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James D. Walser
University of Northern Iowa

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Elements of leadership in education : a reflective essay

Abstract

As I grew up, my interest in various academic subject areas and my enjoyment of school caused me to become interested in education as a career. I felt that I could make a contribution to the lives of my students. My specific interest in mathematics and my personality lent themselves to classroom instruction. Although I have experienced some discouraging days, I still remain confident concerning a career in education.

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A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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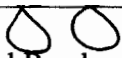
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Advisor/Director of Research Paper

Gregory Reed

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Date Approved


Second Reader of Research Paper

John K. Smith

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Date Received

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

ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION:
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

James D. Walser

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Dr. Robinson

As I grew up, my interest in various academic subject areas and my enjoyment of school caused me to become interested in education as a career. I felt that I could make a contribution to the lives of my students. My specific interest in mathematics and my personality lent themselves to classroom instruction. Although I have experienced some discouraging days, I still remain confident concerning a career in education.

I believe that educators and students are constantly changing. Often policies and practices must be altered to meet these changes. It is crucial to identify the changing demands of the classroom while maintaining the high quality of the education being provided to the students. This process requires a strong and competent staff that is willing to consider changing the programs that are failing and to support the programs that are experiencing success. This can be a challenging process and it lies in the hands of the principal to effectively lead the school staff. I feel that I have strong interpersonal skills, well-developed communication abilities and a sense of group dynamics that will serve me well as a principal. I have believed for some time that I would like to serve as a high school principal.

Principals have a multitude of responsibilities and they must be well organized in order to be successful. A few important steps for successful leadership include: be a strong role model, work to ensure a positive working environment for staff, develop clear expectations for staff and students and build strong communication

with parents and community members. While the above points may not cover all contingencies, they are a strong foundation for exemplary leadership.

A leader leads. A principal must thrive to be the best person possible. A principal, like it or not, is to be a pillar of the community. All eyes are on the leader. This is especially true when things go wrong. Principals who establish themselves as being honest, moral and of strong character will have the basis for good leadership. When principals are well rooted in their beliefs, they are easier to follow. A leader with questionable character will be an easy target if things go awry and people start to point the accusing finger. Administrators with strong beliefs will help to build a firm foundation for their school

Well-established principals must strive to develop a good working relationship with their staff. No matter the size of the staff, there may be some clashing personalities. A good leader must be a peacemaker and a referee. A staff must be well grounded with an established set of procedures in order to succeed. I do not expect my staff members to love each other, but I do expect them to get along and to act in a professional manner. If the staff is disconnected, the sense of discipline can breakdown throughout the school. As referred to earlier, it is imperative to not only develop, but to strengthen relationships with and between staff members. Administration is a team activity and if your weakest player is competent the team should be successful. A sense of “we” must be nurtured and the idea of “us versus them” must be eliminated. When colleagues feel comfortable in their work setting, they will be able to thrive in their jobs.

Students do not resist rules as much as they resist inconsistent enforcement. Rules must be clear and must be enforced in a consistent manner. Often times an exception will be made and other students will cry foul. When rules are made and students are made aware of such rules, the job of enforcement becomes much easier. Enforcement must be the same across the board and all staff must agree on the interpretation. Some staff may not agree with a rule, but common ground must be found so that students see a unified front. "Consistent" is not always a realistic goal. However, general procedures should be able to be applied in most cases. For example, a rule for skipping school or swearing should result in the same punishment regardless of the offender. On the next level, the application of staff policy must also be of a consistent nature. Varying discipline procedures among staff will quickly put staff at odds and will only help to erode staff unity and respect for the principal.

A school is always growing and changing. Schools must be in constant contact with parents and community members. Obviously, parents want to be informed about their child's progress, but they also need to know that the school values their opinions. A good relationship between the community and the school helps to build good rapport and makes area businesses and citizens more likely to join school activities. Sometimes, these relationships will be a source of friction, but it is imperative to remember one's commitment to the education of the students of the community.

