My vision and beliefs to effectively lead a middle school: a reflective research paper

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My vision and beliefs to effectively lead a middle school: a reflective research paper

Abstract
The most influential role in a school is the educational leader. A leader's vision and beliefs are what shapes the school's success or failure. Leadership qualities involve being an effective communicator, an instructional leader, a facilitator of change, a relationship builder, and an ethical leader. Obviously, the range of roles the principal must possess is vast. Within each educational leadership quality are numerous traits that aid in the effectiveness of the principal.
MY VISION AND BELIEFS TO EFFECTIVELY LEAD A MIDDLE SCHOOL: A REFLECTIVE RESEARCH PAPER

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Master of Arts in Education

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Philip L. Laube

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Head, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education
I started my teaching career at Colfax-Mingo teaching seventh and eighth grade math as well as doing some coaching for three years. Since that time, I have been teaching in the Grundy Center school system with classes centering around math, but stretching into science and accelerated reader. I also have done some coaching in this system, but have given it up to focus on my family and pursuing my principalship degree.

My family is an extremely integral part of my life. I grew up on a small dairy farm in a small rural community in Iowa. The farm taught me many life lessons that I still hold on to as I seek to advance my professional career by becoming an educational leader. I was taught the value of hard work, teamwork and sticking together through the easy as well as the tough times.

Teaching has become a tradition in my family. While my parents did not attend college they created a path so all of their children could and unbelievably enough, all of us chose a career in education. I have a sister that teaches special education at Nashua-Plainfield School District and her husband happens to teach industrial technology in the New Hampton School District. My other sister teaches high school Spanish at Dike-New Hartford School District and her husband’s previous career was also in education. Finally, my brother has now been the 7-12 principal at North Tama School District the past several years. The type of commitment my family gives to education is astounding. Obviously, we
have a rich database of knowledge to draw upon when one of us encounters a problem and often our conversations center around education.

Due to the fact that my family is close-knit and many of us have a career in education makes my family values even more significant. My parents have instilled in all of us to work hard, do what is right, and stand up for our beliefs. I will continue to center my actions around these core values when I accept the role of being the most influential person in a school building, the principal.

As previously stated the most influential role in a school is the educational leader. A leader’s vision and beliefs are what shapes the school’s success or failure. Important consideration must be made to ensure a decision an administrator makes leads the building towards his or her vision as well as the school’s vision and beliefs. The way these decisions are made is an integral part of educational leadership.

A successful administrator must possess essential leadership qualities. Those leadership qualities involve being an effective communicator, an instructional leader, a facilitator of change, a relationship builder, and an ethical leader. Obviously, the range of roles the principal must possess is vast. Within each educational leadership quality is numerous traits that aid in the effectiveness of the principal.

The principal’s own beliefs span across these leadership qualities and truly underlie the educational leader’s ability to be effective. One’s values and beliefs
are the guiding and judging force of how to act and react to the varied situations and dealings one will encounter in being an educational leader.

**Effective Communicator**

The ability to communicate effectively greatly affects a principal’s success. Principals wear many hats and several of them involve communication. According to Irmesher (1996) while awake, leaders will be involved in some type of communication 70% of the time. Effective communication is key for any leader.

**Mission/Vision Communication**

Effective communication of the district’s visions is essential for leaders. Visions cannot be acted upon unless everyone is educated about them. According to Domenech (2002), an effective principal must lead by persuading all stakeholders to realize and buy into his or her vision. Communication skills are vastly important. Persuasion is made possible through effective and precise communication. Poor communication fragments the district, and people end up with opposing views and differing ideas of what is expected. Communication is the glue that holds the district together.

Focusing on the positive aspects of a community creates a welcoming attitude from community members so they will be more likely to support the leader’s vision. Again Domenech (2002) stresses the importance of effective
communication stating, “By understanding the audience, a principal can emphasize the positive aspects of issues in his or her communications” (p. 34).

