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Five essential areas for effective administrative leadership

Abstract

There are many areas of consideration for effective administrative leadership. This paper will focus on five areas. These will include the role of the principal as a visionary, group facilitator, communicator, curriculum and instructional leader and last, performance evaluator.

**Five Essential Areas for Effective
Administrative Leadership**

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Master of Arts in Education**

**by
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There are many areas of consideration for effective administrative leadership. This paper will focus on five areas. These will include the role of the principal as a visionary, group facilitator, communicator, curriculum and instructional leader and last, performance evaluator.

Some of the material used on leadership crossed over into the world of business management. Consequently, referrals were made to several books concerned in that area. Also, a strong relationship to administrative leadership roles and corporate management roles were found. The Proficiencies for Principals handbook was used as a guide in deciding the areas of key importance for leadership. The idea of being a visionary seemed to be a consistent thought throughout material.

The idea of being a visionary is also in agreement with the writer's own personal values and Christian beliefs. When evaluating new ideas and paradigms, the writer finds it is essential that the Bible be used as the standard. It is by this standard that all judgments are made as to whether or not new values can be adopted or abandoned.

This is a critical step in becoming a leader in any area of life. A person must first know what he/she

believes in, in order to know what not to compromise and what can be adapted. Without a sense of who a person is and what he/she values as important, leadership of others is impossible.

Bernie McKinley, who served as Mayor of Waterloo from 1986 to 1992, communicated this thought while addressing the city of Waterloo, said, "We must stay focused on our goal, dedicated to our mission and disciplined in our follow through" (B. L. McKinley, personal communication, January 1991). This paper will reflect those ideals that are expressed in this statement. The skills of effective leadership are dependent on visions, goals and dedication to see them accomplished. As stated earlier, the principal's roles for leadership include the principal as a visionary, group facilitator, effective communicator, curriculum and instructional leader, and last, performance evaluator.

Role as Visionary

The first area is the role of the principal as a visionary. It is obvious that the role of the principal is changing (McIntire & Fessenden, 1994). They believe that principals are the leaders of participating stakeholders. The stakeholders are those who have vested interest in the educational program.

The principal is a share holder rather than a dictator. A policy becomes an effort of the entire team. This is a new role for principals today and also a very exciting one. However, it is virtually impossible to operate this way without a vision or a common mission for the future.

According to Vann (1994), principals need to earn their staff's respect by clearly stating a vision of the school's mission. These goals are then brought together collectively in order to produce agreed upon goals and objectives. Ideas on how to keep the goals fresh on everyone's mind include staff memos, presentations and faculty meetings, formal and informal conversations and interactions with parents, other administrators in the district, board members and members in the community. The vision is a significant player in administrative leadership, and there are many ways to communicate this to others. A principal's vision will only be as good as the willingness of others to help make it happen.

Oster (1991) also recognizes this same idea in his book. He indicated that vision must be defined well, and people must have a clear view of what role they play in reaching the goal. It must also be meaningful to them, so meaningful that it defines the way they

view their entire world around them. He also confirms that strong leaders know their values and what is most important to them. They order their priorities and then live by them. He continues to add to this with the idea that good leaders feel good about themselves and what they are doing. They think positively about the future and set goals for achievable accomplishments. With these characteristics, a positive climate is made and others begin to follow with the same behavior. They will begin to focus on their own strengths, set standards and encourage others around them.

Krupp (1994) expands on this same idea with four characteristics of motivational leaders. Not only should leaders like themselves, but they need to be balanced with a sense of responsibility for the consequences of the decisions that are made. Blaming others when things go wrong will not solve anything and will only discourage progress in reaching a solution. People must be permitted to take control of their decisions and focus on solutions when things go wrong. A visionary leader must also be willing to be flexible and try new ideas. This perspective gives others the freedom to grow and try new ideas in order to keep the vision fresh and challenging.

Covey (1989) terms this type of leader as proactive. These leaders take responsibility for their own lives. Behavior is a response to the decisions that are made. Proactive people recognize their responsibility, they do not blame circumstances, conditions, or others. Behavior is a product of conscious choices based on values rather than a product of conditions based on feelings. No matter what the condition, proactive people are value driven and their values are based on producing quality. The key difference between proactive and reactive people is that proactive people are driven by what they value most. These values are carefully thought about, selected, and internalized.