A principal must be a relentless agent of change. Being an agent of change requires a principal to be in constant contact with students, staff, school members, administration and community members. The identification, development and maintenance of change will be a challenging and fulfilling task for a principal.

The possession of these qualities may not ensure success, but they will be crucial in the development of any successful principal. I view writing this paper something like filling a time capsule. I hope that I can look back on this paper and not be too amused about what I did not know. Instead, I hope to look back and be happy with some of my current foresight.

Role Model

Principals must exhibit qualities of a strong role model to inspire those around them. An administrator has many levels of responsibilities that demonstrate this role. Successful principals must practice the following: leading by example, being aware of staff needs while espousing fairness, and applying of the Iowa Standards for School Leaders.

Leading by example

Everyone must work to remain on a positive and productive path. An integral part of this process is the ability of a principal to be a positive role model and to guide staff members and students to be strong role models, as well. A basic element of such leadership is integrity. “All school leaders must act with integrity. Trust is an easy thing to lose and an incredibly difficult thing to regain.” (Wilmore, 2002) A successful principal must accept the inevitability of

personal mistakes. “When problems come, don’t deny them or look for someone to blame. Acknowledge the problem“ (Johnson, 1997). Principals may find it difficult to admit when a problem exists. However, it is a principal’s ultimate responsibility to protect the reputation of the school building and the district. Ignoring even the smallest problems will allow the situation to grow and worsen. “An administrator who demonstrates support and leadership in every situation builds trust, loyalty and dedication” (Johnson, 1997).

A strong leader must always portray a positive outlook and encourage the staff to be positive, as well. Honesty is crucial for a principal when dealing with staff, students and the public. Likewise, role models must always be aware of confidentiality issues in all areas of their work.

The group that has the greatest potential is the same one that may be fraught with the greatest problems. A school’s staff is expected to bring a sense of commitment to their jobs and to school success. It is up to principals to guide and direct the staff on an ongoing basis. The strongest and most talented staff will eventually be worn down to a mediocre and dissatisfied group if they are lacking a dependable role model. Principals are required to continue to be aware of the learning process and “...a comprehensive understanding of the history of preparation; a thorough grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of current programs; and a clear vision about the future of good education, schooling and leadership“ (Lumsden, 1993). Staff members need to know that their opinions and efforts are valued in the school setting. The principal must strive to keep all

staff members involved and informed. When changes occur in a district and staff is not informed, unrest can develop.

Being aware of staff needs while espousing fairness

Similarly, staff unity is a mainstay of a successful educational program. Fairness is an integral part of instilling unity in a staff. A sense of fairness must be a part of all actions and intentions of an effective leader. Fairness means that the contributions of all teachers and staff are being addressed. Teachers and support staff need to know that they are taken seriously in the workplace. If the staff does experience problems, they need to know that they will be supported and not undermined by the administrator. A lack of leadership can lead to a high degree of dissatisfaction and a sense of disillusionment within the school. Even the best teachers will only experience limited success without leadership. With a lack of checks and balances, teachers become their own conscience and the potential exists for making poor choices. Infighting may continue unchecked and great divisions can form between staff members. These strained relationships will only add to a deteriorating staff. Students will recognize a lack of leadership and will continue to disobey rules in an escalating fashion. Once a history of loose discipline has been established, it will become significantly difficult to reclaim a sense of order in a school building.

A strong leader will maintain a close eye on staff relations to ensure a successful learning environment. Positive learning can be achieved by casual and formal conversations with staff in order to identify any areas of concern. A

school leader must be sincere in the effort to perpetuate and nurture a positive school climate.

