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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

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A preferred vision for administering elementary schools : a reflective essay

Abstract

To take on the role as a leader in education will not be an easy task. Administrators will be held to high standards in visionary, instructional, organizational, ethical, political, and collaborative leadership. In order to meet and/or exceed these standards I will depend on my skills in building positive relationships with all people and taking the right steps to build a school with a reputation of excellence.

A PREFERRED VISION FOR ADMINISTERING ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

**The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling,
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by

Amy Josephine Moine

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Today's aspiring principals must take a deep and honest look inside themselves to decide how they can best lead the education of our future generations in a fast paced world full of constant change and confusion. I have taken a deep and honest look at the chaos of my life to better define my beliefs in six areas of educational leadership. Those six areas are: visionary, instructional, ethical, collaborative, political, and organizational leadership.

“Order comes from chaos. When we pass through dark times we let go and come out calmer and with a greater sense of purpose. New levels of order can be reached, but only if we are willing” (McCarey, 1994). As I look back on my life, I have asked myself, “How did I get to this point?” My past experiences have become more clearly defined for me since I read the book and listened to the motivational tape of the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey. Mr. Covey speaks a lot about paradigm shifts and character in his teachings. I feel the most powerful part of Mr. Covey's presentation is his reference to, Mr. Frankl's book, Man's Search for Meaning. Mr. Frankl's “logo therapy” theory claims, “If you have a ‘why’, you can live with any ‘what’ or any ‘how’.” I believe “The highest value of a person is how that person deals with suffering and difficult circumstances. That is where their greatest influence with others is” (Covey, 1989).

Throughout our lives we are all faced with adversity. I believe effective leaders are people who take what they were born with and work to develop their strengths. These people choose the right pivotal people to influence them. They make the right decisions, based on their personal visions, and they choose to focus on the defining

moments of their lives that have a positive impact on their self-efficacy. All of these choices create opportunities for these people to develop further as effective leaders. These leaders know themselves, have little fear, and communicate a strong vision of their personal future. I think people who overcome adversity are seen as leaders because they respond to adversity instead of reacting to it. "In order to change our behavior we must first change our paradigms" (Covey, 1989).

I have heard the expression, "Why do such bad things happen to such good people," said in reference to me many times. I treasure my childhood on the farm and adore my family, but I also come from roots of family alcoholism and depression. However, these adversities have actually been blessings in my eyes because they have been pushing me out of my comfort zone for years. I have gained some valuable insight from my past experiences.

I remember asking the question, "Why is this happening to me?" during my teen years as I endured each crisis with nasty or jealous friends. I remember asking the question again when I graduated from college in 1991 with leadership honors but couldn't find anyone to hire me. I asked why again when I struggled in my first job as a sales person trying to sell an intangible item, self-confidence. Then, I faced my biggest fear of all, the death of one of my own children. Once again, I asked "Why?" Each time I asked myself the rhetorical "why" question, I helped myself cope by giving myself the same answer. There is a reason for all of this. I am being prepared for something important and someday I will know. I have overcome each of those times of chaotic darkness, and each time I have arrived to a higher sense of order. I now feel calm and have a more passionate and deeper sense of purpose. Fear is no longer a factor in my life.

I realize now that I had established a pattern during each of my difficult times in life. I have always had this powerful connection with children. They are drawn to me and I am drawn to them. During each of my dark times I surrounded myself with children. During my family's struggle with alcoholism and my teen crisis years I spent countless hours with my six nieces and nephews. I remember everything about them up until I left for college. They were my saving grace. Everything they did made me happy and I forgot about the world. That still happens each day when I walk into my school. All I can think about is the children. They love and forgive unconditionally, and all they want is love in return. Children have the special ability to live in the present. They wear their attitudes on their sleeve. Children are a lot of fun because they find excitement and newness in every experience.

After college, when I struggled to get a job for six months, it was the kids with whom I babysat and my nieces and nephews who kept my self esteem in tact. When I got depressed because I couldn't make a sale in my first six months of employment I found myself driving by schools just to hear kids laughing. Soon I found the courage to ask if I could visit the neighboring school once a week just so I had the energy to be rejected by CEOs in my sales efforts the rest of the day. It has taken a long time for me to acquire my philosophy of what it means to be an educational leader, and I know I am not finished in my journey of growth. I have come to live with the "what's" and the "how's" of my life, even though I don't have a clear cut "why" for all the adversities. I have learned to accept my chaos so a new and higher level of order can be attained. "We need to accept chaos as a catalyst that renews and reorganizes us" (McCarey, 1994).

