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## A Research Paper Presented to The Department of Educational Administration and Counseling

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### Abstract

I began to seriously think about teaching as a career during my senior year of high school. Before that, I knew I was going to college, but I had no idea what I was going to study. I was going to play football, and if I learned something along the way that was fine. A knee injury during the third game of my senior year quickly altered any thought of ever playing football again. I knew I wanted to stay around football and figured the only way to do that was to coach. Teaching was going to be the vehicle for me to achieve that goal. I liked history class during high school, so I declared to be a History Major at Iowa State University. Two things that I had not accounted for when I enrolled at Iowa State University was the new foreign language requirement for incoming freshman history majors and the bleak job outlook for social studies teachers. These two concerns made me change my major during my sophomore year to elementary education. The College of Education had no foreign language requirements, the job prospects for a male elementary teacher were unlimited, I could still teach social studies, and I could coach.

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Administration and  
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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

by

Eric C. Wood

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This Research Paper by: Eric C. Wood

Entitled: MY PHILOSOPHY

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Robert H. Decker

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## PHILOSOPHY PAPER

I began to seriously think about teaching as a career during my senior year of high school. Before that, I knew I was going to college, but I had no idea what I was going to study. I was going to play football, and if I learned something along the way that was fine. A knee injury during the third game of my senior year quickly altered any thought of ever playing football again. I knew I wanted to stay around football and figured the only way to do that was to coach. Teaching was going to be the vehicle for me to achieve that goal. I liked history class during high school, so I declared to be a History Major at Iowa State University. Two things that I had not accounted for when I enrolled at Iowa State University was the new foreign language requirement for incoming freshman history majors and the bleak job outlook for social studies teachers. These two concerns made me change my major during my sophomore year to elementary education. The College of Education had no foreign language requirements, the job prospects for a male elementary teacher were unlimited, I could still teach social studies, and I could coach.

During my undergraduate years I never actually took my teaching classes seriously, simply because I never saw any connection between what was being taught and what I perceived my classroom would be like

some day. I never realized the flaws in that thinking until I started my student teaching. I wanted to teach, but I did not want to write a ten step lesson plan for every little step I did in the classroom. However, once I realized how critical doing those little things were in preparing me to teach, I have never stopped doing them. I do not write ten step lesson plans anymore, but I do plan out each of my lessons.

I had no difficulty getting a job. I only applied for two, and accepted the first one that offered me a position. The one thing that got me through that first year of teaching were the lessons I learned during student teaching. I was organized and prepared almost to a fault. I did not leave anything to chance. This happened to work well during student teaching and I relied on it heavily. Looking back, I can tell I did a disservice to some of my students. I taught the way I learned best, not necessarily the best way my students learned. At that time, I was reassured by my principal that I was doing a good job. That only reinforced in my mind, the way I was teaching was good enough. During my second year, the principal was suggesting new ideas; I was paying closer attention to what my colleagues were doing and I began to try different teaching strategies in the classroom.

At the end of my second year, I was not getting the coaching assignments I wanted so I took another position at the current school for which I am presently working.

The administrator at my new school had just recently finished her teaching career and was more than willing to help out with new and innovative ways of teaching. This person really turned my teaching career around. I have spent six very productive years teaching in her school. She was really the one person that gave me the incentive to become a principal. After six years of coaching four different sports and full-time teaching, I realized it would not be long before I would become burned out. I saw becoming an administrator as a way to have some choices when that day came . I like new and different challenges in my life. I have just finished four years as a staff officer in an Infantry Battalion where much of my leadership philosophy was developed, and I believe I handled that job very well. After many years of teaching, coaching, graduate school, and the military I believe I have developed many unique talents for being an administrator.

A principal is the most demanding job in education. The contributions I can make as a principal are infinite. Understanding what leadership is and what you can do is only the first step in a long journey.

Here are some definitions of leadership. Stoghill and Coons (1957) believed "leadership is the behavior of an individual when he is directing the activities of a group toward a shared goal." Lippman (1964) said, "leadership is the initiation of a new structure or procedure for accomplishing an organization's goal and objective." Senge (1990) "sees the 'new work' of leaders as designing, teaching, and stewardship." Smith and Andrews (1989) remind us that to be competent as an educational leader, the individual must first be able to manage the meaning of schooling, which means that the leader has a clear understanding of the purpose for schools and can manage the symbols of the organization toward fulfilling that purpose. Meyer (1990) believed that leaders are standard bearers, you are the role model. I tend to take a simpler view of leadership, but a view that I believe encompasses all of the others. My leadership positions in teaching, coaching, and the Army have always taught me that "When in Charge, Take Charge." When a person accepts the job of being a principal, their life is immediately in a fish bowl. If you are not prepared and ready to accept the challenge and responsibility of subjecting your professional and personal life to scrutiny, then as the old adage goes, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."