Iowa Standards for School Leaders

As principals strive to be strong and positive role models, they must strive to operate from an established basis. This basis is best described by Iowa Standards for School Leaders. All six standards play a part in the development of a strong role model. These standards include: visionary, instructional, organizational, ethical, collaborative and political leaderships. In order to infuse a school with a positive attitude, a principal must practice visionary leadership. The entire school population must constantly evaluate and re-evaluate their progress. Visionary leadership may range from physical expansion of a school building to the adoption of new systems of curriculum. Regardless of the context, vision is a constant challenge for all leaders. As an instructional leader, an administrator must apply teaching methods to realize progress. Ongoing changes in teaching must be addressed to ensure quality learning in all schools. A school of any size will demand a leader that has organizational skills. Such skills will range from planning the homecoming parade to interpreting test results from state agencies. Again, strong leaders must successfully meet these responsibilities. A strong ethical base will be necessary if a school is to experience sustained success. Honesty and fairness with all district members will serve any leader well. A true leader cannot lead alone. A true leader must collaborate with others in order to reach each goal. Collaboration will include the skill of listening as well as the

sharing of ideas. Finally, the school administrator must involve as many people as possible in the school's endeavors. Beyond the walls of the school community members must be recruited and encouraged to share in the process. Once these people become involved, their desires must not be neglected, so that they remain involved in the process. This task will call on the political prowess of the building principal.

Leadership, by its nature, can be a lonely business. It is the requirement of a successful leader to involve the talents of all district members. Strong principals must first know themselves and use this self-awareness to lead others. The successful leader is a team coach and all good coaches must continue to learn from and to lead their team. Such leadership will be directed by previously

Work Environment

A principal must also strive to secure a sound work environment in the school. This goal can be reached by addressing the following issues: ownership of education, a positive climate and accountability of all stakeholders.

Ownership of education

When teachers and support staff feel that they have the support of their administrator, they will be encouraged to remain devoted to their school. "Teachers typically define career satisfaction in terms of their ability to be of service to others and make a difference in the lives of their students." (McLaughlin & Lee, 1988) Staff members must strive to take ownership at all levels.

In order to keep all staff members traveling in the same direction, it is important to keep all teachers informed and involved in the process. Staff members do not require only ownership, but encouragement, as well. There may be cases where teachers were trained, but are still uncomfortable with the new material. Human nature sometimes fools us into thinking that things are going according to plan. A lack of support for all staff members can easily lead to failure. That is not to say that teachers will decide to sabotage a program. But, without the attention of an administrator, the “newness” of an initiative can wear off and people will naturally fall back into their old routines.

The maintenance of a learning environment can be a huge undertaking. This is definitely a top down process. As a part of the vision, the administrator must continuously work to maintain the school atmosphere. By setting the pace for teachers to follow, the principal becomes the manager of the school climate. Advocating, nurturing and sustaining are concepts that will always be a part of school development. Only by developing and supporting a positive attitude in the school, may the administrator hope to have a positive learning environment in the building.

If all teachers and students are to succeed together, they must be expected to show progress in their work. As with most building initiatives, a principal cannot hope to implement school growth without the support of others. “A principal alone cannot make substantive changes at the classroom level unless teachers assume ownership and accountability for them.” (Foley, 1994) This being the

case, how can a principal infuse a staff with such feelings of ownership and accountability? Teachers must play an integral role in all levels of change.

Teachers can often identify areas that require improvement and may suggest workable solutions. At other times, areas of concern may need to be presented by the principal. In both cases of developmental change, teachers must be involved from the very time of inception of the process. It is important to realize that the mere inclusion of teachers is not adequate, if the group does not feel compelled to implement change. It is crucial that the areas of change are pertinent and important to staff members.

The staff must also be encouraged to maintain a positive and nurturing environment in their classrooms. Such an environment will be much more attainable when teachers know that they have the backing of an involved and inspired principal. A positive environment is necessary for all children to feel comfortable in their school. It is important that a school's staff works to make all students feel welcome and safe in the school building. Students like to be given attention and to be given responsibility. Most students will readily emulate a positive role model. Constant reinforcement of positive behaviors will allow students to become role models for their peers. As appropriate behavior becomes a habit for some students, others will mimic these attitudes throughout the school. This process helps a student to develop strong character.