Parents, staff, students, and community members all working toward the common goal is my vision. I see our classrooms, school, and community striving to improve our students' educational experiences. Visions must continue to change with the times, and our teaching practices must reflect upon the vision of doing what is best for students. A visionary leader must have effective communication skills in order to disseminate the vision to all parties. The communication could transpire through forums and meetings in addition to letterhead that has the mission and vision of the district printed on it. If the vision really is to permeate deep it must consistently be discussed and hurled out in front of people.

Staff Communication

Effective communication with staff members is critical. Bulach, Pickett, and Boothe (1998) found that the second leading mistake made by principals deals with a category entitled “poor interpersonal communication skills” (p. 2). The main reason people were identified for their lack of communication skills was failure to listen. Failure to listen was exemplified by doing paperwork in the presence of others and not maintaining eye contact. Bulach et al. (1998) recognize a speaker perceives a lack of listening as a sign of not caring while the perception of caring is cast when listening is taking place.
I will build positive relationships with staff and use effective communication to aid in the process. Furthermore, I will create an atmosphere of mutual respect centered on communication. Staff members will know they can talk to me about problems or successes. Simple notes of thanks and praise in teachers’ mailboxes help to develop quality relationships. Also, taking an interest in teachers’ families and personal interests creates a caring relationship of trust and respect. Respectful and effective communication skills will be the key in creating an environment of mutual caring and respect.

These finding are supported by Davis, who asked California superintendents to rank the top five reasons why principals lost their jobs. Given a list of twenty-one at-risk leadership behaviors, the most frequently cited response focused on failure to communicate in ways that build positive relationships with parents, teachers, students, and colleagues. (Bulach, et al., 1998, p. 2)

Not surprisingly, Bulach’s et al. (1998) findings evidence how important proper communication skills are in building positive relationships. Too often people generalize communication skills as verbal skills, but I feel the most important aspect of communication is listening. Irmeresh (1996) states, “To interact effectively with anyone-teachers, students, community members even family members—you need to first understand where the person is coming from”
He continues, "good listeners don't interrupt, especially to correct mistakes or make points, don't judge; think before answering" (p. 1).

Listening is a skill that is often overlooked. I will take the time to listen to staff and offer advice as necessary. I will be frank and candid when needed, but also compassionate and sincere as the situation dictates. Van Zant (2002) offers this advice--pay attention. What people are telling you is important to them whether it is to you or not. Be sure to give the person speaking to you your full attention even when you have other things on your mind.

One strategy I will implement will be to carry around a notepad at all times. Then, as teachers are telling me problems or concerns I will be able to write them down which embellishes the art of listening. Being present in teachers' classrooms before school is a great time to dialogue with them both professionally and personally and one tacit I will choose to follow.

As a principal, you have many means of communication. In fact just about everything you do in and for your school involves some form of communication. To be a leader, you need to know what you want to say and how to say it to every audience through every means available. (Domenech, 2002, p. 35)

Instructional Leader

The role as instructional leader is the top priority for any principal. Leading instructionally affects every student in the building and creates the best
opportunity for all to succeed. “Drake and Roe, for example, call instructional leadership ‘the principal’s major task’” (as cited in Reitzug, 1997, p. 324).

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning expectations exist in schools where instruction is meeting the needs of the students. Students and teachers must see the importance of learning in life, not just in the classroom. Adequate instruction will allow students to comprehend the total picture of lifelong learning as they begin to make discoveries on their own. Principals, teachers, and staff can communicate this belief through their words and actions everyday. Students must realize that lifelong learning improves their quality of life and broadens their horizons. As educators we must as Decker communicates,

Develop an environment that fosters lifelong learning. This strategy acknowledges learning as a lifelong process that takes place inside and outside schools. It encourages the development of education programs to meet learning needs that change over a lifetime, including the need for new skills and knowledge. Lifelong learning programs and activities may include early childhood education, extended-day and enrichment programs for school-aged children, adult education, workforce preparation, vocational training and retraining programs, leisure activities, and intergenerational programs. (Decker, 2001, p. 44)
Initiating and implementing these programs along with granting opportunities for students to get involved in the community aid in the students understanding that learning is lifelong. Staff should also be encouraged to take part in these endeavors to show that they are not too old to learn as well. With all the emphasis on accountability and research-based instruction the link to lifelong learning is easy. Teachers must continue to research best practice in their field and use data to document the progress. By allowing this internal process to be overt students will naturally see that even the teachers are continuing to gain knowledge and are still learning.

