, attain good communication skills, work on empowering my staff and begin to settle in on my leadership style, I believe I will have a good beginning to creating my vision as an administrator. I know that these four characteristics will need to be improved continuously, since administration is situational.

Besides these four main characteristics, there are many key issues that need to be addressed by an administrator.

As I look back at my coursework in educational administration and review the observations that I made during Practicum, the issues that I believe need to be addressed are: (1) curriculum, (2) teacher recruitment, (3) staff evaluation, (4) technology, (5) due process, (6) handicap students, (7) public relations, (8) school budget, (9) at-risk students and (10) professional development.

Curriculum

When I participated in Practicum, I was amazed at what little time was spent on curriculum. As educational standards continue to change, more emphasis needs to be placed on curriculum. Administrators need to become better instructional leaders. How do administrators obtain this goal? Pajak and McAfee (1992) believe that the answer lies partly in the decisions that principals make concerning routine activities such as staffing, supervision of instruction, scheduling and selection of materials. A principal should understand how the curriculum is organized and how learning activities, materials and instructional outcomes fit

into that curriculum. Successful principals shape strategies and coordinate activities to improve the curriculum program and monitor the program to ensure that desired outcomes are being attained. When I take my first administrative position, the first thing that I will do is to read through the learner outcomes of each academic area to give me an idea of what the curriculum objectives are. There is no way that an administrator can be an expert in every field of study, but they need a broad knowledge of all academic disciplines. It is the responsibility of the principal to know what is going on in the building, when it comes to the curriculum.

One topic that has been introduced in the State of Iowa is the school improvement plan. As the director of this plan, the administrator can show his/her instructional leadership ability. With the aid of their staff, they can evaluate the curriculum for strengths and weaknesses and develop a plan to correct any flaws in the curriculum. Developing a school improvement plan is a good way to empower staff members and to build on the vision of the administrator.

Teacher Recruitment

When an administrator makes a decision to hire a new teacher, the quality of the curriculum is influenced. Even though central administration is responsible for the hiring process, building administrators need to play a role in staff selection. Principals can help the district administration by providing them with data on personnel needs for their building. When interviewing prospective staff members, the administrator needs to be careful in the type of questions that they ask during the interview. They must avoid being discriminatory and/or bias. The administrator should have set questions prepared in order to be consistent with each candidate and to pin-point what they are looking for in new staff members.

Principals may have the opportunity of hiring or selecting within the building. Department heads are selected among existing staff members and should be interviewed by the same procedures to avoid discrimination. It is important for the administrator to review all questions ahead of time to avoid any embarrassment and to make sure the questions are valid.

Staff Evaluation

Like curriculum, the evaluation of staff members is very time consuming. During my practicum experience, I had the *opportunity to participate in two teacher evaluations.* With my supervising administrator, I observed each class activity and practiced scripting of what took place. During the analysis of these observations, I sat in on the discussion of how the teacher was rated in each category, using the district's standardized evaluation form. The only type of evaluation that took place was summative. As was discussed in *Supervision and Evaluation of Instruction*, the proper and most effective approach to evaluation is to have both formative and summative evaluations. This would include a pre-observation conference, an observation, an analysis of that observation, a post-observation conference and finally planning for improvement. By following these steps, Dagley and Orso (1991) believe these steps would help inform principals how to be more of an instructional leader and less of a building manager.

At the secondary level, there are too many staff members to

be evaluated both formatively and summatively. If given the time, an administrator should attempt to complete both types of evaluations, which would allow for teacher growth. Besides the time factor, another factor that may prohibit formative evaluation is the contract itself. The contract will dictate how the evaluation must be completed. Given these constraints, one way formative evaluation may take place is by department heads or master teachers. Their role would be to help improve instruction.

Formative evaluation must take place during teacher remediation. I believe when remediation takes place, the administrator will need to have complete documentation of what the problem is and develop a time line of how the problem is going to be corrected. It is the responsibility of the administrator to follow through on all steps of remediation in order for instruction to improve.

