Educational leadership and the vital role it plays

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Educational leadership and the vital role it plays

Abstract
The profession of administration is no simple task. The weight of any decision can be a difficult one. As the corporate executive of any major company, the greatest loss is money. A building administrator in a school system risks not only the financial ruin of the school, but the failed education of a child whose future is dependent upon it. The difficulty involved in the career is evident; therefore, the passion the administrator has toward seeing that every child in the building or district has an equal opportunity to reach his or her maximum academic, social, and physical potential is the number one ideology necessary in becoming a top quality principal or superintendent. Without ardently striving for the success of each and every student, the best ideas may never become a reality.

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Educational Leadership and the Vital Role It Plays

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Master of Administrative Education

By

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What I believe about leadership and education.

After high school graduation, I decided to go to college, or should I say, my father decided I should go to college. Sluggishly, I trudged my way there. If it was not for the game of football I would not have gone. While in college, I was asked to work at an elementary school as a student aide. Teachers kept asking me what I was going to major in. I was undecided. A couple of people thought that I worked well with the students, so I decided to go into education. My favorite subject was English. After transferring to Western Illinois University, I changed my major to secondary English education. Four years into the profession, one of my colleagues urged me to apply for this program. Unsure of my future career path, I decided I would give it a try. That decision brought me to where I am today, contemplating a career in a field that I am just learning to understand and appreciate.

The profession of administration is no simple task. The weight of any decision can be a difficult one. As the corporate executive of any major company, the greatest loss is money. A building administrator in a school system risks not only the financial ruin of the school, but the failed education of a child whose future is dependant upon it. The difficulty involved in the career is evident; therefore, the passion the administrator has toward seeing that every child in the building or district has an equal opportunity to reach his or her maximum academic, social, and physical potential is the number one ideology necessary in becoming a top quality principal or superintendent. Without ardently striving for the success of each and every student, the best ideas may never become a reality.
The principal is the leader of learners.

Making decisions that affect other people is what the job of principal is all about; however, making those decisions blindly is no way to go about it. People are frequently guilty of not looking before they leap. For each blind mistake that people make, they suffer their own consequences. The profession of school administration does not afford the luxury of making mistakes. Each error in judgement as a building administrator has direct consequences on people who are not always going to have a say in the decision making process, but they will always have something to say about decisions that have been made. All decision-makers involved need guidelines to help them construct a school vision, not just any vision, but a quality vision. The Iowa Standards for School Leaders (ISSL) developed a set of standards to help building administrators make proper decisions about the needs of all of the students that their realm of administration encompasses. These standards are the foundation from which a successful leader shall rise.

Using the standards developed by the ISSL, an administrator needs to construct a plausible vision, in which to focus the school’s educational energy. The creating of this vision can be a daunting task. Every vision has a name attached to it, and that name is undoubtedly that of the current administration. Any person rich in moral fiber would put forth a tireless effort to positively influence anything that has their name associated with it. Part of a strong vision should include efficient time management by all staff members. Education is cyclical, and it spins its wheels quite often. The principal’s vision must be a vision of substance. Great leadership might sometimes be the ability to recognize the probable flash in the pan and guide the school in a better direction. All great school
visions must concentrate on what helps the students become better learners and better people.

Using the standards to help create and guide the principal’s vision, and having the passion and motivation to see it come to fruition, a leader must use the proper communication tools. Passion and vision alone do not guarantee success, especially in the school system. Without effective communication, the necessary relationships involved within the building will cease to help, and will begin to hinder the vision’s progress. In any form of administration, a dichotomy exists between the administration and the staff that works for them. Teachers and administrators are no different. If a school’s staff forms the opinion that it is “us versus them”, the principal has created a no-win situation. Unfortunately, the greatest loss is suffered by the students. Positive communication can be the difference maker between a good idea and a great success. Great communication is the responsibility of everyone. However, poor communication is the fault of the administration.

The current administration is always the fall-guy for the fall-out. Principals must gain the support of the teachers by communicating with them. Without the support of the teachers, they will have no one to relay that vision to the students. Poor teaching can make a great administrator look insufficient. Communication with your staff is essential to the success of your vision. That communication can be in multiple forms: e-mail, face-to-face, memos, school mail, or telephone. Only then can the principal begin building supportive relationships with the staff. Together, they can start molding relationships with the community. Gaining support from the community is crucial to the success of the principal’s vision. Once the people in the community feel as if they are
stakeholders in the educational process, local businesses and organizations will not only be more apt to cooperate with the school, but they will be more willing to search for improvements on their own. The parents in the community have the best interest of their children at heart, but keep in mind that the principal and teachers are the community experts on students. Some parents just need to be educated about the proper way to go about ensuring their child’s success.