All adults in the school should be called upon to model and reinforce acceptable behavior. Students need to be directed to set a good example and to

encourage other students towards acceptable behavior. The above elements are only basic when they are already engrained in your own school environment. However, when your school is lacking these important elements, it changes a principal's outlook.

Positive Climate

“Working towards an improved school climate means that dedicated individuals are making conscious efforts to enhance and enrich the culture and conditions in the school so that teachers can teach better and students can learn more “ (Hansen & Childs, 1998).

When a staff works to try to improve a school's climate, they may take on the characteristics of a family. Any family requires attention in order to stay healthy. “Do all family members feel like part of the whole? Do they understand and communicate expectations? Is each member encouraged to do their best?”(Johnson, 1997) These questions suggest that a school, like a family, must be constantly maintained. If staff members do not feel that they belong to the group, many problems may arise. A disconnected staff member may not feel comfortable sharing opinions and ideas. A staff member who feels left behind may cause a school plan to fail

The needs of the staff must also be foremost in the principal's mind. “The three words advocating, nurturing and sustaining are important to the lifeblood of the school”(Wilmore, 2002). These words emphasize that the vision of education must meet the needs of the entire staff and to develop a positive climate. Some of

these areas may be easier to support than others. Nurturing a staff can be a little more complicated than just helping them along. One must envision nurturing to be a process of helping and challenging teachers. At times, some teachers may need more of a shove than a gentle hand. In the cases of a resistant teacher, nurturing may be a challenge. Sustaining a positive atmosphere may sometimes be less than pleasant. For the motivated, dedicated teacher, continuing positive growth can be a productive and inspiring process. Some teachers may be slow to respond to developing a positive learning environment. When developing a positive school environment, an administrator may have difficulty getting cooperation from others. Successfully motivating the teacher who is slow to change is a challenge. Advocating for a school can be as much of an internal as external process. A principal may have to negotiate to receive services for the school and then must turn around and struggle to implement change within the school.

Accountability of all stakeholders

The establishment of clear and well-defined practices for members of the learning environment will help to build a successful school. The principal must have strong management skills, a sense of leadership within the building and be able to support and manage teachers and support staff. The building administrator must be receptive to suggestions by all of those involved in the learning process and must be prepared to take action to resolve any problems. Teachers and support staff should be required to take on the responsibility of working with

colleagues and the principal to maintain a positive work setting. They must also strive to set a good example and to encourage success in the classroom.

Realistically, there will be times when a principal will need to address concerns that they may have with a teacher's performance or behavior. While potentially unpleasant, it is only by discussing these concerns that a role model may continue to build the respect and confidence of all staff members

A lack of leadership can lead to a high degree of dissatisfaction and a sense of disillusionment within the school. Even the best teachers will experience only limited success without leadership. With a lack of checks and balances, teachers become their own conscience and the potential exists for making poor choices. Infighting may continue unchecked and great divisions can form between staff members. These strained relationships will only add to a deteriorating staff. Students will recognize a lack of leadership and will continue to disobey rules in an escalating fashion. Once a history of loose discipline has been established, it will become significantly difficult to reclaim a sense of order in a school building.

A strong educational work environment can only be maintained by constant attention to detail. Community members, parent, students, teachers and administrators must all remain actively involved in the learning process of the district. As districts face significant changes in the future, they must not ignore the importance of a healthy work place.

Clear Expectations

A strong, positive example exhibited by the principal allows teachers to work together and to deal with their frustrations without turning on colleagues or letting their dissatisfaction be seen by their students. Such behavior must be maintained in order to experience success in schools. Clear expectations can be introduced when a principal practices the following steps: encourage staff effort, display a clear vision for school members and advocate change.