Technology

I believe that anyone pursuing an administrative position must promote technology. In order for students to compete in

today's work force they must be technologically literate. It is the job of the administrator to provide all available resources so teachers will be prepared to use technology in the classroom and be able to pass on that knowledge to their students. Barker (1990) believes that until the faculty and staff members see that their chief administrator feels comfortable talking and working with new technologies, it is highly unlikely that they will feel any sense of urgency to learn new skills themselves.

Most individuals think of computers when the subject of technology is discussed. Computers play a big role in instruction in the classroom. Computers are used for computer-assisted instruction, word processing, analysis of information, calculating and many other functions. Computers though are not the only source of technology that can be used in education. Besides the computer, classrooms may have laser disks, CD-ROM and scanners to perform educational activities. Buildings may contain fiber optics for telecommunications, satellite dishes, electronic bulletin boards, electronic mail and even networking of computers.

Before an administrator begins to advance the idea of technology in the school, they must first make sure the staff is prepared to take on this new venture. The principal needs to be proactive when it comes to technology. First, when planning for inservice on the computer or other technology equipment, the administration should provide a balance between lecture and hands on application. If inservice is to be effective, the administrator needs to be sure that the staff has access to the equipment once the training ends. Second, to help staff members that are unsure of this transition, the administrator must provide clear and relevant objectives that are directly linked to instruction.

A couple of factors that need to be considered before purchasing technological equipment are, planning ahead for electrical needs and planning on what type of equipment is needed to implement technology in the building. Barker (1990) mentions that planners must determine the numbers of outlets needed, consider where to run wires and decide how to wire so that when new equipment or other types of

technology are added they can be accommodated. Williams and Smith (1994) suggest that those schools, districts and administrators who succumb to the pressure to introduce technology without first planning, can count on a technological rich wasteland. The type of hardware and software products must meet the needs of the school's technological plan and objectives.

Coming from the area of science, as an administrator I will promote technology. I feel that it is very important that all students be exposed to technology, if they are planning on furthering their education or not. I also feel that staff members must play a role in providing those experiences.

Due Process

In the age of law suits, it is important to know the rights of teachers and students. As discussed in School Laws, students and teachers must be given due process when accusations are made. The fourteenth amendment to the Constitution provides that no state shall deprive a person of his life, liberty or property so long as the individual is given due process. In

following due process, a person must have proper notice that they are about to be deprived of their life, liberty or property, be given an opportunity to be heard and must have a hearing that is conducted fairly. It is very important that the administrator be familiar with the district's policies on students' rights, as well as being familiar with the teachers' master contract. In order not to violate the rights of students and staff, documentation of events must take place. It is critical that administrators document in order to have accurate information during due process hearings.

I have observed many administrators carrying either note pads or index cards with them to document. I think this is an excellent idea and I plan on using this technique when becoming an administrator.

Handicap Students

Along with being familiar with students' and teachers' rights, an administrator must know the rights of the handicapped student. With so many special programs, it is important that the administrator be aware of federal

regulations. They should review the All Childrens' Rehabilitation Act of 1977, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.

As discussed in Seminar, in dealing with special needs students, the administrator must take part in determining the eligibility of the student, take part in the development of the individualized education plan (IEP), supervise the provision of services, guarantee for the least restrictive environment and provide for a free and appropriate public education.

After looking at the legal issues of special needs students in School Laws and discussing various situations of special needs students in Seminar, I think as a prospective administrator, this is one issue that will require constant attention.

Public Relations

More and more of the administrator's time is spent dealing with people. The principal must set the foundation for working with various publics. According to Kindred, Bagin and Gallagher (1990), if an administrator cannot communicate with the

school board, a concerned taxpayers' group, or staff members, days in the district will be few. It is the responsibility of the principal to promote their school in a positive way. They should let everyone know what the school is doing well, what problems are present and what will be done to solve those problems.