When the communication lines are open, teachers and administrators can collaboratively begin creating a warmer climate in the building and a positive school culture. Now is the time for advocating, nurturing, and sustaining to take over. It is the job of the administrator to set a great example for everyone. People will usually follow the principal’s lead. As an advocate for success, principals need to encourage professional growth. Most people have never met anyone who did not need a little nudge every once and a while. Without that helpful push, many people would not have discovered their full potential. Thanks to the support of my administration, I am writing this paper today.

Whenever there is a large number of people involved in a process, there will be people who question the leader. Steering the ship may be the hardest job that an administrator faces. This is not like working the night shift at McDonalds. A building principal is in charge of a sizable group of intelligent, independent educators. They will question your decision-making ability from time to time. The principal needs data-driven decisions to back up their every move. Without that data, biased presumptions rear their ugly head. The district may believe that someone is qualified to be the principal; however, the faculty may still need it proven to them.
It is the job of the principal to be the moral leader in the school. Before vision, before steering, and before communication even starts, the principal must have proven to be a moral and ethical person. It will be a tough job to get if they are not moral and ethical, assuming they check references. People need to know they are a person of honor and not afraid to admit their mistakes. If they do not, they will be ridiculed for making a poor decision and following it through, even after it fails. Nothing is more appealing than people who admit that they make mistakes.

In order to see the school vision come to fruition, a principal needs to become a spokesperson for anything that may improve educational or social opportunities of the students in the building. Constantly being informed about changing mores or values in the community is a must. These have a significant impact on student success. The educational leader must advocate for programs that promote equitable learning opportunities for students, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender, ethnicity, or any other characteristic. Administrators need to be the type of person that they would want running the schools their own children attend, the type that have a passion for their work and the heart for their students; however, heart only goes so far. There needs to be a knowledge base behind the decision-making process. Reflective practice is an essential key to successful decision-making.

Reflective practice in education

Being a reflective practitioner is extremely important to a new age administrator. The days of making decisions based on a guess are over, and thankfully so. In years past, the building principal was used to making decisions in any fashion that he or she chose. It was more of a dictatorship than a democracy. Today's educational leaders need to
effectively incorporate research and reflection into his or her decision-making. The ISSL standards are dependent on reflection. In an era where each building principal is held accountable for the decisions they make, they need to be able to administer with the power of data-driven decision-making.

Research shows that being a reflective administrator makes for better results, and in time, a more efficiently run school system. Before we discuss implementing reflection, we need to define what reflection is. Jack Mezirow states, in Adult Education Quarterly, “Reflection, a turning back on experience, can mean many things: simple awareness of an object, event or state, including awareness of a perception, thought, feeling, disposition, intention, action, or of ones habits of doing these things. It can also mean letting ones thoughts wander over something, taking something into consideration, or imagining alternatives” (Mezirow, 1998). This gentle wording of the concept of reflection may help to alleviate some of the tension that your teaching staff may feel when faced with change. According to Kay A. Norlander Case, author of The Professional Teacher, the Preparation and Nurturance of the Reflective Practitioner, there are three types of reflection: reflection-for-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-in-action. When we reflect-in-action, we spend time thinking about what we are doing, while we are doing it. Reflection-on-action is to think back on what we previously did. Reflection-for-action is the act of pondering over what we thought about while doing an action, what we thought about after the action, and using that reflection to make decisions about what our future actions will be (Norlander-Case, 1999). As complex as the job may be, Case and other current research is telling us something very simple; learn from our past successes and failures. If we take into account every related decision that we
have made, we will be better equipped to not only make these decisions, but also to make decisions that make a difference.