Encourage staff effort

The principal only has limited control over a school's staff, and much of a teacher's success lies in their own hands. Every employee must make an ongoing effort to be supportive of their principal and their colleagues. Personal differences may exist, but these differences must be resolved or tolerated for the good of the school. As adults, it is reasonable to believe that everyone can work and coexist with other faculty members. If differences are not resolved, it can lead to constant infighting and an atmosphere that is not conducive to learning. As time goes on and problems are not addressed, a staff can become segmented thereby losing their group identity. Teachers may let their concerns affect their classroom performance. It will not take long for a school to fall victim to frustration and a feeling of helplessness. Each teacher must plan for maintaining a positive working environment as they plan for their daily lessons. These efforts will be a part of their responsibilities as a role model. A successful administrator is able to lead and delegate tasks to staff members, encouraging the staff to do all

that they can to develop themselves. “As principals, we are on a constant quest to develop every person to his or her highest potential to promote achievement”(Wilmore, 2002).

Display a clear vision for school members

A clear vision for staff and students will develop success in a school. Teachers must have a part in developing an overall school vision. Part of this vision must include the development of a school environment that is conducive to learning for all students. Students must be aware of the fact that the school is a safe place for learning. At the same time, students must know that teachers and administrators will insist that this environment be maintained. If one were to consider education as a journey, then the journey must begin by determining our present location. The starting point, fellow travelers and the intended direction must be determined. “First, you have to collaboratively decide where it is you are going with your travel companions” (Wilmore, 2002). This concept can be further defined as a “vision” that is developed by all stakeholders in the school. No matter where a school may be, it is important to determine a point of reference. An inventory of ideas, plans and projects should be a part of all schools. Once a “map” has been developed and the staff is on board, school improvement lies just ahead.

As the mode of travel for a school’s development becomes defined, constant maintenance is a must. Once a school’s vision has been established, the work has just begun. An administrator must serve as a tour guide who possesses a near-ESP ability. Such an undertaking involves a seemingly endless number of details.

A good administrator is able to lead and delegate tasks to staff members. A strong administrator must encourage the staff to do all that they can to develop themselves. “As principals, we are on a constant quest to develop every person to his or her highest potential to promote achievement”(Wilmore, 2002). This is a form of nurturing that demands that the staff members make a serious commitment to their own development.

As a school’s vision becomes more defined and staff members become actively involved in the process, principals may want to test how well they have implemented training. A confident principal has to ask this defining question, “If I have to be away from the school, how will my school perform?”

Change has always been a part of successful schools. Now, new legislation is requiring change that includes additional accountability. “No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has solidified one emerging trend: school leaders are change agents. Encouraging innovation has always been a part of the job description, but until recently the goal has modest incremental change that could be integrated into the existing system. Today the system itself is the target of reform.” (Lashway, 2003)

NCLB presents many concerns and challenges in the area of change. On the other hand, schools must adopt some changes to meet the regulation of the current federal legislation. Improvements must be applied to ensure a school’s current success and to lay the way for future growth.

There is, of course, a catch. To what extent should we alter our programs in order to meet these requirements? What is our first priority and what are our

district's responsibilities? "Standardized tests measure only a part of what students should be doing? Effective leaders focus on the behaviors that lead to success, not the beliefs that stand in the way of it. Effective principals don't let standardized tests take over the entire school." (Whitaker, 2003) Change will be a constant challenge to all principals. It is only by preparing for and addressing these ongoing needs of a school building that an administrator can develop and maintain a promising working atmosphere.

Advocate change

Once a direction and a destination have been determined, the administrator is in a position to develop and maintain an overall plan of action. Such an undertaking must involve everyone in order to be successful. "School learning environments must be structured with high expectations for achievement and behavior and for positive relationships among students and teachers to ensure safer, more inclusive, higher achieving schools"(Kaplan & Owings, 2000). Thus, the process of building and sustaining a healthy school is a shared responsibility. Teachers who are not motivated or supported by their principal will have a limited ability to maintain a challenging classroom environment. Kaplan and Owings go on to say that as the needs and expectations of students, parents, and community members continue to change and grow, the classroom approaches must change those expectations. "Successful learners have ownership or psychological investment in their schoolwork and become academically engaged when they find their school work interesting and worthwhile."(Kaplan & Owings, 2000).