Guthrie and Reed (1991) suggested that successful leaders exhibit many common characteristics, and engage in similar activities.

Leaders:

- \*pose a vision of what their organization should be like.
- \*know how to motivate and inspire those with whom they work.
- \*understand the major operational levers that can be employed to control or change an organizations course.
- \*are intensely sensitive to and continually reflect upon the interaction of external environmental conditions and internal organizational dynamics.
- \*understand the fundamental components of strategic thinking that can be used to guide or altar an organization.

Parks and Wormer (1992) have developed what they believe to be the essentials of leadership.

The essentials are:

- \*leaders know what they want to accomplish.
- \*leaders know how to get support and assistance.

- \*leaders exert the energy needed to achieve and sustain their goals.

- \*leaders know the limits of what is possible.

I have found what I believe to be more characteristics of a successful leader: (Anonymous, 1996).

- \*sensitive to the feelings of others while being at once considerate, helpful, responsive, and friendly.

- \*loyal to their ideas and ideals and respectful of the beliefs, rights, and dignity of others.

- \*strong in their feelings of self-confidence.

- \*consistent, generous, humble, modest, fair, and honest in dealing with others.

- \*enthusiastic in informing others about the policies and regulations of the school system.

- \*trustful of people until they prove untrustworthy.

- \*sincere, straightforward, and approachable.

- \*able to listen and communicate effectively throughout their own organization.

- \*able to empower others to pursue a collaborative agenda aggressively.

\*reflective of their own and the groups ideas and decisions.

I believe there is a distinct difference between a role and a responsibility. A role is a part we play as a principal. The so-called "What hat am I wearing now?" A responsibility is something we are accountable for no matter what "hat" we happen to be wearing at the time.

Gorton & Schneider (1991) identify six major roles for the principal. They are: 1) manager, 2) instructional leader, 3) disciplinarian, 4) human relations, 5) evaluator and, 6) conflict mediator. I consider these to be the six "hats" a principal may be wearing at any given time during the day or year.

Responsibilities, or things for which a principal is accountable for no matter what role he/she is playing seem to be endless. Following is what I consider to be an essential list of responsibilities for an effective leader that needs to be identified by your superior and yourself. Some of these may be delegated, but the principal still has the responsibility to make sure they are accomplished.

\*school management (maintenance, facilities, supplies, budget, and scheduling)

\*personnel (hiring and firing)

- \*student activities.
- \*student behavior
- \*program development
- \*planning
- \*community relations
- \*professional development

This is not an all-inclusive list. A principal needs to sit down with superiors and subordinates to make sure every responsibility is taken care of.

In the eyes of many people, school administrators are first and foremost managers. Their main role is to develop or implement policies and procedures resulting in the efficient operation of the school, (Gorton and Schneider, 1991). Here are a few tips to help a principal be successful as a manager:

- \*Set goals. Write them down, rewrite periodically.
- \*Know when to say "No."
- \*Know when to include and not include people in the decision making process.
- \*Ask "What is the best use of my time right now?"
- \*Keep a calendar of specific items to be done each day.

- \*Work on your "Really like to do list."
- \*Ask what you're avoiding when you are procrastinating.
- \*Have a purpose when you hold a meeting.
- \*Ask open-ended questions, listen actively.
- \*Generate as little paperwork as possible.

Cunard (1989) believes school principals are expected to provide instructional leadership, but the everyday demands of the principal compromise their ability to fulfill that role. Smith and Andrews (1989) identify some areas to accomplish in order to be a successful instructional leader:

- \*Let teachers become responsible for staff development.
- \*Create an instructional council - composed of teachers interested in planning and developing staff development and other instructional needs.
- \*Create the position of instructional dean - an instructional dean who is charged with the mission of monitoring only instruction.
- \*Recognize the value of peer coaching. Teachers value feedback from their peers more highly than from any other service.

Another hat a principal wears is a disciplinarian. The first action for control of an inappropriate behavior is anticipation and preparation on the part of the teacher and principal. In those instances when inappropriate behavior does occur, consider these techniques:

- \*Always use firm, fair, consistent, and immediate approaches.
- \*Develop a concise set of rules and consequences with input from students and faculty. Follow them precisely and immediately.
- \*Students have a responsibility to follow classroom expectations. Students who do not may be isolated either in the classroom or with appropriate supervision outside the classroom.
- \*Develop a student, teacher, and parent contract with responsibilities and expectations for each.
- \*Develop a "work it out" program. When infractions occur students will develop a plan which includes the following:
  - a) What did I do wrong?
  - b) Who was helped?
  - c) Who was hurt?
  - d) What am I going to do about it?