Facilitator of Change

Instructional leaders facilitate change. Knowledge of how to effectively lead faculty through the change process is essential for all educational leaders. While vision gives us a glimpse of where we are going, instructional practices show us where we are now. I believe the instructional strategies implemented in a classroom evidence where the teacher is on the continuum of learning. One of the most difficult tasks for an instructional leader is showing teachers the need for change.

I believe the new Teacher Evaluation Standards will aid me in this process. One major focus of the new Iowa evaluation is the feedback conference. The state has initiated a system to produce teacher instructional growth through evaluation and conferencing. By utilizing this evaluation method our teachers
will improve the quality of their instruction. Principals should ask teachers in the feedback conference, "What do you see that you would like to change?" Due to the fact that some teachers will not change without assistance, the feedback conference comes increasingly important (Reitzug, 1997).

However, in some circumstances both pressure and support are needed to affect change. In some cases the pressure is external, mandated by the state as it was in the state of Washington (Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002). I will try to give both pressure and support to staff.

Gradual pressure was Ms. Glen's approach as well. She told us, I've been able to lead the group without saying, "You will do this." It's more showing them different examples, different reasons, and suggesting things. Ms. Powers eased the pace by providing resources, managing the budget, and offering focused professional development. Most important, she used school funds to hire facilitators—certified teachers—to teach other teachers. She explained, 'Building capacity of classroom teachers is the only way you're going to reach all those kids.' If you target teachers in improving their instructional skills...then you're affecting all the kids in that classroom and that teacher in a much more profound way. (Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002, p. 80-83)

After realizing the need for change, teachers can be motivated to work toward the change. Changing the teacher's instructional skills, as Uchiyama &
Wolf (2002) suggest, allows for greater impact on student achievement. All students would benefit from an increase in teachers’ abilities to be effective.

In order to change, teachers will first need to identify a goal area within the Iowa Teaching Standards by conferencing with me. Teachers will then develop an action plan and strive to work through the action plan to attain their goal. In addition, throughout the year he or she would be meeting with me to assess his or her progress towards the goal. I will need firsthand knowledge of the teacher’s ability as well. I will gain this vital knowledge by being “out and about” in the classrooms and will also perform 2-Minute Walk-Throughs to aid me in an accurate assessment of the teacher.

Reitzug (1997) says when dealing with teachers instructionally, the two most important activities are supervision and evaluation. I will try to make the evaluation process a time of professional reflection. Internal reflection and feedback from others allows corrective thought to happen. As a teacher, internal reflection is an important part of my self-monitoring process. I evaluate lessons and make changes from period to period, day to day, and year to year. Being able to reflect allows for growth. Reflecting grants the opportunity to fix mistakes or to keep the same mistake from happening again.

*Active Instruction*

I want invigorating instruction that relates to students’ lives so they may see the usefulness in learning each concept.
I believe it is possible to create a school culture that is hospitable to human learning if we turn the tuning knob to stations that invite students and adults to take risks with a safety net, engage in novel and surprising experiences, enjoy a sense of adventure and purposefulness, share leadership with others, pose and solve problems for themselves, find the joy and freedom that comes with hard work, assume responsibility not only for their own lives but for the lives of others, and make a contribution to others. In sum learning can be informative or transformative—sometimes both. (Barth, 2001, p. 51)

Instruction should be creative, active, inspiring and should change with the times. Students should become motivated to learn. Then as the lesson is facilitated with enthusiasm, excitement for the lesson will spread. Active, hands-on lessons help accomplish this. Educators need to facilitate learning in and out of classrooms and allow students to explore, discover, and learn on their own.