Principals need to be proactive. It is crucial that they know what they value most before any leadership can take place. Oster (1991) also recognizes the great need for vision and values. He states that organizations that are value based and vision driven will build an environment that energizes people and stimulates growth.

Visions are important. They provide a unified purpose. Without one, activities of the teacher become empty vessels of discontent (Barth, 1990). He emphasizes the need for a personal vision in order to

direct a good school. It can provide a framework for conceptions of others. These new ideas build a foundation for the school to be a community of learners, and a road map for daily situations. This provides a method for attacking each problem in a less random way and gives thought to each decision. Without a vision, behavior becomes reflexive, inconsistent and shortsighted. It cannot be emphasized enough that the principal's role as a visionary is vital to the success of the educational program. The task of putting a personal vision on paper may be difficult, but the visions of school people are desperately needed in order to make any improvements (Barth, 1990).

Role as Group Facilitator

The second consideration for effective administrative leadership is in the role as group facilitator. This includes building a team for site-based management, teacher improvement, and group facilitation. The principal's role has changed due to new expectations in leadership. Principals are required to emphasize learning, curriculum quality, and monitor student performance. But now with teachers and parents involved with new leadership roles, principals are taking on responsibilities formerly carried by the superintendent.

Leadership status is earned rather than appointed. With this new description of leadership, principals are becoming leaders of leaders. There is a great need for principals to provide training for these new leaders, and also training for themselves in the area of group facilitation (Parks & Barrett, 1994; Wohlstetter & Briggs, 1994).

Parks and Barrett (1994) describe three areas of training that need to be implemented when creating a strong team for shared decision making. These areas are interpersonal, conceptual, and technical skills.

Interpersonal skills are vital. These skills are defined as team skills or collaboration, participation, and decision-making skills. This arena also includes skills in conflict resolution which is important when dealing with controversial topics. Principals can also help in the area of communication skills. These skills are critical for keeping the school's mission and direction clear. Diplomacy skills also hinge on communication. These skills keep professionalism intact.

Conceptual skills are developed by visiting other schools. Neilson (1993), recognizes the importance of a school visitation program. Conceptual skills provide a context or knowledge base for how shared decision

making works. Conceptual skills can also be developed by creating a base of knowledge through books, articles, and exposure to a broad area of content. This creates an atmosphere of learning for all which Lezotte (1994) discusses in his article on effective schools. These skills allow a person to know the nature of education and then use this as a basis for creating and facilitating new ideas.

Technical skills deal with the functions of operating a school. These functions include such things as school budget, program evaluation, purchasing, scheduling, and building maintenance. It is critical that the leaders of the school understand the ways of operation. It is critical that they know without these functions, the instructional program cannot exist.

The principal must first have a vision for the school before facilitating a group of leaders. The leaders must be trained in the areas previously mentioned. These ideas will lay the groundwork for site-based management.

According to Olasov (1994), site-based management can be defined as an attempt to transfer responsibility for decision making from the district level to the building level. Barth (1990) also points out the

importance of making decisions closer to the point of where the effects will be felt most. He adds that site-based management allows teachers to become more innovative as they are given power over how their resources are used and how policies govern their professional lives. The control also comes with accountability. This helps them buy into the mission they helped set for the school.

Site-based management is designed to bring the decision-making process into a team effort with the principal as the chair and selected teachers and parents as members. This is termed as the site-based decision-making council in the article by Olasov (1994). This council serves as a communication channel for the teachers and parents. The councils are site-based so problems and complaints can be dealt with efficiently and quickly. The members take responsibility for the actions of the council. It is a team approach and it is one that has proven to help schools benefit its ultimate client--the student (Holman & Paz, 1994; Lezotte, 1994; Markavitch, 1994; McIntire & Fessenden, 1994; Olasov, 1994).

Including the parents is a key factor to making the system work. According to Olasov (1994), parents provide insights that are not common among educators,

and they are more willing to speak up to the administrators. They offer a different perspective to the problem solving process. They tend to focus on solutions that meet the needs of the students. Parents are a positive attribute to the site-based management system.