The power of reflective practitioners is not reserved for administration only. As a building principal who is an advocate for collaborative and instructional leadership, sharing the beliefs about reflective practitioners will prove to be beneficial to the whole learning community. If principals want to make a difference in education, they need to positively impact the educators that are in direct contact with the students. By empowering the teachers to practice reflective decision-making in their own classrooms and lesson plans, you have nurtured appropriate avenues that lead to student success. The teachers are in charge of making the majority of classroom decisions (Norlander Case, 1999). In Les Tickle's book, *The induction of new teachers reflective professional practice*, he quotes Thomas Green in defining what he calls a conscience of craft: “A conscience of craft is whenever the expert or the novice in any craft adopts the standards of that craft as his or her own... In other words, it is displayed whenever we become judge in our own case, saying that our performance is good or bad, skillful, fitting, or the like... thus to possess a conscience of craft is to have acquired the capacity for self-congratulation... shame at slovenly work, and even embarrassment at carelessness” (Tickle, 1994). Once you have helped instill the practice of reflective practitioners, the educators on your staff will be honing their own skills via daily, weekly, and yearly reflection.

Reflective decision-making and the ISSL standards form an intricately woven fabric. One will not succeed without the other. As the visionary leader in Standard I, principals need to make sure that the school's vision is headed in the right direction. If
their decisions are not based on past experiences, they could be leading the school toward an unattainable goal. It is essential that all of the decisions are congruent with the school’s vision, and it is the responsibility of the building principal to reflect back on the impact that previous decisions have made on our learning community. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, but it doesn’t hurt to retread the tires. This educational retreading is vital to the success of the school’s vision and the success of the students in which that vision promotes.

Standard II, instructional leadership, is as dependent on reflective practitionering as Standard I, visionary leadership. To be an effective instructional leader, administrators must instruct his or her staff to become reflective practitioners as well. The classroom teacher has an immense amount of power. In order to sustain that positive school culture, principals need to help teachers stay on the cutting edge of school research, constantly seeking for better ways to succeed, endlessly nurturing the staff to become life-long learners. Reflective practitionering gives the principal and the teachers the proof they need to say that what they are doing is working or to admit that what they are doing is failing. Both are important and need to be said from time to time.

Standard III the standard on organizational leadership. Is there anything better for an organization than not wasting your time heading in the wrong direction? The ability to make the right decision at the right time is the backbone to organized leadership. Once the principal creates a vision and starts working at the arduous task of stewardship, organization becomes the quintessential tool to success. Without the ability to make decisions based on reflective research, the principal runs a high risk of steering the ship in the wrong direction.
As the collaborative leader in Standard IV, principals have a great opportunity to model this skill for the people that work with them. As you empower the staff with the ability to be reflective practitioners, you are creating a community of independent professionals. When teachers enter into a job fresh out of college, they come from programs that have been based on theory rather than personal observations about students (Pepper, Hare, 1999). In the periodical Childhood Education, Caroline Pratt was quoted as saying, “My own education was given (to) me not in teacher-training courses, not by professors of pedagogy, but by children themselves...” The article goes on to state that “real teacher development could not exist solely through the study of theory, but rather requires application with children” (Crawford, Cornett, 2000). This collaboration gives principals the advantage of using other members of the staff, who are advanced in the skill of reflective practititioning, to model the practice as well. Hearing sound words of advice from a colleague is sometimes easier to hear than advice coming from an administrator, and they could be more apt to apply it to their discipline. With the researcher and the practitioner working together, since they are usually the same person, we have created meaningful change in context of practice (e.g., classrooms, after-school programs, etc.). Our multiple efforts to reform are now focused to address one major concern at a time (Baumgartner, E., Bell, P., Brophy, S., Hoadley, C., Hsi, S., Joseph, D., et al., 2003). This does, however, have a temporary downside. “Developing reflective practitioners requires substantial training, additional resources, and large doses of trust (Fien, Rawling, 1996).

The administrator has to have the trust that his or her staff will follow through with the personal reflection after the additional resources have been supplied. With the
limited funding that most public schools are provided, this poses a problem with getting
the program started. Change takes time and money, two things that school districts find it
difficult to part with. Another problem that may arise is that the “researchers usually
find themselves in the dual intellectual roles of advocate and critic” (Baumgartner, E.,
Bell, P., Brophy, S., Hoadley, C., Hsi, S., Joseph, D., et al., 2003). This works as a
double-edged sword. Can the teacher, as creator, diligently build what they will
ultimately dissect? It takes a very secure individual to truly judge ones own work.