Obviously, there are limits to how sensitive a curriculum can be to the needs of the student. But, the “that’s the way we have always done it” attitude cannot survive in a successful school.

As outside demands may change, principals must continue to lead their schools in the correct direction. Successful principals transfer strong internal expectations to all stakeholders in the district. Success will only be achieved when everyone shares in the development and application of such expectations.

Communication

Positive growth within a district and specific school buildings are greatly dependent upon strong community support. Lines of communication must be developed and maintained between schools, students, parents, community members and all other stakeholders. Successful methods of communication include: positive phone calls from the teacher to the student’s home, informal public meetings, effective orientation programs, and utilization of the press. A building principal must begin the task of communication close to home; at first. “All principals would like their teachers to initiate contact with parents. Teachers who do this – and do this effectively – see the rewards: often, talking with parents leads to improved student behavior and effort” (Whitaker, 2003). Unfortunately, calls home are often considered to be reserved for disciplinary purposes. Teachers, parents and students, alike, share this mindset. A concerted effort is necessary to change the context and intentions of a call to the home.

Positive phone calls from the teacher to the student's home

From the teacher's perspective, it is a case of accumulating positive examples to share about all students. Even the student who is struggling in class or poses behavior concerns can be found to possess positive qualities. By beginning a parent communication with such positive observations, the discussion of a concern becomes more palatable for the parent. The teacher that resists calling a parent may face a call from the parent at a point where the problem has grown and the parent has become defensive. "As a result, many teachers (and principals!) build up a wall of resistance to initiating calls to parents" (Whitaker, 2003). In some cases, teachers may want to role-play with other teachers to practice making calls to the home. Strong communication must be a skill that is practiced and supported by the principal.

The principal has the opportunity and the responsibility to set the pace in all aspects of student learning. "The principal must work with teachers, providing support and receiving support in helping students to achieve optimal results." (Ediger, 2001)

Informal public meetings,

While telephone calls are an effective means of communication, such calls are only a portion of a program of school communication. Informal meetings are another useful method for sharing information and fielding questions and concerns of the public. "They give parents opportunities to know the principal and to comment on school programs and projected changes. The meetings also

give the principal opportunities to listen and respond to parent concerns” (Vann, 1992). While attendance may vary at these meetings, it is important to develop a regular schedule and to hold the meetings on the scheduled dates. While this may be a new concept in the district, consistently held meetings may reap positive results.

Effective orientation programs

Another area of communication that must be addressed by the principal concerns the orientation and treatment of new students. Often times, a building staff may develop the attitude, “They will get used to the routine.” Sincere attention paid to a new student will help to make the transition into the school an easier one. “Have an evening orientation meeting for parents of incoming kindergarten children in the spring, just prior to registration, and have another informational meeting two weeks after school begins for parents of all entrants.” (Vann, 1992) Likewise, a clear procedure should be developed for students who transfer into the school during the academic year. Such a plan should include: a student buddy system, a classroom teacher who is assigned to the student and scheduled principal meetings for the student and parents. Such meetings may not require an investment of a lot of time, but frequency of contact will prove to be more important than the length of the meetings.

It is important that communication be an interactive pursuit. Parents, students and community members must also be made to feel welcome in the decision-making aspects of a school district. “ Many of the principals suggested that it was

important to have parents involved in the decision making process. Some principals suggest that having parents involved is needed in order to gain support for the school; others indicate that the involvement of parents can help to increase parent's awareness of the school." (Gay & Place, 1999) Some community members, however, may not be easily drawn into the practice of communication. Some stakeholders may need to be approached more vigorously. These very non-involved people may tend to be resistant to any school-wide changes and may actually block a principal's best intentions.