Building teacher morale is another benefit of parental involvement. And likewise, teachers are more appreciated by parents as they come to understand the teaching experience. It is a group effort to improve the school. It builds respect for everyone's unique role and contributions toward the desired goal (Lezotte, 1994: Olasov, 1994).

The principal's role in developing a successful program is to provide leadership. This can be accomplished by creating an atmosphere of openness and flexibility. The team must be provided with training in order to function as a team in shared decision-making skills. It is a group effort to improve the school, and it is essential that the team deal with issues that take into account the general mission. Success also depends on who is chosen to be the teacher and parent representatives. The perspectives that they bring to the group are key to the effectiveness of the

decisions that they make (Horine, 1993; Markavitch, 1994; Olasov, 1994; Riley, 1994).

Other considerations in making a site-based management team effective are mentioned in the article by Holman and Paz (1994). They claim that the decision-making plan needs to include key components. A mission statement is critical. Board policy and definitions of the roles of the stakeholders should be defined clearly. Also, a plan for staff development and time frame for implementation is crucial. Last, evaluation for the process and product of the site-based management program helps in insuring accountability for its own implementation and ability to improve academic performance. Sergiovanni (1994) also claims that the most important element to any program where effective leadership is prevalent, is that people come together in shared consensus. Each one needs to be dedicated and committed to the outcome, but loosely tied to the means of reaching the outcome.

Role as Communicator

The third area for consideration is the role as communicator. Bennis and Nanus (1985) address the importance of communication this way. They claim that people in any given organization will have rich and meaningful plans, but without communication, nothing

can be realized. As an administrator, a person must be able to relate an image of a desired state of affairs and translate that image into one that encourages others to commit and be enthused about it. Kindred, Bagin and Gallagher (1990) also recognize the importance of this point. They believe communication is vital when making any presentation. The speaker must communicate with frankness and hold a genuine interest in the topic.

Frank (1986) confirms the same thought. He emphasizes that the speaker must first determine the objective; second, determine the right person or group of persons who can give the desired outcome. Most importantly, the speaker must learn everything possible about the audience and what their expectations are for the speaker. He defines the objective as the goal and the destination as the purpose or what needs to be achieved. Bennis and Nanus (1985) emphasize the importance of knowing the audience in their book. They describe a man who decided to start up a business and manage it in a way that he always wanted to be managed. His style incorporated a system of encouragement. He did this by making a point to visit the shop floor twice a week to compliment those who really put their best forward. He made a point to ask about family

members and keep a mental note of the working atmosphere. His success was representative of what a great communicator does. He tried to learn about the people who helped him achieve his visions.

As an administrator, it is crucial to keep in touch with those who are a part of the personal vision for the school. People need to feel secure in whom they are confiding their dreams and visions, and the administrator is responsible for developing an atmosphere of trust.

Teeter (1995), in her article, claims that there is a dire need for a relationship of trust between teachers and administrators. She adds that the treatment of the people within the school can contradict the purpose of the school. For example, students can be required to be perfectly quiet in hallways, lunchrooms, and classrooms and at the same time loudspeakers can blast out interruptions and children can be taken out of class without warning. Things like an ill-maintained building also can give the message that the people inside are not looked upon as important. These types of things need to be considered when building trust and opening up lines of communication. Inventive, committed teachers and innovative principals along with dedicated parents are

capable of touching the lives of children in order to make them feel important.

Noddings (1995) adds that trust must be developed between teachers and parents. Teachers rate parental indifference as their number one complaint. Unless the two groups come together for the common good of the students, indifference will remain. There will be no serious educational breakthrough until everyone meets as allies.

The importance of building trust is evident. Communication of the school's mission, and stated goals for the future build on the trust relationship within the school. Communication is the tool for developing and achieving the vision.

Kindred, Bagin and Gallagher (1990) believe that the school holds a definite responsibility to provide accurate information to the people who contribute resources or have any vested interest in the school. This is essential in order to develop trust and to maintain their personal ownership into the school and its programs. Again, communication is an essential element in developing a good relationship between the school and its community.

Many changes are occurring in society today. Schools are becoming a part of a team of caretakers

within the community. This relationship between agencies is defined as a process of communication. Citizens need to be aware of the specific educational needs and interests of their community. Communication of these needs encourages cooperation in the work of meeting the needs.