The use of reflective decision-making is more than just a means of improving
classroom instruction. The ability to make ethical decisions will also be directly affected.
“Reflective practice involves using ethical and contextual considerations in professional
decision-making rather than making such decisions on the basis of habit, intuition,
impulse, and tradition” (Fien & Rawling, 1996). Is it ethical to make a decision that will
impact the lives of hundreds of students based solely on what the administrator feels is
the appropriate thing to do? The modern-day administrator needs to promote ethical
decision-making. Data-driven decisions, based on reflective research, give administrators
the ethical support needed to organize, collaborate, and pursue his or her school’s vision
of successful education. “Reflective practitioners are aware of the impact on others and
the society of their work…and the moral and ethical consequences of their decisions and
actions” (Fien & Rawling, 1996).

As the ethical leadership described in Standard V, the building principal has a
moral obligation to make decisions with the students’ best interests in mind. We are
essentially asking our teachers to prepare the leaders of tomorrow with the cognitive
skills to answer these questions: “What is going on here? How did this come to be? How
could this be different? How might I alter it?” (Brady, 2004). Aren’t these the questions that we as educators should be asking ourselves every day? Ethically, I believe that the administrator who reflects on his or her own decisions and asks the same of their staff is doing what is right for the students and the community. Reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action is beneficial to all social classes and a multitude of careers.

Reflective research can be applied to Standard VI, political leadership, as well. In the political arena, failing to make sound decisions can cripple a principal’s professional credibility. Portraying themselves as a leader, grounded by educated decision-making, will help the principal create the platform that is necessary in building a sturdy career. Even before they are in the administrative picture, if they are planning on furthering their career in that field, they must realize that every decision that they make is being observed and judged by multiple people in the school and the community. That is the essence of political savvy. The more trust and respect that you have earned from others in the field, the easier it becomes to land a job as a principal. Without that political favor gained by effective reflective research based decision-making, the road to an administrative position may be a long and tiring journey.

The important leadership concept to remember is that principals can’t force change onto their staff, even when the change may be needed. Thorough research, guided reflection, and a compassionate administrator can lead to positive student achievement. Using all of these tools in the arena of education helps administrators create the learning community conducive to strong education and bright futures. These are the tools that are needed to reform the educational system that has created the
students in the past, but it is time to build a system that will create the students of our future.

*The leaders role in educational change*

The days of the one room classroom have subsided. Although most agree that the cozy rural system was effective, the world has become a smaller place, with larger communities. With the outcry for growth and expansion, small school districts are consolidating, city limits are getting larger, and students are being faced with more diverse educational challenges than ever before. The urban school systems have had higher demands placed on them, and in turn, so have the teachers and administrators. The teacher has growing demands placed upon him or her such as: adapting a curriculum to accommodate a more culturally diverse student body, taking more classes to further his or her education for license renewal, and providing proof, via portfolio, of the growing state-wide standards. "District leaders are operating in an environment of ever shifting priorities...In the 50’s, school management roles could be defined by the four B’s: bonds, busing, budgets, and buildings. By the 70’s, it had become the four R’s: race, resources, relationships, and rules. Today, district leaders must concern themselves with a host of different concerns: the four A’s--academic standards, accountability, autonomy, and ambiguity and the five C’s—collaboration, communication, connection, child advocacy, and community building” (Jackson, 2005). With all this on the table, more and more responsibilities are given to the building principal. The new age urban administrators finds themselves in a realignment of duties. Modern day school reform, from the administrator’s standpoint, has taken the approach of delegating many of the old school
principal responsibilities. The teachers’ dream of shared decision-making has become an administrative reality.

