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Beth Ann Kleve
University of Northern Iowa

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A look at administrative qualities for success : a reflective essay

Abstract

It is not just having a degree, and a few classes that help to make a person a good administrator. It is having an understanding and passion about ones own personal beliefs and core values that will help to make the difference between a good administrator and a great administrator.

In the following paper professionalism, leadership, morality, and learning will be discussed further. Examining how each of these areas are important qualities for an administrator to develop and maintain as a leader in a school.

A LOOK AT ADMINISTRATIVE QUALITIES FOR SUCCESS

A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

by

Beth Ann Kleve

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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Date Approved

Gregory A. Reed

Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Victoria L. Robinson

Second Reader of Research Paper

2/15/05

Date Approved

John K. Smith

Head, Department of Educational Leadership,
Counseling, and Postsecondary Education

A person's values and philosophy start at an early age. Our parents are the first people to help develop and foster our inner beliefs and desires through their actions, words, and activities completed or not completed as a family. One of the first areas that a parent has influenced over is how a child feels about education. This is seen in a child's reaction the first day of kindergarten. Are they running out the door ready to go, or are they hanging on to someone's pant leg begging not to go into that room. Of course, a lot can change through the course of the first day of kindergarten until the last day of high school. However, how a parent handles the given situations will develop a person's intrinsic motivation towards academic achievement.

Many of the values and beliefs were developed through the development of my parents' guidance, care, and concern about education in my life. They did not necessarily mean I or my brothers to enter the education field, but that was the one area in our lives they wanted us to do our best in. Education is something that nobody can ever take away from you is what my parents told us, and that is true. I could have every worldly possession gone in a flash, however my education and educational experience will be something that creates the person that I have become and will become in the future.

Education was an important role in my life when growing up. It was something that I knew that I had to do, but also I knew that was something that I wanted to be a part of since third grade. I looked at my teachers with respect and reverence. To me they were the greatest people in the world, and I knew that someday I wanted to be on the other side of the desk, having the teachers' manuals, and enjoying everything that a teacher gets to do. It was a mystery and something that I knew I wanted to be a part of. As I completed my education and had the opportunity to work with teachers and students, there was something more that I wanted to be a part of. It was helping to make the school run. I wanted to be in the front office helping make the

important decisions that would affect the betterment of the students and staff. I had viewed what some great administrators have done, as well as seen what some poor administrators have completed, and knew that I could make a difference. Mostly, I have witnessed what has gone bad in administrative situations and knew that I wanted a chance to do better, I wanted to offer the power of change and bring in the positive practices I have seen and implement them in my own building.

However, as I have prepared myself for that role as an administrator, I also found out that it is not just having a degree, and a few classes that help to make a person a good administrator. It is having an understanding and passion about ones own personal beliefs and core values that will help to make the difference between a good administrator and a great administrator. If I do not have a deep understanding of what I believe, and what are the internal driving mechanisms of my educational philosophy, then I will have difficulty when faced with challenging situations.

One of the first values that I poses, is the value of professionalism. As an educator, I am held to a higher stander by the students and staff in the school and the people in the community. My actions and behaviors will not only be seen by those in the community, but will be shared with others and remembered even after I have left a school. It is important that as administrator I preach and practice professionalism twenty-four hours a day seven days a week. I do not know who may be watching and even when I may not be looking someone else will be and I will be remembered not for what I have done well at the school or in the community, but what I did wrong.

Along with professionalism, it is important for a strong leader to demonstrate control while maintaining ethical and moral leadership. Living in a world where people are easily persuaded to do the wrong thing for a little extra money makes it imperative to remember

what is right and wrong in this world, and no matter what happens, you will be caught. We also live in a world that people are willing to sue or go to court over anything. That is why it is important for one to be morally sound and follow the rules and laws that govern the school as well as lead with honesty and compassion. Demonstrating control of your school, but also showing that you are a human being and have care and concern about what happens with the students, staff safety and well being is just as important to you as well their academic gains. It is leading with control over a staff, but leading with an open and compassionate heart. Knowing that there will be times that things happen and we have to pull together as a staff and work through the situation.

While demonstrating professionalism, and leadership it is important to demonstrate the importance of life long learning. Learning is something that does not stop or ever go away. We are continually learning something new each day, and it is important to stress the importance of learning and continually learning especially in education. Each year there are new things that are developed and created. New studies about best practices, new laws, and new mandates. If we do not stay current and work towards understanding the implications we have we will be stuck doing the same thing, and progress will not take place. Change can be scary, but it can also be beneficial. We have to embrace change with the enthusiasm and caution.