Communication is an acquired skill. The ability to speak and listen is crucial to this skill. According to Covey (1989), Bennis and Nanus (1985), and Frank (1986), the key to interpersonal communication is to first seek to understand, then to be understood.

Covey (1989) claims that the first step to listening is to listen with the intent to understand not reply. This understanding is an empathetic kind. It looks at the situation through the speaker's eyes. He adds that if you listen with the speaker's interest in mind, you validate them. When they feel validated, they feel secure to share their heart. This opens lines of communication and it is then possible to influence and begin the problem solving process.

Communication is the key element for administrative leadership. Effective communication happens with empathetic listening, knowing the person to whom you are speaking including their interests, motivations and who they are, are all part of seeking

first to understand as stated by Covey (1989). As administrators continue to be challenged to keep up with changing societal needs, communication will play a significant role as to whether effective ways will be developed to meet these challenges.

Role as Curriculum and Instructional Leader

The fourth area of consideration in effective leadership in administration is the principal's role as curriculum and instructional leader. According to Hughes and Ubben (1989), curriculum is defined as the what is taught in the school. The authors go on to describe some areas of consideration when organizing curriculum. These include curricular structure and alignment, density of curriculum, and curriculum clusters.

The curricular structure is recommended by effective schools research to include a list of topics, skills or concepts to be covered for each subject. Along with these, specific objectives, lists of resources, and mastery levels must be established for every course. Evaluation techniques also need to be established. These evaluation procedures need to be consistent and used by all teachers in the school. The prescribed curriculum needs to be the result of at least two professionals and determined in collaboration

with a team of leaders. Considerations need to include both horizontal and vertical dimensions. The vertical is defined as the content and sequence of the content. Horizontal includes the choices available to a student at a given period of time.

Alignment is another factor for curriculum development. Administrators need to be aware of whether the students are receiving the prescribed curriculum. The alignment coordinates what is taught to what is measured. It deals with evaluating whether or not the curriculum is meeting the goals and visions of the school.

Curriculum density deals with the amount of content that students are exposed to within a given amount of time. Improving academic learning time is critical to make certain that the basic areas of the curriculum are adequately covered.

Last, curriculum organization needs to be flexible in order to provide for the various needs of children. It is important that curriculum meet these needs while at the same time ensure that all subjects be taught to some degree at all levels. This will be the only way to achieve common learning or basic skills.

Hughes and Ubben (1989) define instruction as the methods that aid in student achievement. As a leader

of instruction, principals must be knowledgeable on the many diversified methods of instruction. They must exhibit an expectation for all teachers to use innovative ideas when appropriate, and exemplify an attitude that welcomes new ideas (Krupp, 1994; Markavitch, 1994; Neilsen, 1993; Parks & Barrett, 1994).

Neilsen (1993) describes a school visitation program set up to help teachers implement new and innovative teaching methods. Teachers saw what other teachers were successfully implementing and they gladly embraced the idea of change. Blocks of time for teachers to do this are necessary. Then, teachers must be given latitude to make changes.

Teachers can be motivated in the area of instruction at special conferences and at in-services, but school visitations can be the most practical means in helping to see it happen. Neilsen goes on to describe elements for a successful program. These include finding a suitable sister school to visit, and arranging a time and a team of teachers willing to participate. A format for the visitation is also important. Last, a response sheet helps teachers describe what was observed and record successful ideas. These are then kept in a notebook and set out for all faculty to read.

These are then kept in a notebook and set out for all faculty to read.

The idea of innovative change will always be an issue in the area of instruction. It is important to consider the many learning styles, the rate of learning and what will be the predetermined outcomes for student achievement. Most important is the school's mission statement. This must be used as a guideline for any curriculum and instruction decision.