Because I am willing, I have created my own “whys” in my search for meaning. I have been preparing all of my life for something bigger than myself, and I am finally ready to become a school leader. I have decided that if educators can give the public concrete evidence of the “why’s” of education then the public will accept the “what’s” and “how’s” of educational practices. We are experiencing adversity in education. There is reason for concern, but I also feel there is reason to be excited about the opportunities we have in front of us to make education better for our children. How I, and all educational leaders deal with these difficult circumstances will influence the future of education.

Ethical Leadership

I believe an ethical leader is a person who has taken whatever life deals them and has overcome adversity to achieve a higher standard of living. As a result of overcoming adversity, the ethical leader inspires others to reach down deep and push themselves to higher levels of achievement. An ethical leader always has everyone’s best interests in mind. They are sincere, honest, logical, and credible in their decision-making.

Leadership is defined differently by all people, according to their perspective and the stage they are in at the present time in their life (Paterson, 1993). I have found that my leadership style is to build on the strengths of the people around me. By bringing out the best in others, the whole organization has an atmosphere of shared vision and trust, which creates high productivity. I have found that a deep understanding of others stems from a deep understanding of myself. The ability to relate to others breaks down communication barriers and builds trust. Effective collaboration to accomplish goals is the result.

In 1992 I was helping teach a Dale Carnegie course in Minneapolis, Minnesota. I had a man from Northwest Airlines in my class. For confidentiality purposes I will name him Tom. He was a department manager and was taking the Dale Carnegie course because his health was deteriorating due to stress on the job. Tom's boss wanted him to be more effective in leading his team. Tom was a strong looking man that stood almost six and one half feet tall, and had a booming voice. He was very knowledgeable about airplanes and was put in his position because of his knowledge and thirty years of expertise in that department. During the third week of class we spent time setting goals. Tom's goal was to make his workers perform better. He reported that their attitudes were terrible and he always had to get after them to get work done. He said he had done all the right things. He felt he had trained them well and they had plenty of knowledge. Sometimes he would eat lunch with them, and he knew all of their names. Tom ended his talk with, "They should be in this class, not me. They need to change their attitudes." Tom was to report on the progress of his goal to have more productive employees nine weeks later.

Six weeks later during the third to the last session, each class member was assigned to give a talk that appealed to our emotions. Tom waited until last to speak. He began by telling us how he did not want to be there that night because wishy-washy things were not his style. He continued by telling about the experience of holding his first grandchild in the delivery room. We all saw him soften right before our eyes. He shared with us his feelings about that night's session and told us that his opinions about his classmates had changed because of the riveting talks some classmates had shared about personal triumphs and tragedies. He was touched, had gained respect, and saw

things in those people which he had never seen before. That evening, by vote of the class, he received the achievement award for "Breaking Through."

On graduation night Tom gave his final talk and reported on the progress of his goal to have more productive employees. He reported that he showed his subordinates the award he had received for "Breaking Through." They asked him what he did to get it, so he shared his story with them. The next day some of the members of this crew brought in their children's pictures and shared some stories with him at lunch. He even found out one crew member of twelve years had a child with serious health problems.

At the end of his talk, Tom looked me straight in the eyes from across the room and announced, "They changed! I did it!" We all laughed as I asked, "Who did the changing?" He gave me a puzzled look and, after a long pause, quietly said, "I did???" Tom received a standing ovation! He had figured it out. This strong man had most of the traits that I believe make a good leader. But, he couldn't affect others positively until he showed some sincere interest in his crew as people. When he looked at them as people he saw minds, hearts, souls, and talent. His crew felt that and responded positively.

I have learned if I walk my talk, people will know what I stand for and others will trust me more readily. "Do what you feel in your heart to be right –for you will be criticized anyway; Eleanor Roosevelt" (Carnegie Institute, 1984). An ethical leader is not flawless. They are human, can admit when they are wrong, and always treat others in a humane way. I think some people believe that a leader has to be cut-throat, tough, un-feeling, critical and analytical to be considered a strong leader. I believe a leader is a person who lives life and values other people. I believe a leader with a vision and passion for that vision is unstoppable. In the book, Leading with Soul, Lee Bohlman and

Terrence Deal raise the question about whether our society's movement towards convenience and technology is causing the demise of our nation's spirit and morality.

We walk a fine line today between doing what it expected and progressive in comparison to what is ethically right.

Ethical leaders practice their values with conviction. I have learned that leadership is a journey.