Openness and fairness must be used when dealing with both internal and external publics. As a beginning administrator, I feel that the internal publics must be targeted first. If an administrator cannot gain the support or respect of this public, they will be ineffective as an administrator. This group of people can make or break an administrator. After gaining support internally, the external public must be targeted. I feel the most important group is the media. When there is an issue or problem that needs to be addressed, these individuals can give you the most support.

Within the area of public relations, it had been discussed in many courses that an administrator needs to have access to a Crisis Management Plan. If a plan is not in place, one needs to

be developed. This plan will save time and embarrassment to an administrator when an unexpected incident occurs.

School Budget

Budgeting is one issue that I feel uncomfortable with , after finishing my coursework. Throughout the program, this topic was discussed very little. In a time when school district's funds are decreasing and accountability is being stressed, an administrator must have the ability to take building monies and be able to budget it to accommodate all students and to provide the best environment and curriculum they can with the funds provided. With this in mind, an administrator will need to prioritize requests from staff members as well as building maintenance to reach the goal of creating the best conditions for the school. According to Gorton and Thierbach-Schneider (1991) an administrator's success in providing the best possible budget and physical facilities for the school depend, for the most part, on their knowledge, resourcefulness and persistence.

At-Risk Students

In Practicum, I spent a large amount of time working on an at-risk team. I felt it very beneficial in being exposed to students that I seldom had the chance to see in my classroom. Today, students have to face many problems. Students' parents may lose their jobs, their parents may be divorced, students may be experimenting with drugs and alcohol or students may become discontent with the school environment. There is a definite need to have an at-risk program in place. This program must begin with an at-risk core team. This core team, according to Anderson (1993), should have as mandatory members, the principal, assistant principal(s), counselor(s), school social worker(s) and school psychologist(s). In addition, any other interested staff person or anyone else who interacts in a crucial way with students should be invited to belong to the core team. Students with problems, need to be placed in the appropriate environment and that must be spearheaded by the principal.

Professional Development

The last issue that I believe needs to be addressed is the continued professional development of the administrator.

As in the teaching profession, an administrator also needs to be a life-long learner. This can be done in many ways.

Administrators need to belong to professional organizations, ie: National Association of Secondary School Principals or Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, read professional journals, attend conferences, as well as take more coursework. Also I believe an administrator can grow even more by occasionally stepping into the classroom setting.

Whatever the case, administrators need to be informed of new issues, techniques and strategies in education.

As I finish my requirements for educational administration, I now ask myself, "How do I see myself as an administrator?". I believe I have the qualities of becoming an effective administrator. I am a highly organized individual. I am flexible and can adapt to any situation, allowing for fairness when dealing with individuals. Working in an environment that has a 23% minority population, I feel that I will be able to work with students in any school setting. I believe that every student has the ability to succeed given the proper environment and a chance.

I believe that staff members should be treated as professionals but at the same time they need to be held accountable for what takes place in the classroom and for the education of all students. As a prospective administrator, I believe my sense of humor will work to my advantage. I feel that administrators need to show that they are human and that can be done through humor. Throughout my educational experience, I feel that I have always remained a team player.

One problem that I might foresee is relinquishing some of my work to a secretary. It has been stated many times that a principals secretary is invaluable. I think it will be difficult at first, coming from the classroom where you do everything to an administrative position and having a secretary you can rely on for doing some of the managerial tasks.

In my years of teaching, I have witnessed many administrators that would be classified as members of the Good Old Boys' Club. I feel administrators need to be individualists. An administrator can still be a team player and be an individualist.

Finally, when I take an administrative position, it will be for all the right reasons. I must feel comfortable with the position and be able to promote my own leadership style. To take just any administrative position will create unforeseen problems. As I look towards an administrative position, if a job does not fit my personality and I feel I cannot succeed in that position, I will turn that job down.

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