- \*Work with school district specialists to determine if there is a learning disability or an emotional or physical need which may be a factor in the students behavior.

School administrators work with a variety of people, including students, teachers, and parents. Although no single individual or group should be considered to be more important than another, there is little doubt that administrators' relationships with staff members significantly influence their effectiveness as leaders. (Gorton and Schneider, 1991).

Following are some recommendations to help administrators maintain good staff relationships:

- \*Encourage free discussion.
- \*Assist in developing cooperative techniques for getting the jobs done and the goals met.
- \*Assist in developing future leaders.
- \*Coordinate functions of the staff.
- \*Provide advice as needed.

Wise, Darling-Hammond, McLaughlin and Bernstein (1984) believe the purpose of an evaluation system must match the values, goals, and culture of the organization and community.

I believe there are several qualities that a leader possesses that affect the quality of the teacher evaluation experience.

\*Credibility:

- Knowledge of technical aspects of teaching.
- Knowledge of subject area.
- Years of classroom teaching experience.
- Years of experience in schools and school districts.
- Recent teaching experience.
- Familiarity with the teachers classroom and students.

\*Persuasiveness - Evaluators must be able to persuade teachers to alter their activities by providing clear convincing reasons why change is needed.

\*Patience - The most prudent tactic may be to give a teacher time and space to reflect on the feedback that has been provided.

\*Track Record - The principals observations and advice are judged in light of subsequent events.

\*Avoid giving the impression that all their suggestions are guaranteed to work.



- \*Should not feel compelled to have an answer to everything.

- \*When unable to solve a problem, the teacher and principal might try setting up an on-site research project to study the problem.

- \*When a suggestion has been tried and fails, principal and teachers work together to understand why.

- \*Modeling - One effective way for a principal to get their point across is to model the new suggestion or idea.

Principals should also model desirable attributes.

(Anonymous, 1996).

The last role Gorton and Schneider (1991) identified was conflict mediator. Here are some tips for conflict resolution.

- \*Seek win/win situations.

- \*Help everyone save face.

- \*Give everyone an opportunity to describe what they do, and how they see their job functioning.

- \*Use a private conference area. Meet at a table - not behind your desk.

- \*Foster team work, as opposed to "stars."

\*Meet with staff, students, parents, and community leaders  
as early as possible to build a sense of united purpose.

The last section of this paper will be devoted to "have to do."

These are my own personal values, beliefs, and philosophy in order to be a successful leader. These are taken from the various leadership positions I have held: football captain, army officer, teacher, coach, and parent.

You have to want to be a principal. I believe that before I accept the position of a principal I have to have in my mind an attitude of desire, dedication, and commitment to the school that hires me. I also believe the basic values of, integrity, loyalty courage, and humanity can never be compromised.

There are some things I plan to do when I become principal:

\*Ask the experts - seek advice or counsel from those who  
have "been there, done that."

\*Be fair - treat everyone with dignity and respect.

\*Lead by example - do as I do.

\*Care - no ticket-punching, people see insincerity.

\*Have confidence - if you do not believe in yourself, nobody  
else will.

\*Be organized - manage your time and delegate tasks.

- \*Be competent - people look to you for answers and solutions.
- \*Be yourself - being yourself got you where you are today.
- \*Make things happen - be a doer, get involved and be seen.
- \*Develop teamwork - teamwork builds cohesiveness.
- \*Check, Check, Check - just because you delegate something to be done does not mean it will.
- \*Be an active listener - not letting your mind wander off, maintaining eye to eye contact, and providing feedback.
- \*Have compassion - it does not mean you're weak, it means you're sympathetic and fair.
- \*Know your boss - keep him/her informed, be honest, and if in doubt seek counsel.
- \*Be flexible - roll with the punches.
- \*Be practical - think first, be cool under pressure, and use common sense.
- \*Be a salesman - you are the leader and public relations director.
- \*Have fun - leading a successful school is like managing a winning baseball team - it's fun!

A principal is charged with a sacred trust: the education of students and faculty. There is no greater trust than this. They deserve your leadership, care, compassion, and most of all your love.

Taking charge of a school at any level is an exhilarating opportunity, tempered by a certain amount of uncertainty. Following tips in this paper, hopefully, will lighten the load of probably one of the most overworked people in the school, the principal.

As I reflect back on why I decided to begin this course of study to become a principal, I am reminded of why I wanted to become a teacher. I became a teacher because simply I wanted to help, I wanted to make a difference in someone's life. I not only wanted to earn a living, but I wanted to make a difference while I was doing it. I want to become a principal for the same reason, to make a difference. I realize that by becoming a principal I will not only make a difference to those same students, but to the greater degree, all the people associated with those students. By being the best possible leader I can, I will accomplish that goal.

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