The fact of the matter is that a building principal’s time is valuable, yet limited. It is impossible to meet the demands of every issue that needs tending to, without empowering a staff to assist in working on decision-making that will directly affect their area of interest. As a visionary leader, urban principals, in charge of school reform, must empower their staff to assist in the matter. The best way to empower a staff is through staff development. Every article that I have read in the past five years has advocated staff development. Not one article has said that it would be best to let a teaching staff go stale. Providing funds to help the teaching staff grow into decision-makers is essential to the school’s success. Standard II, being an educational leader, and Standard IV, being a collaborative leader, embody the concept of staff development. However, as stated by Jaminice Jackson, in her article, Leadership in Urban Public Schools, “When budgets shrink, professional development is treated as an expendable luxury to be sacrificed on the chopping block of balanced budgets.” In Andrea Kent’s article, Improving Teacher Quality Through Professional Development, she states, “Districts are currently spending less than half of one percent of their resources on staff development” (Kent, 2004). Therefore, it should be a priority of the building principal and the superintendent, to factor an allotment for staff development into the yearly budget. Without it, your school vision may lack the necessary stewardship to see it through. The building principals need to depend on their staff for educational leadership and support. Educating them through staff development is a great way to aid in building staff community and a positive school culture.
The idea of school reform is so common, the implementation of it so arduous, and the sustainability so rare. What can a building principal do in order to sustain positive reformation? Sustainability, like many other characteristics, can be learned. Dean Fink and Andy Hargreaves state in their article, Sustaining Leadership, “Leaders need to develop sustainability by the way in which they approach, commit to, and protect deep learning in their schools; by the way they sustain others in their efforts to promote and support learning; by the way they sustain themselves in their work, so they can persist with their vision and avoid burning out; and by the way that they try to ensure that the improvements they bring about will last over time, especially after they themselves have gone” (Fink, Hargreaves, 2003). Anyone can put forth the effort at the beginning of a new idea. Fresh ideas bring fresh energy. What happens when the honeymoon is over and it’s time to make the reformation work? “The principal’s role as a leader of learning is put to the strongest test when his or her school faces demanding policies that seem to undermine true learning or to pull people’s energies and attention away from it” (Fink, Hargreaves, 2003). They go on to state, “The promise of sustainable success in education lies in creating cultures of distributed leadership throughout the school community, not in training and developing a tiny leadership elite.” Without the building principal making the effort to relinquish some of his or her power, urban school districts will not stay afloat. Does this mean that the principal’s role will soon be obsolete? Of course not. “Even in a system where leadership is shared more broadly...principals play prominent roles as catalysts for change, protectors of vision, and leaders of inquiry” (Copland, 2003).
Once building principals have empowered the staff, they need to display what Michael Fullan refers to in his article, *Leadership and Sustainability*, “…the constellation of characteristics that all effective leaders have: unwarranted optimism, enthusiasm, and energy.” If an administrator doesn’t go fishing with the right bait, collaboration becomes monotonous, organization becomes a chore, and the vision floats belly up. All the standards in the world can’t resuscitate a flat-lined staff if the leader doesn’t provide the life sustaining elements used to spark the motivation in others.

When the administration and the teachers are on the same page, things begin to click. It is important that the principal is making sure that the curriculum work that the departments are composing is in alignment with the state and district standards (Cordeiro, Cunningham, 2003). That upper level direction can be the difference between hard work and time wasted. Keeping your teams focused is a difficult task, and that takes us back to the importance of the hiring. What type of individual is the principal inviting to be part of their staff? In the article, *Leadership of Inquiry: Building and Sustaining Capacity for School Improvement*, Michael Copland states, “I think that my biggest contributions are the people that we’ve brought in the last two years. Because those are the people that really stir it up in a positive way—because there are people who stir it up negatively—but they stir it up positively. And so I think that as they empower themselves, it is going to continue to be a positive force” (Copland, 2003).

“School leadership is not the sum of its individual leaders. School leadership is a system, a culture. Schools are places in which principals, teachers, students, and parents should all lead” (Fink, Hargreaves, 2003). Michael Hynes and Judith Johnson, in their article, *Teaching/Learning/Leading: Synonyms for Change*, stated that “We believe
teaching, learning, and leading are synonymous.” These two statements embody all that the future of educational reform should behold. School reform is to the benefit of everyone in the community. Everyone should feel the success and the failure of the school district they support. If the community loses the mentality of the militaristic hierarchy in our school system decision-making, together we can help our education system to win the war and truly have the chance to leave no child behind. This is not cut and dry, it is a daunting task to say the least. There are plenty of wrong and right answers. If it was this simple, we would have a sure and fast rubric to evaluate our administrators by. There are a lot of factors to consider. Defining good teaching is a great place to start, since that is a major part in what you are to oversee. In order to know what good teaching is, principals must read educational research and gain knowledge to better guide the staff.

Since the building principals are the leaders of continual growth and development, they must lead not only the students, but the teachers as well. Having been in the classroom for a sufficient amount of time, most principals feel pretty comfortable in leading students toward the beacon of success. Unfortunately, that comfort level often changes when it comes time for the principals to guide their staff through the learning that is necessary in sustaining school improvement. However, research suggests that without the principal’s ability to encourage teachers to further their education, becoming an advocate for life-long learning, schools can become educationally stagnant.