When a person leads they provide gifts to those whom they lead. Leaders love by being caring and compassionate. Leaders empower others by teaching autonomy and influence. Leaders instill authorship by supporting accomplishments and craftsmanship. Leaders make others feel significant by helping others know why they are worthwhile. Leaders inspire. Once I have progressed through the journey it will be up to me to teach others to lead with soul (Bohlman, 1995, p. 65).

“When dealing with people, let us remember we are not dealing with creatures of logic. We are dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bustling with prejudices and motivated by pride and vanity; Dale Carnegie” (Carnegie Institute, 1984, p 23). I believe ethical leadership is mostly about relationships. The most important relationship is the ethical relationship we have with ourselves. I believe leaders that spend time developing and defining themselves first are more effective at truly concentrating on their relationships with others. I will lead by developing myself and nurturing my relationships with others. I will lead through example, by taking risks, and by communicating the vision. I will live with passion and create guiding experiences for young people to develop their cognitive and emotional abilities. I want those whom I impact to have the courage and passion to be their authentic selves and to follow their dreams. My experience as a Dale Carnegie instructor has impacted my whole interpretation of life, human interaction, and myself. “If half a century of living has

taught me anything as all, it has taught me that nothing can bring you peace but yourself; Dale Carnegie” (Carnegie Institute, 1984, p. 26). It is the Dale Carnegie philosophy and the values I learned from my own family that I will take into any leadership position I attain. I will think with my head but lead with my heart.

Visionary Leadership

I equate the process of vision development to looking at the popular three dimensional pictures that require our eyes to stare for long periods of time until our mindset shifts from what is plain to see on the surface enough to recognize the hidden three dimensional picture within. When people finally see the hidden picture they get excited and call others over to participate. Soon, a large group is involved in forcing their minds to adapt and see the hidden picture. The most important members in the group are the individuals that keep encouraging the other members that can't see the three dimensional picture to try new strategies like blurring their eyes or looking at the picture from a different angle. Another important person is the one that won't give up trying. They may even buy the picture just so they can practice at their own pace. They know what they are supposed to see. They just have to practice using their eyes and mind together in a different way.

Think excitement, talk excitement, act out excitement, and you are bound to become an excited person. Life will take on a new zest, deeper interest and greater meaning. You can think, talk and act yourself into dullness or into monotony or into unhappiness. By the same process you can build up inspiration, excitement and a surging depth of joy; Norman Vincent Peale (Carnegie Institute, 1984, p.16).

The process of making a vision a reality is like following a diet. I am intrigued by the success of the Weight Watchers organization. They are visionaries in their philosophy. I see many parallels between Weight Watchers and Mr. Covey's Seven

Habits of Highly Effective People. Each of the participants begins the program with their ideal look in mind. Then the participants set goals, document their progress, and are held accountable to their goals on a weekly basis. All decisions of food intake are based on the person's individual plan to reach his or her ideal vision of weight. Once the goal is achieved, a new way of life begins for that participant and the whole person becomes transformed. However, if the passion for the vision isn't there, the vision gets lost in distractions. If the individual stops being accountable, the old habits and dreaded weight not only come back, but often increases. Thus, the desired outcome is pushed further away. As a result, the fear of more failure becomes the major obstacle for accomplishing the vision.

A vision is not something imposed by a leader. It is not something canned, but something that evolves through collaboration (McCarey, 1994). In order to make a vision a reality, the visionary leader needs to attend to the following criteria so all stakeholders find meaning and build ownership and passion to fuel the vision's success. The visionary leader needs to be knowledgeable of how the past may influence the new vision and communicate how the new vision can positively impact the future for all those involved, so fear is diminished. Measurable and specific goals for the vision need to be set according to a timetable. The process for the vision needs to be monitored on a regular basis and then communicated. Lastly, as accomplishments are made, the people involved need to be recognized, rewarded, and publicly celebrated.

This visionary process worked well for Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois. The superintendent and teachers implemented their plan for gaining higher achievement scores and increased their scores dramatically. Adlai

Stevenson High School's A to B grade average rose 24% in ten years. The school's ACT composite scores rose 2% in ten years, and the advanced placement program grew from 162 students to 1,375 students in ten years. The teachers of Adlai Stevenson High communicated through collaborative teams that were held to a timetable for the goals they had set specifically for their teams, and the results were measurable. Once they maintained this part of their vision for higher student achievement they began the whole process again in other areas designated for improvement (Schmoker, 2001).