Finally, as an administrator my core belief is not only to do what is right for students, but that all students can learn. Today we are held to increasingly accountable for what students are learning as well as the progress they make in school. We are in an era of No Child Left Behind, and it is our job and duty to find ways to ensure that all students are learning and proficient. It will make administrators examine their building in a different light and search for ways to help teachers be successful and become a community of learners. Staff development will take on a

new look and as administrators we will have to work to find ways to make learning inviting, meaningful, and delivered in a way to create a community of learners.

In the following paper professionalism, leadership, morality, and learning will be discussed further. Examining how each of these areas are important qualities for an administrator to develop and maintain as a leader in a school.

“Professionalism can be broadly defined as accepting responsibility for one’s own professional development and growth. Specifically, it refers to exemplary practice, and being aware of and experimenting with new developments in the field” (Shantz 1996). Professionalism is something that we do not always think about in our daily lives. It is something that is encoded within the teaching profession and just expected each day. When we start our jobs, we do not have a manual about how to conduct ourselves each day in school and out in public, nor is there a college course at the undergraduate or even the graduate level. Observing those around us often picks up professionalism, and following in the mannerisms and style they lead with.

Professionalism is seen upon many levels for an administrator. To be an effective and credibility one has to show professionalism twenty four hours a day seven days a week. The idea that once a teacher always a teacher also applies to that of administrators as well. A teacher just like an administrator is seen as a public official like that of a senator or congressperson. Someone in the community is observing everything that that person does outside the wall of their own home. Unfortunately, a person’s reputation can be determined greatly by the action that he or she has within the community, if an administrator is seen as person that is not involved the community, the community may see the person as not involved within the school. Simple actions or lack of actions can create a positive or negative image.

When recently sitting in a professional growth and development class, a discussion was lead about professionalism that reiterated the idea that there are many little things that we take for granted that need to occur in order to viewed and received as a professional, items such as dress, mannerisms, and communication skills. Practicing and demonstrating these skills will help to be seen and received as a professional.

To be seen as a professional also means having effective communication skills. An administrator is the schools first and foremost spokesperson. It is important that an administrator has the ability to speak and write clearly and eloquently. It is important to practice proper written mechanics as well as when e-mailing to also practice e-mail etiquette. Too often, when e-mailing things are stated in the wrong way it can cause many unforeseen problems. Another common occurrence is that we do not think about is our phone and e-mail rude efficiencies. These are efficiencies that happen and that we often do on a daily basis without even thinking. Such as interrupting a call when call waiting beeps in, the fax machine replaces the phone, and things now are sent on the due date instead of ahead of time, and eventually e-mail and the idea of simple snail mail items like a written thank you is replaced with an e-mail thank you. These are communication taboos that could cause minor and even major problems.

“Professionalism involves values such as honesty, fairness and integrity” (Shantz 1996). If one does not have a values system nor follows the values, that one has it makes it difficult. An administrator is a person who leads with these values on their sleeve and follows with their heart. Being a professional also does not mean following only the rules of etiquette and the rules of business. It also means leading with the above-mentioned philosophies.

Professionalism encompasses a large area of items. It is something that is not always clearly defined but is expected by the educational world. Professional is best categorized under

all of the Educational Leadership Constituent Council Standards. Once again, professionalism is not a written standard, however, expected upon everything that an administrator completes. It is something that has to an ingrained part of a person's persona and continually worked upon and redefined. It means staying on top of the current trends and knowing what is expected in the business and educational world.

Professionalism is an important habit to follow when in education. While being a leader in a building, school, district, or community the administrator has to also remember to be a leader that demonstrates moral and ethical leadership.

"The roles of an educational leaders are many: coach, teacher, counselor, facilitator, director, and sometimes parent: (Quick & Normore, 2004. p.336). To lead in an effective manner, and maintain all the above mentioned roles, an effective leader is a person who is able to lead with moral, ethical, and compassionate leadership. To lead a building of teachers, staff, and students a principal has to demonstrate all of these qualities and follow these guidelines in every day practices as well as in any major decisions that have to be made that will affect the building one may run so that everyone is working towards a common goal. An educator has the hat of many people, and when in these roles it is important to remember the guiding principles one has to make the correct decisions, even when the decision is not appreciated or questioned by the masses.

According to Daft leadership is defined as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend all changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purpose"(Daft, 2005 p.5). Being at the helm of a school building is no different from being in charge of a fortune 500 company. The employees and clients have a different look but the leadership skills that an administrator uses would be similar to that of the CEO.