In Debbie Backus’ article, *I’m Always Posing Questions*, she states, “Principals need to take responsibility for teacher learning. The teachers in my school are my learners. As principal, it is my responsibility to help them learn, grow, and succeed”
(Backus, 2000). The principals needs to model the vision that they have created for the rest of the school. Furthering their own education to become an administrator is a good start, but it can’t end there. David J. McGough suggests that “…principal’s learning is personality-dependant, informal, experience-based, and peer related” (McGough, 2003).

Is learning as a principal any different than learning as a teacher? The simplicity of the statement creates an all-encompassing constant for true education. All learners’ unique styles of information retention is dependant to some extent on their own personality. The goal of the educator is to empower the student to process his or her own thoughts. Too frequently, we try to get students to regurgitate information, thus losing the hope that the pupil may someday teach the student. Personality plays a part in how we learn. Rather than ignore that fact, let us embrace it. We need to get educators to treat “…learners as self-directed clients” (McGough, 2003). As the building principal, once you can plant the seed of self-exploration, it will lead to a self-centered, personally-driven educational experience. As a learner myself, I can attest to the fact that educational experiences that are self-driven are the most enriching kind. Encouraging your staff to be receptive enough to want to learn is not an easy task. Roland Barth is quoted in his article, Building a Community of Learners as saying, “When I visit schools, I find them populated with two quite distinct groups. The first group is the educators who are learned. We have certification and degrees. We are anointed. We’ve done it. We’re finished. The second group is the learners. These are the students” (Barth, 2000).

It is the job of the principal to model to his or her staff what the teachers should model to their students. With the world constantly changing, it is important to be ready for the changes being made. Nothing does a better job for preparing you than education.
A huge sign on the door of a school in East Lyme, Connecticut, quotes Eric Hoffer: “In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists” (Barth, 2000). We need to practice what we preach. Students watch their teachers’ every move. They have a better chance of becoming life-long learners if their teachers set good examples. Principals can motivate their staff by being motivated themselves. Although motivating a staff can be challenging, it is essential to a school’s success.

There are multiple ways that teachers can further their education. Workshops, clinics, and in-services are great ways to help teachers polish up their skills. Offering these educational tools to the faculty is the responsibility of the building administrator, especially in the idea of the in-service. On the subject of in-services, one principal was quoted as saying, “We value outside experts who help us refine our practice. But we also take important steps to ensure that we associate ourselves with the right experts…I don’t want a glamorous packaged program that takes all the decision-making out of the hands of teachers” (Backus, 2000). Too often, teachers find themselves at an in-service where “experts” are talking at them instead of with them. If collaboration is truly important to the school’s vision, you need to empower the staff by using the ideas of the people in the building. No one knows the students’ learning needs as well as their teachers do. Backus states, “Every instance of reaching out occurs because we believe it will enhance the instructional knowledge of our staff” (Backus, 2000).

the best they know how. If we want them to do better, we must help them improve their
skills and master new ones” (Whitaker, 2003). There are always exceptions to the rule,
but generally speaking, teachers do the best with what they have. Most professional
educators take their job personally. However, not all teachers have the necessary tools to
meet the needs of all of their students. Some teachers have the ability to work well with
the top level learners. They can challenge students in every unit and help them to
understand material which they couldn’t comprehend in the past. Other teachers shine
with the most reluctant of learners. They are masters at finding a teachable moment in
every class period. Their unique gift of breaking down the most impenetrable barriers of
education is astounding. The problem is that the majority of your classrooms are not
grouped to all of the differentiated learning styles. One of the best ways to promote good
instruction is to let teachers see it.

One of the many problems of education is that the teachers rarely have time to
interact with each other regarding constructive sharing of ideas. Whitaker reflects in his
book stating “When I realized that others could learn from my superstar-teachers too,
getting other teachers into their classrooms became an essential tool. After all, who
better to teach the teachers than those with the best skills” (Whitaker, 2003)? The road to
success is a steep one, but the rewards last a lifetime. Creating a community of learners
by following your school vision could be the most rewarding experience of your life.