Superintendent DuFour, of Lincolnshire, Illinois always publicly recognized those people who contributed to the success of any program. "Recognition for a job well done is the top motivator of employee performance" (Schmoker, 2001, p.15).

An administrator recently told me "You have to know what you believe in or people will push you around." I see a visionary leader as one who believes in themselves yet, is a public servant. When I visualize what it will be like to lead a school, I see a school that is upbeat and progressive where members of my team are supportive of each other and working to be leaders themselves. I see students who love coming to school and know their purpose for being there. I see teachers enjoying teaching and students excited about their learning. I see a community that is proud of their school and is very supportive and loyal to the school program, the staff, and my leadership. I see collaboration and trust between staff and community. Lastly, I see myself as the facilitator for creating the community that builds and inspires future leaders.

Collaborative Leadership

I believe collaboration is the best way to reach goals and make the vision a reality.

I do believe it takes a village to raise a child, and I believe some of the most valuable resources a school has are volunteers, parents, and community partnership programs.

Schools should be the center of the community and become accessible to the public and public activities should always include the school system in some way... For the future, a large challenge will be to gain support from community members especially in communities that depend on tax votes for school funding. More and more people are having fewer children in the school system. Therefore, they will not vote to support the school unless we keep them involved and give them access to our schools (Brent, 2000, p. 36).

Volunteers are an important link from school to the public. One study in Principal 2000 surveyed fifty-seven principals. Ninety-seven percent of the principals agreed that volunteers helped improve the school climate and that students looked forward to working with these volunteers. Nearly all the principals in the study stated that volunteers improved the school's relationship with the community. The volunteers were also interviewed and 90% of them said they had greater respect for the teachers and that volunteering helped them understand the schools better (Brent, 2000).

In Waverly Iowa, Superintendent Dr. Slessor, described a mentoring program that a Rotary Club member initiated in the late 1990's. The program has become so powerful and has involved so many people that it has decreased drop out rates and helped open new doors for financial support from the community. In Charles City, Iowa we have a "Foster Grandparent Program" that has become influential in many ways, especially since a majority of our voting population is over age sixty.

In the 2001-2002 school year when the state budget made major cuts, our parent organization organized the fundraising that would allow our students to go on field trips. When our school board announced they would be cutting elementary teaching positions,

parents came to the board meeting so they could help convince the board to rethink their intentions. Volunteers are the most powerful links to the community.

Teachers need to collaborate with each other, and also with administrators and the community. This collaboration will build positive relationships with our students, parents, and community so when we are facing difficult decisions we can all support each other.

Instructional Leadership

I recently asked my administrator how he spends most of his time during the day. He responded, "Putting out fires and taking care of paperwork takes up most of my time" (L. Mulford, personal communication, September 2002). I asked him to share with me what instructional leadership meant to him. He responded, "I want to be more of an instructional leader, but the reality is that these other things have deadlines and some things just have to get done. If I don't do them, who will?" (L. Mulford, personal communication, September 2002).

To truly create reform and raise the quality of our schools we need to do two things; (1) Recruit the best teachers; (2) Support and improve all teachers' teaching skills by being present in the classroom and providing opportunities and guidance for improvement. I believe the top priority of an administrator is to be an instructional leader with more time spent working on instructional issues and less time managing papers. To truly be an instructional leader some of the other managerial duties may need delegating. This is a major paradigm shift and means redefining the role of the administrator.

Today's principal must be a manager, instructional leader, visionary, politician, strategist, community leader...and if that isn't enough to ask principals to fulfill those roles, the new "No Child Left Behind" legislation places the responsibility for raising achievement levels for all students squarely on their shoulders...In

October 2000 the Institute for Educational Leadership shared models of distributed leadership, freeing principals to spend more time on teaching and learning, such as shared principalships and developing teacher leaders...Creative use of Title I funds could help or hire outside the school for people to oversee playground and other duties. Often suggestions such as these are not seriously considered (Kennedy, 2002, p. 28).

I believe we need to reshape the duties of the principal and share the role of educational leadership with more teachers who are willing and qualified. What better way is there to empower an organization? If we truly want to increase our learning scores then the instructional leader needs to be spending their time in what Mr. Covey presents in his audio presentation as domain two, "Action that is not urgent but very important to the mission, values, and goals of the organization." If the instructional leaders could spend their time in domain two they could delegate some of the responsibilities of domain one, "Action that is urgent and important." The difference between domain one and two is that domain one requires "reactive" leadership, putting out fires, while domain two requires "proactive" leadership, thoughtful planning and implementation of quality programs. If we allow leaders to lead in domain two, which requires time, then we can lessen the "urgent fires" of domain one. "The challenge to managing time is managing one's self. If we can gain control of time and events as to how they relate to the mission then we are managing our time effectively" (Covey, 1989).