"Some call teachers facilitators of learning. Clearly there is a place for the Transmission of Knowledge model, for sit 'n' git, but it does not dominate instruction" (Barth, 2001, p. 48). It is important to see faculty being enthusiastic and encouraging to students so learning can be fun and active. Staff ought to be given the opportunities to change, and I will aid them throughout the growth process.
The building should explode with enthusiasm and fun. "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, poster).

Creating a Positive Learning Climate

Climate produces the feeling one gets when entering a building. An atmosphere of learning and professionalism or one of stress and chaos is cast upon everyone entering the building.

A positive learning climate involves several key aspects. Organizational structure, building beauty, and building tone all are necessities for a positive learning climate. Without producing the correct climate first, everything else is in vain. The organization of the school must allow the day to flow smoothly. In addition, a beautiful well-kept building sends a positive message to students and staff. Finally, to create the correct tone in the building we will celebrate our accomplishments and respect each other through difficult times.

Organizational Structure

Organizational leadership is influential in creating an efficient and well-run school. Organizational leaders shape the school day and the flow of the building. Buildings with strong organizational leaders can be "sensed" the moment one walks through the school door. Organizational rules and policies keep schools safe and allow students to move smoothly through the day.

Creating a positive learning environment does promote improvement and achievement in our schools! Therefore, as educational leaders we must
acknowledge and focus on the organizational climate that we maintain within our schools.

The important relationship between a school’s organizational climate and the success of whole-school improvement initiatives is clearly evident in the data. It is suggested that those with responsibility for promoting and affecting change give closer attention to the nature of prevailing organizational climate, as well as the complexity of the improvement initiative promoting school change. (Dellar, 1999, p. 366)

A principal must be knowledgeable in the ways of organizing the use of space in the building. Flexibility and creative thinking help when working with such issues. Due to plenty of latitude, a principal’s resourcefulness plays a major part in making these decisions.

The best decision can be made by using many resources. Seek advice and direction from other administrators within the district as well as administrators from other districts. In addition, a cohort of principals will be graduating with me and are a natural block to lean on. Finally, the staff provides alternative views and suggestions when it comes to formulating changes with the procedures of our school. Due to the overwhelming amount of organizational decisions a principal encounters, we must be organizational leaders.
Building Beauty

Fostering a positive learning climate also entails accounting for the beauty of the building. The impact that a clean, well-kept building and grounds have on pride is endless.

Ms. Glen (the principal) explained, “The environment is a big part of how people perceive a place. When people walk up here, what do they see?” On our visits, we saw a school notable for its beautiful surroundings—not only its gardens but also clean, well-lighted places inside the school for students to learn. (Uchiyama & Wolf, 2002, p. 81)

Clean, neat, respectable buildings are inviting to students. Similarly, I want murals and paintings on the walls, and displays that recognize this is the students' building. In my own experiences I have found clean buildings will be kept clean by students. If inappropriate actions deface the building, not fixing them will only encourage more inappropriate actions. Students want to be proud of their school. Physical characteristics do impact students' pride. Even extremely old school buildings, when treated with care and respect, can make students proud.

Building Tone

Building tone will destroy a school if left to chance. The main person responsible for setting the tone is the principal. “A principal plays a key role—if not the key role—in setting the tone. The behavior he or she models is the
behavior that those who are associated with them are more prone to model than any other" (Decker, 2001, p. 45).

Being visible throughout the building on a day-to-day basis will set the correct tone. Allowing students, faculty, and staff to see I am actively involved in and concerned for the educational experiences of the students helps to organize the building in several ways. Teachers and students can ask me questions, I can help model the way I want situations handled, and I can get a firsthand feel of problems and successes in the building.

A system cannot have a negative climate while striving for excellence. The climate and attitudes we express on a day to day basis reflect our feelings about each other and our work. Building a positive learning climate centered on respect and professionalism requires specific actions.