One of the first things an effective leader is to hire quality staff, and work to improve the staff that is all ready in place” (Whitaker, 2000). The staff you have reflects your decision-making abilities. How and what type of staff you have will help steer your goals, vision, and mission of the school district. As an administrator, one will look to hire staff that has similar beliefs and values towards the quality of education that is desired in the building. It is also important to hire a staff that are experts in various areas and not to hire only experts in one area. Look to have teachers that have knowledge in reading, language arts, math, science, and even other areas that may help with student success and student achievement, as well as help the staff and oneself be knowledgeable of the trends and issues in education.

While an administrator it is also following and doing what is best for children. Knowing what the codes, policies, procedures, and laws are that govern your school. If a person does not know or is uncertain about a procedure that is when research is completed to find the course of action that should be taken. Do not just try to guess and hope that it will be the correct answer. Guessing is when mistakes are made. It is more important to delay a decision for an hour or two than make a rash emotional decision that could cost a job, a career, and money. Ethical and moral leadership are just that, following and doing what is right. Doing what is right for the students, for the staff, and for the betterment of the district. It is embracing changes that lie ahead in education, and learning from the paths previously taken and creating a new road.

Being an administrator not only embracing the philosophy of doing what is right, but taking and being in control of a building.

“ A good leader gains and remains in control at all times. Never let them see you doubt or sweat. Take a stand and hold that position. No one else will defend the children (or policy, teacher, or curriculum) as well as you” (Senge, 2002 p. 412). The role of an administrator is not

only that of an educator but of a leader. A leader in the moral and ethical vision and guidance of a building. A leader in control and a leader in "control" have a double meaning and it is important for a good leader in a building to have a sense of balance between the two types of control.

According to The Webster's New World Dictionary, control is "to regulate or direct" (Merriam, 1977 p. 133). When talking about control this is the form of control that we look for an administrator to have. A control over situations that one will be able to take care and demonstrates as he or she is able to handle the situations with ease, calmness, and clarity. The ability to handle the situation as if they knew everything that had to be done and in the order that it has to be done. This is the type of person who knows the policies and procedures that need to be done on any given situation from absence policies to a lock down procedure in the building if there was a stranger in the building. Taking charging and never letting the staff see doubt, fear, or panic in your eyes even if underneath everything you are just as scared as the staff feels.

When beginning a new position or even a new school year it is important for the administrator to go over the *policy and procedure that is expected in the building from the time they are to be there in the morning, lunch sign up, to the policy for informing the staff if there is an early dismissal.* Going over these policies and procedure and having them in an accessible place is important so there can be no one stating I did not know that or that was never mentioned. It is even important for the principal to go over and practice with those involved what to do in various situations that could arise in a building and the chain of command that has to happen for something to take place and be successful.

However, to be calm, cool, and collective in a given situation one also has to be flexible. In any given situation, a curve ball can appear changing the direction, outcome, and even the

mood of the situation to either escalate or deescalate what has just happened. For a leader to be in good control of his or her policies and procedures some of the practice has to be done with contingency. "Contingency means that one thing depends on other things, and for a leader to be effective there must be an appropriate fit between the leader's behavior and style and the conditions in the situation" (Daft, 2005, p. 81). This may seem to contradict what has just been said about being in control of situations, however if a person is to maintain control of a situation things have to be examined on individual cases, and examine the policy and procedure that is to follow the situation that is at hand. A situation may arise where a hostile parent is in the building, and despite all the training in the world upon how to act and respond in a given situation one has to be ready for anything. Like the motto of the Boy Scouts, "Always be prepared." That is how contingency and control have to work together in given situations. We have ways to follow things, and if something happens, we have to be able to bend to handle a given situation. Does it mean breaking or bending policy procedures? No, it should not. Policy and procedure are developed with the safety and concerns of the staff and students in mind. If we make exceptions for one, we have to make exceptions for all of those who ask afterwards.

A good leader also gains control of the staff, working to develop a community. A community that works towards the betterment of the school and the curriculum that they provide. The leader provides the framework upon what is expected within the building and works to find the resources that his or her staff will need to make the school a better place for student achievement. It is about working together with the staff not against the staff. Helping them to refine the skills that they do well, and boost the skills that need improvement. It is promoting the idea that everyone is a stakeholder and if we work against each other we will create our own

demise. By developing and cultivating relationships within the school environment, it will help to have a positive "controlled" atmosphere within the school environment.