An instructional leader needs to model lifetime learning so they can facilitate and provide more meaningful professional development for others in the organization. Professional development should be based on data that identifies specific needs of the district. Then professional development goals should be set around those specific needs. The instructional leader needs to keep the stakeholders focused, committed and accountable. The leader needs to provide time to discuss how or if goals are being met

and facilitate ways to improve the process. Most importantly the instructional leader needs to help set aside time for teachers to plan, collaborate and reflect.

When schools formalize collaboration and align it with their specific needs it then receives the priority that it deserves. If we think that 'consulting the research' will tell us everything we need to know about how to address standards and skills in areas where kids persistently struggle, we are naïve. Teacher tested, locally proven lessons and strategies are every bit as legitimate – maybe more- than published research. Both are important. An effective proven lesson is a precious thing. If we want to multiply rather than squander teacher expertise, we should be maintaining organized, accessible files of our best lessons at every school and in every district. It is not complicated. When Cherie Kobler's physics team found a faster, more effective way to teach the concept of "Why the Sky is blue," they realized they had something valuable. (75% more students had learned the concept.) So they kept a record along with results and notes that would enable a new teacher to see all the steps to teach the lesson successfully (Schmoker, 2001, p. 11).

If instructional leaders don't provide time for planning, communicating, collaborating, and reflection then everyone will resort to teaching to the middle, avoid accountability, go back to old comfortable habits and develop a negative attitude toward trying new teaching strategies. As a result the vision is lost and so are the children.

First year teachers have problems transitioning from student to teacher. New teachers have many obstacles. They are learning the curriculum, may not have the support they need and have trouble knowing how to adapt their lessons to be successful in meeting the needs of all learning levels. The result: Once a new teacher has their own classroom they resort to teaching to the middle (Holloway, 2000, p. 1).

Our schools need to have support systems in place to support and keep these quality teachers happy in their positions. I believe it is beneficial for instructional leaders to have mentorships in place to help new teachers make the transition from student to teacher.

Educators can make or break a child's day, and ultimately impact their child's future. The power of teaching is ongoing whether it is positive or negative. A difference is made when an individual teacher closes their door and connects with students. To ensure that teachers are supportive of all students we must create

professional, safe, secure and encouraging environments where everyone feels appreciated, listened to and respected. The role of the administrator is the crucial element in determining morale and climate at any given school (Connors, 2000, p.12).

I envision myself as an instructional leader. When hiring teachers I will provide clear expectations for teaching and learning and will communicate my expectations on a regular basis. I believe in teaming new teachers with experienced teachers who are proficient in teaching and adapting to accommodate all learning levels. These are natural ways for teachers to build leadership skills while developing exemplary skills for instruction. However, the mentors will also need to be compensated and given time to collaborate. I see myself updating staff constantly on new trends, laws, programs, and resources. I see myself going into the classrooms of my teachers and providing them input or coaching them on best practices in teaching. As an instructional leader I won't have all the answers, but I will know where I can go to get the answers. If we truly want educational reform, I believe we need to redefine the role of an administrator. "In building a school culture, what the leader does on a daily basis becomes the most important thing in that school" (Dr. D. Else, personal communication, June 2001). I want to focus on making sure our students are receiving an excellent education through excellent instruction each day.

Organizational Leadership

I believe an effective organizational leader is one who is able to acquire the right people for their team and then makes every effort to really know the interests, fears, strengths and weaknesses of each team member so the strengths of each person are used for the good of the organization. On September 15, 2002 a friend whom I admire greatly asked me where I get my energy. My answer was that I get my energy by surrounding

myself with great people who are positive thinkers, smart, visionary, supportive, and share my same values. I believe people with similar values are drawn to one another. I believe when a person surrounds themselves with the right mix of people everyone tends to pull the best out of each other. The ability to find the right people requires the leader to know him or herself well and be willing to truly tune into their teammates. My friend explained to me the reason for his question. "I always like to ask that question in interviews. The answer the person gives me tells me a lot about them" (Dr. G. Reed, personal communication, September 2002). After reflecting on our conversation, I realize I am energized by the possibilities that arise when you align good people with good ideas.