Create cognitive dissonance. School leaders can help staff members question their assumptions by presenting evidence contradicting those assumptions. Create small victories. Celebrate success. ...Those who are able to sustain the effort will find that the fruits of their labors produce much more than a well-tended garden. (DuFour & Burnette, 2002, p. 29)

In addition to implementing DuFour & Burnette’s (2002) suggestions I will also use an approach I learned from a previous principal. I will do what no one else wants to do; lunch duty is an example. I believe in this ideal and envision my organizational development of a school building involving this
principle. If the teachers are happy, the school is happy. Times may come when teachers will be pushed to do unwanted tasks, but if they see our roles as a give-take partnership, the climate of the building is much more conducive to learning.

Fostering Relationships

Relationships may extend beyond the doors of the school into the community or just down the hall, but relationships are the life-string which ties human beings together. Building relationships will alleviate and help solve many leadership dilemmas.

Community Partnerships

Community resources exist in every community. Principals must have an awareness of what their community has to offer and the knowledge of how to create productive and lasting partnerships with community organizations. “Community education is one proven process for building communities and involving families in the education of their children—of looking at public education as a total community enterprise” (Decker, 2001, p. 43).

I have seen long-lasting outreach programs with religious and community organizations. Normally both the school and the community benefit and grow through outreach programs. It may be as simple as taking middle school students to interact with the elderly in the nursing home; life-long learning is happening for the students, and the elderly absolutely love the interaction. Building a school-community relationship gives students opportunities for learning right in their
own communities, and businesses then have the opportunity to address the needs they see in employees.

Relationships can extend beyond the community to government and higher education organizations. It's important to take advantage of all opportunities and use them to improve students' education.

As an educational leader, I will collaborate with students, parents, and community members. I want the students' voices to be heard. Students' ideas make the school a better place and build a sense of school pride. Parents and community members need to feel as though the school is "their" school. Meetings and contacts with parents and community members give them the opportunity to let their thoughts be known. I would like the school and community to work with and for one another. To build a community partnership,

Encourage increased use of community resources and volunteerism to augment the basic educational program, develop educational partnerships between schools and public and private service providers, business and industry, and civic and social service organizations. ... what is important is the focus on building relationships that strengthen the ability of families, schools, and communities to positively increase the opportunities for academic success for all children. (Decker, 2001, p. 44-45)

I will build relationships by being involved. As leaders we must be seen in the community and at community functions. The best way to form
relationships is by taking the first step. Volunteering and offering my time and support to a variety of business and community organizations will allow relationships to be formed. From those relationships develop partnerships where both parties donate and benefit from the interaction.

Finally, Decker (2001) believes making this happen requires building and sustaining relationships, just forming partnerships is not enough. He states, 

"Relationships are essential and relationships require work. You can’t build a school-community partnership with a formula or a form letter. You build it one relationship at a time. You need to engage people to start a relationship and then need to nurture those relationships to maintain them." (p. 46)

**Teacher Relationships**

One facet of education which is typically overlooked is how the adults in the building interact. While this may seem trivial, it is one of the most important aspects of educational leadership-creating positive relationships between and among staff.

"As a teacher and then as a principal, I learned over and over again that the relationship among adults in the schoolhouse has more impact on the quality and the character of the school—and on the accomplishment of youngsters—than any other factor." (Barth, 2001, p. 105)
These relationships are vital. The teacher-principal relationship is a complex one. The relationship is a win-win relationship when done correctly.

Using others’ expertise and admitting that I do not have all the answers is an important component within collaborative decision-making. Staff will be encouraged to voice their opinions in helping us make the right decision. Reitzug (1997) expresses portraying principals as experts and superior only builds ill feelings from teachers who may have a wide knowledge base. Teachers then begin to feel as though they are pawns cast about to achieve instrumental school goals.

Collaborative decision-making gives ownership to everyone involved. Decisions made by a group are more likely to be followed by everyone, even when some are not in agreement. Collaborative decisions make staff feel valued and respected and help build the principal-staff relationship.