While being in control of a school it is important to stand up for your core values and beliefs towards education as well as the mission and values of your district. Being a leader is not a time to be wishy washy about ones beliefs or values in education. It is time to show the teachers and community what you believe about education as long as it is morally and ethically right for students and staff. It is also important to have a staff that has the same vision and beliefs as you do about students and education and if there are some discrepancies, it is important to work towards creating a common bond and look to develop a way that everyone has the same vision and beliefs about education.

When standing up for ones values, it is also important to make sure you take a stand for your teachers, staff, and school. There will be times when someone is out to criticize and belittle a staff member. It is important to stand up for the teacher and go to bat for them. Even if the teacher has done something, wrong. Once the situation has been resolved then talk with the teacher and let them know what is expected of them, and then help them so that a situation may not happen like that for them again.

One can have control of the situations in a sense they are calm, cool, collective, and act with contingency in a given situation. One can also demonstrate control in the sense they are so power driven, that they have to know everything that happens in the building. This sort of control is one in which the person has the makings of a dictator or tyrant leader. Although one may think this is helpful and beneficial to have a school that operates in a way in which one person is control and the absolute power over everything, this will only lead to rebellion and possibly a

hostile take over. It will create a staff that is unhappy, having students that are unhappy, and make for a building climate where learning is not fun but a chore.

Educators are all trained (hopefully) in the best methods to help children learn and have a strong knowledge base about the subjects that they are teaching. The role of the administrator is to help guide the teachers in curriculum development and becoming a continual learner. Not as a person that is there to judge and second-guess everything that the teacher does within their classroom. Although there may be a time when they have to evaluate and make a decision whether or not that person is a qualified teacher how some control and trust has to be maintained between the administrator and the teacher.

This form of control will also make the administrator paranoid and always second guessing themselves upon who they can trust as well as always worrying about who they can and can not trust in their building, creating a hostile and miserable work environment.

“School climate, culture, and community are direct reflections of leadership” (Quick & Normore, 2004, p. 346). The building dynamics are greatly determined by the control that a principal has in the building. If the principal is an effective leader, they have control in situations that may cause a rise in the blood pressure, but the ability to be flexible if things take a different turn. They also know how much control to exert over the staff to have a staff that works together with the parents, student, and administration to develop and foster a positive and meaningful work environment.

As an administrator through the hiring and hiring a quality staff, it is important not to just expect the staff to be done with their education, and allow them to just teach. Staff desires feedback and information. These are two things that teachers often crave and often lack when they enter the profession. An administrator will be able to see the need to have opportunities to

observe, provide feedback, as well as have opportunities to help the teachers improve upon the skills they have or may need refinement in. "If you don't feed the teachers they eat the students. Teachers are extraordinary resources that outstanding leaders acknowledge as vital components of successful schools" (Connors 2000, p. 2). It is understanding that we know teachers are professionals, and that they are hopefully there for the educational needs and development of the students. A teacher has to also understand that it is important that the administrator knows what is going on in the building and that they need to find ways to provide feedback as well as get information out to the teachers. Too often teachers feel as if they do not know what is going on, which can cause for mutiny among the ranks. An uncertain staff is an untrusting staff.

A great leader is one that demonstrates moral and ethical leadership. Today we live in an age of corporate espionage, corporate downsizing, and cooperate corruption. The temptation is constantly around to cut corners, and do ways to try to cheat the system. However, if one cheats the system the people that are affected are the staff and students. A principal that is open to change and fudge things so that a person, a report, or data can look and reflect in the manner that will shed a positive light upon the school. However, by doing so will create lies that will only develop and create more lies. In the end, creating a web of lies that could jeopardize the school, the staff, and the district. An effective principal will know the rules, the laws, and have a guiding backbone that will help them make decisions that will be the right decisions. They may not be favored by everyone, but if they are made following ones personal ethical and moral background the decisions should be understood and accepted.

The leader also has to lead with a compassionate heart. The staff and students that are following the principal are human beings and that they have feelings and emotions. It is important that when working your staff that it is important to build a relationship with your staff.

It is about knowing your staff and what some of their needs and requests may be. It is about knowing their family, and finding a commonality to develop a relationship of respect. It is a simple jester of asking a staff person once in awhile about their family or events that are happening in their lives. Knowing that you have a person that cares helps to change the tone, the climate, and even the culture in the building. It is important as a leader to realize that staff does not leave their lives outside the school building. Our personal life has a great control over our career life, and as a leader not being able to recognize the personal needs of our staff could cause and create a hostile working environment.