Utilization of the press.

How do schools communicate with those who are not actually involved in the school district? The district newsletter is an excellent source of information and vital communication that reaches each person in the district. It is important that this publication be closely reviewed. Such a publication that represents a school should be free of grammatical and spelling errors and be revised and updated regularly. The newsletter is a vital tool of communication for the school district. Changing format and featuring guest writers entice readers to look through the paper. Often times, the school lunch menu and the activities schedule are kept and the rest of the letter is thrown away, but local businesses could get involved by donating coupons and prizes that may encourage a more careful reading of the newsletter.

Another important means of communication is the local newspaper. When properly managed, this publication can effectively spread the word for the district.

It is very important to work to develop and maintain a positive relationship with the local newspaper. A principal would do well to schedule weekly or semi-monthly meetings with a representative of the newspaper. A constant flow of information to the newspaper will help to bolster the reputation of the school district and solidify a strong relationship with the paper.

There may be times when such a paper resists or even holds a grudge against a school district. Unfortunately, this puts a school in a rather difficult position. Sometimes information had been made available to the paper, but not published. Newspaper staff may claim that the school is not sharing information. In some cases, a paper may actually turn against a school and cause problems for the school board, superintendent, principal and staff. Beware the power of the pen, before it stabs you in the back. The defense against a vindictive newspaper is to make information available to the newspaper on a consistent basis and meet regularly with a representative. Continue to buy school advertising in the paper in order to attempt to develop a financial relationship, as well.

Unfortunately, there will always be members of the community who may never support the school, but will be available to act out against the district. The best defense against a resistant public is to work to build and maintain a positive school reputation. A lack of communication will only increase unrest in a school. Good communication is a true necessity for a successful district.

Leadership is certainly a human activity. Thus, effective communication will be an absolute necessity to success. A strong leader must strive to gather and

share information with all of those who have an investment in the educational community.

Conclusion

As I contemplate my change from the role of teacher to administrator, I am almost overwhelmed by the prospect. The magnitude of this impending change is not lost on me. While the new learning environment will not be foreign to me, my role will change considerably. My two general concerns involve my ability to make positive transitions in my new school and my concerns for the unknown factors that I will encounter in my new surroundings.

In the areas of positive transitions, I know that all of my preparation cannot fully prepare me for what I will face upon entering “my” school that first day and eventually meeting staff members, parents and students. Before I began my training in administration, I was somewhat aware of the many responsibilities faced by a principal. Although I have been introduced to a continually growing list of job requirements, I have also become equipped with experience and resources for dealing with said requirements.

I realize that the school will be somewhat “set” in a certain routine and it will be my responsibility to identify the strengths and weaknesses of such established practices. I am aware that I must “pick my battles” and determine my priorities as I reassess them with the passage of time. I believe that positive transitions will involve my remaining receptive to my building members and to the community, as well. The most important aspect of making a positive transition into a new

school is to remain true to myself and to maintain credence and respect to my beliefs.

Such transitions will be closely linked with the unknown issues that will await me behind the doors of the school. As I have continued the study of leadership, certain statements have found a place in my long-term memory. “A principal’s job is to maintain the reputation of the school,” best describes the role of a principal. Another tip states, “Try not to take anything for granted and always be prepared to be surprised.” While these two short quotes cannot replace extensive training they do provide a means to organize my thoughts and motivators. As I imagine various school scenarios, I have increasingly worked to consider the largest scope of the problem or challenge. I continuously ask myself, “What is the best or worst outcome of this situation and how do I strive to produce the best result.”

While my beliefs are simplified, they must incorporate the guidance of ISSLC and the experiences that I have gained throughout my association with this principalship program. I must end with a statement that was made by my principal over 25 years ago. He became notorious when he was quoted in the local newspaper as saying, “Successful leadership is like wetting yourself in a dark suit. It gives you a warm feeling all over, but nobody notices.”

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