Principal as the Leader of a Community Service

No matter how great our vision is, how well we collaborate, or how well we
reflect in our decision-making, the community still sees the school system as a
community service. Schools provide an essential service to families and the local patrons
of the community. When the term “service” is brought to mind, we are quick to think of a car hoisted up in the air at the local garage with the grease laden mechanic turning torque wrenches and dripping sweat. Although very few people in the school district are turning torque wrenches for a living, all of them are sweating, not just from the lack of air conditioning but from the hard work that it takes for a school district to deliver the service that is asked of them. That is what a school district really is, a service. Except, their finished product is not a rebuilt engine that should be able to go another eighty thousand miles. The schools product is an educated young adult that will not only be prepared and poised for life’s adventures, but also able to improve and expand upon the gifts that we have already given them. The complexities that make up a school system are very similar to most major companies in this country. To run a school efficiently, the building administrator has to do things much the same as any company president.

The building principal is the CEO of the building. Each department that they have in the building provides a service, and each service in the building is equally important. Enabling their staff to believe in that concept is one of their key responsibilities. Everyone needs to feel as though they make a difference. In the school system, everyone most definitely needs to feel this way. I have yet to see a malnourished child do well in the classroom. Hooray for the food service workers! The success rate for students suffering from illness is incredibly low, thanks to school nurses and the custodial staff that keep our schools sanitary. Never in my life as a teacher have I ever seen a student learn who wasn’t in attendance. Bless the bus drivers and the mechanics at the school garage for getting the students to school and home safely. As the building principal, it is their responsibility to see that each and every cog in the educational wheel
is in balance with the rest. If one department in the school feels less important than the others, the system breaks down, and the service that they are trying to provide is sub-par. If the building principal wants to promote their school vision, they must see to it that the communication necessary to keep harmony within the building is a forerunner on the list of their priorities.

It is extremely important to make sure that every department is working at its highest level. Remember, ultimately the buck stops on the principal’s desk. When the building doesn’t run efficiently, the superintendent doesn’t blame the secretary. One of the biggest mistakes that administrators often make is that they add responsibilities to people that have bigger and better things that they have been trained to do. For example, Katherine and Robert Niebuhr state in their article, *Principal and Counselor Collaboration*, “Many principals...assume that counselors should perform a variety of tasks which...take counselors away from the very task for which they are uniquely trained, i.e. coordinating special education, building master schedules, performing clerical work relating to student records...” (Niebuhr, 1999).

As the leader of services, remember that the boss can’t do it all. They need to delegate. It is essential to not only the success of the principal but also to their sanity. The office assistant is going to be one of their greatest assets. They must make sure to utilize that person the proper way. They can help schedule the principal’s day for them and let them know where they are going next, but the principal is the one that needs to make sure that where they are going is helping them accomplish the school vision. In an article by Jody Capelluti and Ken Nye, they stated, “One characteristic of the principalship is that other people often determine where a principal is to be, what he or
she should wear, and what he or she should say...but if you’re going to be a principal, your going to have to learn to stay in control of your professional life.” They go on to state that, “As the principal, I need to be the keeper of the vision, the leader of the journey, and that my calendar should be a tool, not to keep other people happy but to keep me and the school on track to be successful” (Capelluti, 2002).

One of the best ways to keep that vision is to have a helpful system of organization. The most precious commodity of any leader is his or her time. In order to be the most efficient leader of services as possible, building administrators need to prioritize. Something as simple as the flow of paper across the principal’s desk is manageable with the proper system. In Robert Furman’s article, 14 Ways to Make More Time For Leadership, he states that the “traf it” method may be the way to do it. “Traf it” is an acronym for a four-step process for handling mail. “T” stands for “throw it out.” “R” stands for “refer it to someone else on the staff.” “A” stands for “act on it.” “F” stands for “file it.” (Furman, 1999). At the end of his article he finishes by saying, “Yes. The final responsibilities of a high school principal are overwhelming, but that’s the job that you have accepted. Because of the demands of the job, you need to take care of yourself both mentally and physically, be happy, and enjoy your life. How you manage your time both on and off the job will be a decisive factor in your quest for excellence and happiness (Furman, 1999).

Standard IV, collaboration, and Standard II, instruction, are the two most affected standards. Collaborating gives the faculty a sense of community. It is that sense of community that creates the positive school culture that allows the administrator’s vision to flourish and the students to achieve academic success. With the entire staff, the
principal works together to analyze achievement results, set targets for improvement, and share best practices” (Young, 2001). Whether fixing a car, managing a restaurant, presiding over a major company, or running a school, each of these businesses are service oriented. If schools fail to produce a worthy product, everyone loses. With collaboration, the service that schools provide can be one that the whole community is proud of, not just the principal.
References