In building a strong organization, I believe two criteria are the most important. They are recruiting the best teachers and retaining the best teachers. I look at hiring and retaining quality teachers as being similar to a sales position especially in a small rural community in Iowa. Since most worthy candidates will be single and young, it is my job to market our school district so teachers will not only teach there, but also build their lives there. In an effort to attract more exemplary candidates, it will be my job to work with the community as well as the school district to make the lifestyle one that is appealing to the candidates. It is equally important that the district and its operations are exemplary so candidates will know they are teaching in an excellent school district.

Across the nation schools are trying to take steps to attract quality teachers and keep them. Some of the incentives used to attract teachers include signing bonuses. Are these incentives sending the right message? As a leader I will look for teachers who are knowledgeable and committed to children. Another trend in hiring teachers is providing

training to people in other professions who may make good teachers. In some states trainees receive a substitute's pay while they are attending teacher preparation training before receiving teacher licensure (Rasmussen, 1999). Another program is a cadet-teaching program for high school kids to see if teaching is an interest.

The incentive I believe would be most effective is the idea of trying to create more leadership opportunities in education for teachers in addition to getting an advanced degree and becoming a principal (Rasmussen, 1999). Providing additional teacher-leader opportunities allows quality teachers to keep teaching, while fulfilling their leadership aspirations. I don't know many teachers who get into teaching because they want to be an administrator. I also don't think money is always the almighty motivator. I think the perception of having power over how one's day will be spent and living one's own way of life is the motivator. I think teachers want to teach with the reassurance of knowing there are opportunities to advance in their profession while earning the respect they deserve and living their lives to the fullest.

In the past, the leaders with power and influence had a lot of money (Coontz, 1977). The leader's role during the years of the industrial revolution was to take care of the workers (Patterson, 1993). The workers became dependent upon the leader in many ways. No one knew another way to live. The leader was all-powerful and all-knowing. The workers had limited knowledge and accepted their position as subordinates to the leaders.

Today, a leader won't have the positional power role long if they think they are all-knowing and that everyone should depend on them (Patterson, 1993). Life and technology are changing too fast. Education has become available to everyone today.

The workers and teachers of today and tomorrow are independent thinkers who come with expectations of becoming valuable members of a team and aspirations to be team leaders some day. Leaders need to be able to understand people and have the ability to identify, harness, and direct the talent of those they lead. They have to be able to find the individuals who want to aspire to be future leaders and then coach them all on to the victories of achieving goals.

Leadership is “relationship building.” A leader can influence others to achieve mutual goals. A leader is a visionary, has charisma, organizational skills and listens well. Patterson also shares that leaders are, at times, followers. So there is a paradigm shift. A leader can open up the organization through stakeholder participation, honoring diversity, and allowing conflicts to happen on an open level. Then time can be spent to resolve the conflicts. The leader allows time for reflection and is up front about mistakes (Patterson, 1993).

“The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done, and self restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it; Theodore Roosevelt” (Carnegie Institute, 1984, p. 22). I believe the success of an organization is found in recruiting the right people, engaging in effective communication, empowering the members of the organization and developing leaders.

Teachers are extraordinary resources that outstanding leaders recognize and acknowledge as vital components of successful schools. They are solution finders, provide feedback, spread the good word, and share their talents for the benefit of children... Teachers are the gold collar workers of the universe (Connors, 2000, p.13).

In leading a school organization I envision myself searching for and acquiring excellence. I envision myself as a leader who will create a nurturing culture and identify

talents, and ultimately capitalizing on those unique talents. I want to be an administrator who makes it a priority to treat teachers with respect, recognize invaluable contributions and realize teachers are the best allies. Then I will see great things happen. I hold students, teachers, and education in the highest esteem. If I treat the teachers well the children will flourish.

Political Leadership

I have struggled with my thoughts on politics and I have come to the conclusion that political leaders are not knowledgeable about education, yet they are a vital influence on the path that education takes. Schools are publicly funded. Unfortunately, politics is part of the reason it is hard to make transformation in schools a smooth process. I believe the political leader needs to be knowledgeable of the laws and current issues in the legislature and then communicate this knowledge to all stakeholders. I believe the political leader should be active in voicing their concerns and ideas to the legislature. I also believe that we can't always control what the government does, but we need to continue to work in maintaining control of our local school districts by being out in the public and working with the community as an advocate of our school.

What is it about the lives of teachers and the cultures of schools, which makes changing what happens in classrooms so difficult? Teacher tension issues of acceptance stifle reform. Administration and their decisions can stifle reform. The legislature and their 'shooting from the hip' policies can break down reform. Reform is about people making up their own minds to change, and change is slow over time, bit by bit (Newman, 1998, p. 1).

