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[Attraction: The Secret of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership](#)

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Attraction: The Secret of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership

A best selling book,

The Secret, reveals that the single attribute that ensures success is one that every great educator has always had in his repertoire. Rhonda Byrne (2006, 4) says that “the greatest teachers who have ever lived have told us that the law of attraction is the most powerful law in the Universe.” Byrne points to poets, musicians, artists, and thinkers like Shakespeare, Beethoven, da Vinci, Socrates, Plato, and other legends. But lesser mortals, teachers and administrators in the field, also have known that “attraction” is the secret to school success. Jon Saphier and Robert Gower (1987, 2) put forth this idea over two decades ago—power of attraction versus power of authority. For teachers, it was the attraction attributes—encouragement, enthusiasm, praise, humor, and dramatizing—that harvested winning behavior.

Lee Iacocca poses a question as the title of his book,

Where Have All the Leaders Gone? The book is challenging the reader to choose the best political leaders for the future. Iacocca (2007, 6-10) suggests the “9 C’s of Leadership” as leadership benchmark attributes—curiosity, creativity, communication, character, courage, conviction, charisma, competency, and, common sense. Where does the “attraction” attribute fit in with the 9 Cs? Communication, competence, and charisma are matches for attraction. Communication is “telling the truth” and competence is solving the problem. “Charisma is the quality that makes people want to follow you. It is the ability to

inspire. People follow a leader because they

trust him” (9). In some political climates a candidate requires the attraction attribute of charisma to be at the top of list. He points to President Ronald Reagan as a leader in political times that called for communication and charisma (261). Iacocca would caution that leaders seldom have all 9 qualities and he believes today’s climate calls for elected officials to have curiosity and character as well as attraction attributes of communication and competence (262). Jim Collins (2001, 13) looks at leadership in business and finds that great leaders’ first step is to attract the right people. Leaders “... got the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats—and then they figured out where to drive it.” When queried about how leaders, especially in education and government, can get the “wrong people off the bus,” Collins indicated that it takes longer but can be done. “You might have to carry the wrong people along, but you can essentially restrict them to the

backseats of the bus..." (217).

And, so it is for school leaders. Finding and attracting the right people, applying the "9 C's of Leadership" and using the winning attention moves are what successful educators do. "Skillful teachers make certain moves to engage students' attention: to capture it initially, to maintain it, and to recapture or refocus it when it wanders off course" (Saphier and Gower 1987, 15). Saphier and Gower categorize attention moves as desisting, alerting, enlisting, acknowledging, and winning. Desisting and alerting are more authoritative. Enlisting, acknowledging, and winning moves "emphasize the appeal or attractiveness of an idea," and "they are positive and tend to attract rather than force" an issue (17-21).

How are we doing as a profession to "attract" (pun intended) future leaders that know and understand the power of attraction? Are we encouraging our best and brightest and most attraction-oriented educators to embrace the path to administration? Do we teach that quality in our graduate educational leadership programs? Do Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards mention the "attraction" attribute in the knowledge, disposition, and performance indicators?

Administrative Candidate Qualities

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor,

Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2006-07 Edition

,
"Education Administrators," (Do you have what it takes...[2007](#)) recommends "...the following list of attributes if...considering a career as a school principal.

- Ability to make constructive and beneficial decisions for students, faculty, parents, community, and institution
- Motivation and determination
- Leadership and supervisory skills
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Effective communication
- Diverse knowledge of educational practices and models
- Computer technology aptitude."

No rank order is implied but in that list, motivation/determination and strong interpersonal skills are "attraction" attributes.

Attraction has an important role. Although Ediger ([1996](#), 4) sees a "fine line" between a proactive and reactive principal, he believes that "to develop a quality curriculum, the principal must encourage, guide, and stimulate teachers to change in a positive direction. Teachers then inwardly feel a need to move from what is to what should be in the curriculum. The role of the principal is vital. Teachers tend to look to the principal to lead them from the actual to the ideal."

Some school districts are recruiting teachers who have demonstrated school leadership to apply for “grow-your-own” administrator training programs leading to certification. For example, in South Carolina, the Charleston County School District has partnered with The Citadel School of Education to identify program candidates based on three qualifications—recommendations, writing sample, and interview. Do the selection criteria include “attraction” as a preferred qualification?

The writing sample asks candidates to describe the role of the principal and responses are evaluated on four areas of leadership—instructional, organizational, moral/ethical, and managerial. “Exhibits a clear understanding of climate, communication, and continuous improvement,” the desired response for organizational leadership, implies “attraction” as an important quality. The desired response would be more specific if it read, “Exhibits a clear understanding of climate, communication, and the need to attract followers for continuous improvement efforts.”

One of the twelve questions in the interview—What characteristics and qualities do you think an effective leader should possess?—has the potential for candidates to mention the 9 C’s, in particular the role of charisma, communication, and/or competence. An improvement on that question, if “attraction” is paramount, would be to ask the candidates another question—“For an administrator, how important are the attributes charisma, communication, and competence? Give an example of how an administrator might use those attributes to attract followers to realize a school change.”

Graduate

School

Leadership Programs

Graduate school leadership programs are often linked to Interstate School Leader Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards (Council of Chief State School Officers 1996). The standards cover knowledge, dispositions, and performance in six areas—vision, culture/climate relative to instructional program, management, community collaboration, integrity/ethics, and political/social/economic/cultural/legal. The 1st standard, “A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students’ development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community,” has elements of visualization and expectation. A standard #1 disposition indicator is that an administrator demonstrates a “current belief, value, and commitment to a school

vision of high standards (author’s emphasis) of learning.” In

The Secret, “expectation is a powerful attractive force” (Byrne 2006, 72) and visualization (vision) “...is a process that has been taught by all the great teachers and avatars throughout the centuries as well as by all the great teachers living today” (81). All of the ISLLC standards can make a case for one or more indicators that embrace attraction.

Administrator Practitioners

South Carolina principals have a formal evaluation system, Program for Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Principal Performance (PADEPP) that dovetails with the six ISLLC standards ([Principal](#)

[Evaluation Instrument](#) n.d.). A 7th standard, unique to South Carolina, is Interpersonal Skills which challenges a leader to interact “effectively with stakeholders [and address]... their needs and concerns.” It is this category that most closely relates to “attraction.” It incorporates three of Iacocca’s 9 C’s of Leadership—communication, competency, and charisma (builds mutual understanding). PADEPP Standard 7 looks for a leader who “recognizes and effectively uses skills and strategies for problem solving, consensus building, conflict resolution, stress management, and crisis management.” It is the latter quality, crisis management that is addressed by Iacocca (11) who believes that in addition to the 9 C’s, “the biggest C is crisis” and at the moment of urgency “leaders are made, not born.”

In every book, there is a kernel of wisdom. In

The Secret the kernel is attraction. Of course, the attraction attribute is complex. It is filled with action words to describe building a culture and climate for success—sustaining the vision; communicating the truth; promoting high expectations; solving problems; and, managing crisis. Leaders who attract followers know how to inspire others. In business, attracting the “right people” is the first step (Collins 2001, 13). In politics, as we look at where our leaders are, we take the advice of Lee Iacocca who says that leaders are not gone, “they’re right here, in this great country. But they need to be called forth” (262). Authors Rhonda Byrne, James Collins, and Lee Iacocca confirm the need for business and political leaders to view attraction as a lynchpin for success. Educators, too, need to look closely at the recruitment and encouragement of tomorrow’s teachers and administrators—those that know how to attract others to support the educational journey of successful teaching and learning.

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