Being an effective leader demands the needs for an administrator to wear many different hats, as well as follow many different ethical and moral guidelines. If one does not do so, it could create an unethical leader who does an ineffective job as a leader for the students and staff.

When providing information to the staff, it is important that one works to develop staff development that is appropriate, timely, and works to help student achievement.

“. . .A degree of reverence for current practices, because they are a part of the present climate, culture, and community. Even if stakeholders are uncomfortable with some of the current practices, they are ‘theirs,’ and to question them in a manner that could be perceived as disrespectful may seem like the leader is undermining their very personal foundation as well as that of the community” (Quick, 2004, p. 341).

Too often people will state and discuss that the in-service they partook in was a joke or a waste a time. It can often go to the extreme that staff state why do we do this because it is just like anything else it is another trend and we will be doing something different or back to what we are doing now in a few years. It is important that as a leader your staff is open and up to the challenge of change, but the change is approached in a manner that people will accept, and will

be willing to try and change. Change happens, hopefully always for the best, and sometimes things stay the same or go backwards. Yet, if we do not encourage the staff to take the risks and find ways to improve how are we going to become better? The status quo is the status quo and sometimes that is not always what is working for children. We need to find ways to help children, and approach the changes with care and caution. Change a few things at a time, and not try to change things all at once. With a quality staff that works towards the betterment of students, an administrator can demonstrate his or her qualities that will help to make the difference between a good leader and a great leader.

In an ever-changing academic world, new rules, policies and procedures will be created and developed every year. It is important to stay on top of the current trends, issues, policies and laws that will develop through the years. Failing to be compliant could result in severe problems for your school, teachers, and students. An important role that an administrator has is that of being a life long learner. Part of that role will be in continually asking what can be done to make the school a better place. Help the teachers see the importance of learning is to include them in the learning process through professional development. "Effective professional development experiences build a learning community"(Carr and Harris, 2001, p. 125). Professional development allows teachers to learn new ideas, strategies, and tools to be used in the classroom. Through communication with the staff, effective professional development can be presented and used throughout the building. It will excite the teachers about something useful to use in the classroom, and demonstrate to the community that we are learning community, and we look for ways to improve and better serve the students.

To develop a successful professional development model it will involve being a successful communicator with various teams and prioritizing the needs of the building around

the school, state, and national standards and benchmarks. Through a successful team and action, planning group that it will be "expanded to the point where important new ideas or programs will remain even if the 'leader' leaves"(Goldberg, 2001, ¶ 36). If I leave, the new administrator will see the staff's quest for new knowledge, and the students' willingness to learn.

The ideology of life long learning, and promoting the success of all students is found in Educational Leadership standards, under standard two.

Standard two states, "A school administrator is an education leader who promotes the success of all student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth" (Wilmore, 2002, p.32). This standard focuses upon student and staff success and learning. It will mean finding a happy medium of encouraging student achievement, while encouraging the love of learning. Keeping the staff interested in new ideas and concepts, or evening reviewing old concepts to help keep teachers up to date and a passion towards learning. Demonstrating a school of life long learners.

Planning and implementing successful and meaningful staff, development through out the school year can meet standard two. When planning the building and or district in-service days, look to find the areas of most needed change, or where groups feel they need more information in their daily teaching lives. Working corporately with neighboring schools, and or local education agencies can do this. Another alternative may be allowing teachers to attend workshops during the school year, and allow them to lead workshops and information sessions to help motivate and inform the staff. It also means not over loading the staff with new ideas and concepts to add to an all ready busy schedule. An administrator has to watch the needs of the staff and students, and ensure success on the given programs in place before moving to the next area of study.

Promoting and developing life-long learners is the ultimate goal within any educational setting. However, it is something that if an administrator demonstrates to the staff and to the students, it will be quality that will be cherished by all. A quality administrator will gain the trust and teamwork of the staff to look for ways to improve education. In an article written by Dufour(2004), he states that it is important to have schools working together and to have weekly meetings to work in the pursuit of common goals. At times it is hard to encourage a staff to come early or stay late, but if the vision is articulated early in the process, and staff approached as to how to improve the academics within the school district an hour a week is worth the success of the students.

To be a successful administrator, one has to have a variety of skills to be successful, and to create an environment that is friendly and successful for the students and staff. It is important to remember that each day we face is a new day and to take each situation as they arise. More importantly, it is important to remember why one wants to be an administrator and the values, beliefs, and vision one has as they take the helm of a school building.

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