As a political leader I will communicate my knowledge and work toward relationships that will help influence political decisions. I refuse to take the position of victim to political agendas. I will be a public cheerleader for our school and work hard to

tap into public grants that are available. I will encourage teachers and administrators to be members of their associations so we can support education lobbyists at the state and federal levels. Lastly I will pray for God to grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change on a large scale, the courage to change the things I can at the local level, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Conclusion

To take on the role as a leader in education will not be an easy task.

Administrators will be held to high standards in visionary, instructional, organizational, ethical, political, and collaborative leadership. In order to meet and/or exceed these standards I will depend on my skills in building positive relationships with all people and taking the right steps to build a school with a reputation of excellence.

I have always been fascinated by what makes a business successful to the point of name recognition. I drove by a Maid-Rite on my way home the other night. The store itself was probably less than 800 square feet, but it looked sharp and had a good location in town. It reminded me of a popular Maid-Rite in Marion, Iowa off 1st Avenue. It was my brother's favorite eating-place when he was in sales for Purina back in the 1980's. He kept telling me he had to take me there because I would love it. One day I went with him on sales calls and we had lunch at Maid-Rite. A man and his wife ran it with their three daughters as the waitresses. At first, I thought my brother only liked it because these three "waitress daughters" were so good looking. They were smiling and laughing with the customers. I remember we had to stand the whole time because the place was packed, but we didn't mind. It wasn't long before I realized there was more to this place than the friendly and pretty daughters that were the waitresses. The father/owner came

out from behind the counter and was mingling with the customers, giving them seconds and laughing with a booming laugh. The place was buzzing. Then the father yelled at my brother and told him to quit looking at his girls and making them smile! The people all laughed and teased my brother as the owner reminded everyone humorously to leave big tips so his girls could go to college. The whole family who worked there came over to meet me because they knew my brother so well. Then they took us back to the kitchen so that we would have a place to sit and eat our sandwiches. We didn't want to leave. Later that day my brother had so much more enthusiasm on his sales calls. I had never seen him so confident. I realized the atmosphere at the Maid-Rite had made a positive impact on my brother's productivity. Every time I drove by that Maid-Rite after that day I would see people lined up in the streets and I would automatically smile. This restaurant owner had found the secret to building a world-class organization. He had created a loving and secure place where your enthusiasm and spirit were renewed.

Our cohort recently watched a video entitled, In Search of Excellence, in our leadership class. Four things stuck out in my mind when watching this video. Recruiting the right people is vital for an organization to move more smoothly, quickly and successfully towards their vision. The power of enthusiasm and commitment to a vision develops passion and belief that the vision can be reached. Developing pride in the organization for each other and a common purpose provides a top-notch first impression. Finally, celebrating each other's achievements and reaching the goals of the organization builds momentum and starts to penetrate other areas of the organization and the lives of those involved.

The organizations of Walt Disney and Apple had stringent requirements in their recruiting. I actually went through the interview process for Disney when I was in college. I was amazed at how selective they were. You had to be a perfect match. It sounds a little like discrimination, but no one fights it. People understand because it is Disney. It is a magical world with magical people. Recruiting the right people is part of their key to success, and the pride they establish by not letting out the secrets of the characters is unbelievable.

Steve Jobs, of the Apple Corporation, states in the video, In Search for Excellence, that he used recruitment and enthusiasm to lead his company to success. He really believed in his product and he really believed he had the best people. As a result, he believed that his company could do anything, and his people did too. They created things they had never even considered before. He was able to align a group of the right people so they would pull the best from each other. Mr. Jobs didn't look for the expert gurus in the field. He went to his own front line and found their talents and capitalized on them to become a world icon in technology. In the same video Mr. Jobs states, "The best managers are the ones that don't try to be the leader but become the leader because of their knowledge and the fact that they still want to be part of the team" (Peters, 1985).

I love the fact that McDonalds has become as American as apple pie and baseball. They do some hokey things with their employees, but the employees jump right in because it is all in the quest to create that pride. McDonalds is quality, consistency and supports America. Not only that, but McDonalds is one of the first and few franchises that has prospered globally. My brother conducts the process of setting up McDonalds franchises and factories all around the world and is amazed every day by the respect and

name recognition that McDonalds has. When people of China, Taiwan, and now Russia think of Americans, they always think McDonalds. That is their first impression of the United States. There is a lot of pride in being known for that. The McDonald's corporation has developed pride in their company, employees and customers. They celebrate their business and employee accomplishments and that pride has spread throughout the world. These organizations all create a desired atmosphere that penetrates our drudgery and changes our outlook on our day. It is a process of getting the mind to act so the body will react or vice versa.