The principal who is a true instructional leader is not afraid to share with teachers the process for making an effective school. The principal does not give up the responsibility for leadership. An instructional leader recognizes the professionalism and expertise of teaching, gives teachers their wings, and allows them to soar to heights they never imagined. (Terry, 1999, p. 30)

However, not all decisions warrant group involvement. In some cases the staff needs to understand the decision made must be followed whether they agree
with it or not. We will work as a team in the decision making process and in the implementation of any decision as well. Seek input on decisions that necessitate it, but for others it may just be the principal’s call. The teacher-principal relationship will demand rules and decisions be followed, but will also invite an opportunity to discuss opposing views at the right time and place.

A relationship built upon mutual respect will allow open dialogue on controversial issues and will lead to any decision being followed. Respect staff by not criticizing them in front of their peers and push them to share their views. They will know that I am always there to talk to whether it is a professional or personal problem, but also when I have made a decision, the expectation is, it will be implemented. In review, this all needs to be done with effective communication. “Everything that happens in a school, whether it be good or bad, happens because of the relationships in the school” (Mary VerPloeg’s Personal Communication, Fall, 2002).

Student Relationships

The relationships the adults in the school build with students are the most important part of school climate. The effect one single adult relationship can have on a student may never be adequately measured, but for the students who are touched by a caring adult, nothing else really matters.

Student-teacher relationships. The relationships teachers have with their students influence how they run their classroom. Teachers with understanding
and respectful relationships run a class much more democratic in the decision-making process. Students take ownership in decisions when they are actively involved in making the decision. "Allow students to help make rules and solve problems together they are not only becoming a stakeholder in the decision, but also are practicing a democratic form of leadership" (Cohen, 1999, p. 96).

One of the most interesting facts Cohen (1999) points out is "the extent to which students perceive teachers as caring is found to be predictive of motivational outcomes..." (pp. 17-18). When students believe teachers care about them their motivation increases. If we believe and expect students will succeed and care when they do and when they do not, they are more likely to succeed. Absolutely amazing! The following dialogue between Ladson-Billings (1997) and a group of students who when asked "Why they liked social studies?" offers some more insight into the power of caring relationships.

"The teacher!” they responded in unison.

“What do you like about the teacher?” I probed

“She listens to us.”

“She respects us.”

“She lets us express our opinions.”

“She looks us in the eye when she talks to us!”

“She smiles at us!”

“She speaks to us when she sees us in the hall or in the cafeteria” (p. 68).
What an effect a great relationship can have on students and one key to
that great relationship is effective communication.

Trusting relationships allow the mind to relax and be primed for learning.
“"I learned from these young people that when students feel safe, when they feel
respect from both their peers and their teachers, and when they trust the people
around them, they become free to learn” (Greeley, 2000, p. xiii). The relationship
is so critical in all of this.

Student-principal relationships. Students will know the principal’s office
is their office. I want them to come to me when they have major concerns or
problems. Continuous effort will be given for me to get out and about. I will not
be the unapproachable principal who lives in his office and does nothing to foster
caring, productive relationships. “We must recognize that students will learn
most effectively in an atmosphere in which they feel safe and do not fear being
ridiculed or humiliated” (Cohen, 2001, p. 65).

All humans have the need to belong. I will help meet that need with the
students in the building by seeking input from students and expecting them to
help make certain decisions.

I love to provide a structure for children. The school is ours. Students can
embrace this notion. Not in a school of two thousand, but they can in a school of
three hundred. I want to work with students and meet and greet them in the hall
each day. I want them to feel as though they belong here. “Students are more
likely to thrive when they are in school environments in which they feel they belong and are comfortable, in which they feel appreciated by teachers” (Cohen, 2001, p. 65).

**Ethical Leadership**

I believe this facet of leadership is the most important. All decisions, the vision of the district, or the organization of the building, are ethical issues. For that reason ethical leadership is not one dimension of effective leadership, it is the essence of effective leadership. “Real leaders concentrate on doing the right thing, not on doing things right” (Lashway, 1996, p. 1).

Ethics must be brought into the decision-making process. A code of ethics is a way of monitoring actions and decisions. Without ethics, straight paths turn into a thousand winding roads and decisions become ambiguous. Decisions become hard because as Lashway (1996) recognizes, school leaders have ties and connections to so many different people who have enumerable different values for which they are competing which creates “an ethical dilemma” (p. 2). The choice is not between wrong and right, it is a choice between two rights. This only heightens the dilemma.