Role as Performance Evaluator

The last area of consideration for administrative leadership is the principal's role as the performance evaluator. Again, throughout the literature, this topic is influenced with the underlying theme of outcomes. Walker and Zitterkopf (1994) suggest in their article a style of management called management by objective. This style of evaluation identifies goals or objectives at the beginning of the school year. These goals are a collaboration of ideals set by both the teacher and the supervisor. Both teacher and supervisor document progress toward the accomplishment of the goals throughout the year. This style of evaluation differs greatly from the past performance evaluation techniques. Suggestions for all students and student achievement have not played a major role in

teacher evaluation. This article went on further to identify five areas of comparison to the business sector. The first area is congruent with the whole idea of creating a vision for schools. This idea identifies the clients and their needs and then produces services to meet the needs. The second suggestion concentrates on outcomes and asks the question, Does the product or service meet the needs? The third idea is based on accountability. Everyone is accountable if the needs are not being met. The fourth idea is that the organization needs to be focused on quality. Everyone from top to bottom needs to be dedicated to producing quality. Last, developing a collaborative atmosphere enables the goals to be reached. This is because the goals have already been determined by all who are involved.

Student achievement should be the primary focus or product. Educators must be client centered, accountable to reaching the primary focus, and willing to adjust and be evaluated in order to reach the goals that have been collaborated on by everyone.

This same idea was confirmed in the article by Tucker and Stronge (1994). They explain when evaluating any personnel, the evaluation process should address the individual contributions of each employee

to the school mission. The Professional Support Personnel Evaluation model offers this practical method of evaluation. The system includes seven steps:

1. The key to the entire process is to identify the needs of the educational program. Financial and personnel resources are items to be considered. Once the program goals are determined, the evaluation and relationship processes can begin. The relationship between the school goals can be made between the people and resources used to reach these goals.

2. This step deals with identifying duties. This must be accurate and descriptive. The needs of the program dictate the expectations and this dictates the duties.

3. This deals with selecting professional indicators or performance indicators that show professional responsibilities. A sampling of these indicators is also important. They must be measurable and unique to the job.

4. This step deals with setting the performance standards showing acceptable, exemplary performance. A consideration of resources, particular positions and their purpose is also important in relation to the standards set.

5. This step includes the documentation process. It is a record of the individual's performance and it needs to justify any personnel decisions based on the evaluation.

6. This step is the evaluation of the performance. It is a comparison of the documented job performance and the performance standards. It is a conference which should lend itself to the occasion for candid communication between the evaluator and the one being evaluated.

Discrepancies between performance and standards are discussed and serve as the focus for the conference. New objectives or areas for improvement are also incorporated.

7. This last step includes improving and maintaining professional services. This step addresses the need for improving and maintaining professional performances with explicit steps toward those goals. It is a culmination of the entire evaluation cycle and can also serve as the first step in the cycle.

The entire evaluation is again based on comparing professional performance and established expectations. There are no surprises in this style of evaluation. Expectations are made clear. Ways to meet these goals

are determined and continual updating keeps everyone moving forward. It interweaves the three important tasks of any administrative job. Those are strategic planning, program development, and personnel evaluation. The evaluation process is just a part of a universal plan and should not be thought of separately (Tucker & Strong, 1994). Many of the articles supported this idea of combining the vision and the program with the evaluator process as a three part system (Markavitch, 1994; Olasov, 1994; Wohlstetter & Briggs, 1994).

Conclusion

The role of the principal is changing. As society depends more and more on schools to meet their ever changing needs, schools will have to collaborate with those within the system and also outside of the system in order that these needs can be met.

Usdan (1994) attributes these needs to demographic shifts. These shifts are the result of several factors. These factors include the fact that many students are at risk, there are now many homes run by single parents, and many homes have two parents working outside of the home. Because of these factors, there is a greater need for before and after school child care, preschools, special guidance programs, health and nutritional needs, and other various types of programs.

These shifts have called for the base of decision making to broaden in order to include political and business leaders. They are important allies for education. Other agencies must also unite with schools to meet the educational and social needs of children today. The principal in an elementary school must realize the dynamics of these changes in order to become an effective leader.

This paper has touched on five major areas of consideration for effective administrative leadership. The principal must first put forth visions with values. A team of leaders must be created through communication, building of trust, and collaborative decision making. With proper training and in an atmosphere of trust, the missions set by the team can be accomplished. The principal is then the leader of leaders. Curriculum becomes an issue that the team works together to develop in order to meet the agreed upon goals. Instruction is the method of how the curriculum is taught. Again, teachers and principals must be sensitive as to whether the instruction is meeting the needs of the customer or the students. We, as educators, are on the front lines when it comes to meeting the escalating needs of the youngsters that are put in our care, and effective leadership skills are at the core of seeing these needs met.

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