The selling point of our schools will be the atmosphere that is felt as people come through our doors. Recruiting the right people to teach is critical to student achievement. I want the cream of the crop teachers teaching with me and I am not afraid to recruit them. They are our front-line to our precious product and customer.

The other night an old friend asked me to attend his sales meetings he was holding to see if I had any suggestions. He was so fired up about his product because he was invested and was seeing great results. Everyone wanted to buy his product by the end of the meeting. I feel the reason they all wanted to buy had more to do with his belief and enthusiasm than the actual qualities of his product. My friend is a lot like the 3M company when they took the risk of pursuing the idea of sticky notes. When both my friend and the 3M company focused on believing in their vision, it paid off. What if we all believed in our students and teachers that much? Would they start to believe more in themselves too? How far would they reach then?

We are all going to be sales people as administrators. We have to be tuned into our customers and believe in what we are doing, so we can create that enthusiasm. That

is ninety percent of the sale. The other ten percent is closing the deal. If we show we believe with our hearts and show we have thought things through with our head, then they will believe in us too. We all need to define what we want our “first impression” to be when parents and students enter our school. All of these things are what I feel contribute to the culture we all are trying to achieve at school and in our lives. Just like that great little Maid-Rite I visited back in the 1980’s. Who would have guessed what a great little place it was? It made me want to stop at the Maid-Rite in Cedar Falls on my way home, not because I was hungry for food, but because I was hungry for the atmosphere. I don’t even know if the Maid-Rite in Cedar Falls is any good. But I had a good experience once, so I am willing to give it a try. Nobody wants to go back to a restaurant where they didn’t like the product, mood, or service for the price they paid (Peters, 1985).

We are all in search of excellence. It is all about the people who surround us. The search for excellence is really a search for excellent people. The Apple Company has a little known tradition that the every employee signs the inside of each computer screen (Peters, 1985). Educators have been doing that for years. We sign each of the minds, hearts and souls of every child, parent, and community member we serve. What an honor.

In the dedication of her book, If You Don’t Feed the Teachers, They’ll Eat the Students, Neila Connors describes a beloved administrator. He was a “cheerleader leader.” He fed the teachers’ needs by telling them what they did well. His belief is that confidence is when you feel good, and as a result, you tend to perform well. If you feel badly you tend to perform ineffectively. The more self worth someone has, the more

likely they are to reflect and become determined to improve. The book also defined the qualities of a leader as someone who cares, walks the talk, knows how to handle stress, has good health (mind, body and spirit), thinks logically, and has the ability to have fun. The most important characteristic of a leader is that he or she is someone whom others want to follow. This definition fits my vision for myself as a leader perfectly.

...Upon entering his school, my first thoughts centered on the friendly, warm, and inviting atmosphere. After a day of observations, I asked Guy what his secret was to creating a friendly and inviting climate. Guy replied, ' I have two beliefs. My first is that to be successful you must be a cheerleader leader. You stay on the sidelines and cheer the staff on-appreciating all of their efforts, goodwill, and risk-taking. You don't punish the whole team for the faults of a few. My second belief is if you don't feed the teachers they eat the students. I go above and beyond to make sure the teachers who are doing their jobs-connecting with kids and fulfilling our mission –are rewarded, supported, and applauded.' ...” Guy Bennet was among the best of those principals who could amalgamate teachers of widely varied personalities and backgrounds into what he like to call a family each using God-given talents in making professional contributions to the intellectual and personal growth of students (Connors, 2000, p.8).

Guy's legacy has become my mission statement. For many years I have asked myself the question, "Why are these things happening to me?" My answer to myself is that I am being prepared for something bigger and better than myself. I am a big believer in that things happen for a reason. The time has come when my answers to my questions of purpose have become clear. I don't deal in commodities; I deal with human minds, hearts and souls. I am drawn to people, especially children, and they are drawn to me. It all seems so natural now. Being an educator of children is the most prestigious position a person can hold in their life. I believe every child can learn. We take them all with their chaotic baggage and help each one find order and new levels of understanding life. A hundred years from now the only thing that will matter is that I made a difference in the lives of children and their futures. So I will end with this. Whatever happens, may I

think with my mind, feel with my heart and lead with my soul. To do that is what is best for the children.

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