**Personal Ethics**

Using my own ethical code and enforcing the principles in which I believe bring with it the courage to accept the consequences of my actions. Faltering from personal beliefs merely because of the consequences is unethical. If beliefs
change due to the consequences, then personal credibility is being compromised for the easy way out. By holding strong to my values and beliefs I will maintain credibility. These tips will help me conduct myself in an ethical manner:

First leaders should have and be willing to act on a definite sense of ethical standards. Second, leaders can examine dilemmas from different perspectives. Third, leaders can often reframe ethical issues. Finally, leaders should have the habit of conscious reflection, wherever it may lead them. (Lashway, 1996, p. 3)

**Professional Ethics**

Educational leaders need to conduct themselves with a professional code of ethics. As professionals we must respect fellow staff members' and students' right to privacy. In one of my past experiences, a fellow staff member was telling students about other students' problems. The breaking of this professional code caused unneeded problems. Teachers were upset that students uninvolved in the problem were being made aware of the situation from informed staff members. A professional code of ethics had been broken.

Respected administrators have a professional code of ethics. As I reflect upon my past experiences and who I admire, individuals who conducted themselves with an ethical code rise to the top. It could be sensed in the building and in the classroom. They meant what they said and followed through with what they believed.
My leadership will focus on being ethical. Being fair and consistent with rules and in my dealings with others will help ethical leadership become a reality. Students and staff alike want to be treated fairly and have policies enforced evenly and consistently. When students and staff see my handling of situations, hopefully, they will come to me with their problems or concerns involving the system. I take pride in keeping my word and standing behind my beliefs.

I will lead by example. Lashway (1996) states, “Moral leadership begins with moral leaders” (p. 4). Howard Gardner (as cited by Lashway, 1996) says of great leaders “that they embody the message they advocate; they teach, not just through words, but through actions” (p. 4). Ethical leaders cannot be hypocritical. They must rely upon their ethics consistently.

In simplest terms, stewardship asks leaders to acknowledge their own human faults and limitations rather than hiding behind their status and power. Ethical behavior is not something that can be held in reserve for momentous issues; it must be a constant companion. (Lashway, 1996, p. 4)

Lashway (1996) simplifies it. Even though the leader’s role is complex and varied, it is based more on human integrity than on technical expertise. The combination of being fair, credible, and enthusiastic has an awesome contagious quality to it. It is my ethical leadership vision.
Finally, in Dr. Else’s class (Personal Communications, Summer, 2002) he gave us these nine tips to aid us in walking the ethical line.

1) Seek feedback from an ethical person
2) Gather information from all viewpoints
3) Evaluate yourself, do not assume you will do the right thing
4) Have other options available so you may leave if necessary
5) Ends and means rarely connected, how we live is what we become
6) Learn how to forgive, do not need to forget, but forgive
7) Use humor to help keep things in perspective
8) Use your ethical imagination to determine how things should be
9) Focus on hope! You can focus on what you choose to, focus on the positive!

Most of these nine helpful hints can be related in some way to being fair, credible, and enthusiastic.

Summary

Effective educational leadership entails many aspects. Being an effective communicator and an instructional leader are two major keys. In addition a principal must create a positive learning environment, foster relationships, and lead ethically.

Leading instructional practices in a school is the best way to enable the school to reach excellence. An instructional leader affects all students in the
building by influencing instruction in each classroom and working as the change agent.

I will allow my ethical beliefs to define my leadership, but will accept input and advice from all stakeholders. No matter the circumstance a leader must communicate effectively and foster relationships with people and organizations both inside and outside of the school.

Students learn best in a climate in which they feel safe and respected. I will create a positive learning climate through organization, keeping the building clean, and by creating a positive tone. Lead by example to alter the climate of a building: Be overcome with enthusiasm and a love for learning and it will spread through the halls.
References


