

1994

## Principal leadership qualities needed for the twenty-first century: A reflective essay

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## Principal leadership qualities needed for the twenty-first century: A reflective essay

### Abstract

According to Heck (1991), Socrates once defined an ideal leader as a philosopher-king. This person would be secluded from society so as to be unaffected by the behaviors of politicians. He claimed that being surrounded by these types of people could lead to such undesirable traits as greed, dishonesty or illogical thinking. After a period of years, this person would emerge having been tutored by the wisest teachers and well-prepared to rule the rest of society.

PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP QUALITIES NEEDED FOR  
THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:  
A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
The Department of Educational Administration  
and Counseling  
University of Northern Iowa

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts in Education

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by  
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August 1994

This Research Paper by: John P Sheahan Jr.

Entitled: PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP QUALITIES NEEDED FOR THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: A REFLECTIVE ESSAY

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

6-13-94  
Date Approved

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According to Heck (1991), Socrates once defined an ideal leader as a philosopher-king. This person would be secluded from society so as to be unaffected by the behaviors of politicians. He claimed that being surrounded by these types of people could lead to such undesirable traits as greed, dishonesty or illogical thinking. After a period of years, this person would emerge having been tutored by the wisest teachers and well-prepared to rule the rest of society.

Socrates may have a point in being wary of politicians; however, today's and tomorrow's leaders can not remain secluded. They have to be aware of the changes taking place in society if they are to successfully initiate, lead and manage change. Changes in the expectations of leaders surround us like the air.

School principals constantly need to be aware of those changing expectations. Educational leaders are not free from a structure that has weathered those changes and reforms. Over the last century, schools have increasingly been expected to move from an autocratic, top down structure modeled in order and efficiency toward a more democratic, bottom up structure modeled upon freedom and sharing (Guthrie & Reed, 1991).

My early experiences with educational leadership differed from the prevailing views of successful leadership today. The principals I worked for enjoyed the power that went along with the position. I remember several times coming to school literally intimidated by the aura of power seemingly coming from the principal's office. The paradigm I had developed with regard to the principal was shaped by over 20 years of experience dealing with this authority figure.

I was fortunate, as a young teacher, that I had a principal who recognized my abilities and went to great lengths to nurture them. I was encouraged to become a principal. Having pursued this profession and experienced it for a year I realize the importance of creating a climate that tries to lessen anxiety. I learned that the tone for the year has to be established right away and then behaviors consistent with that expectation must be maintained.

### Principal Leadership Qualities

#### Needed for the 21st Century

The new paradigm for school organization and management can only be accomplished with new proficiencies in leadership. I believe that principal leadership for the 21st century must be focused in five

areas: values leadership, site-based management, situational leadership, shared instructional leadership and managerial tasks of instructional leaders. Understanding and use of these proficiencies will enhance my educational leadership, thus providing a better educational climate for our children to learn. The following sections explore each of these qualities of leadership.

### Values Leadership

Values leadership must be organized around a values set (Moorhead & Nediger, 1991). A key factor that distinguishes one school community from another is the principal's value set and behaviors that are a product of those values.

My values set as an educator has shown me the importance of standing up for what you believe. Having been in the same community for over 10 years, I know that when dealing with students and parents you are going to ruffle many feathers. I was once told that if you try to please everyone, you end up pleasing no one--especially yourself. That is the primary reason why I believe in creating high expectations for people. When students do not attempt to meet those expectations, I get frustrated and make my desires for a serious effort known to the

individual by way of a heart-to-heart conversation. Calabrese (1990) wrote that democratic schools are places where full participation is an expectation. People, by nature, will give you the effort that you expect. I honestly believe people like to be challenged, so I will need to figure out the individual challenges that people want for their professional growth. Administrators have to show how their authority is grounded in a responsibility to create a moral and intellectual world (Cooper & Mulkeen, 1992).

An instructional leader must be honest, but also must be sensitive to the teachers' or students' needs or feelings. Brutal honesty without compassion can destroy a professional trust and complicate future professional relationships. A friend once told me, "What takes seconds to say can take years to heal." This idea of developing trusting relationships is a key element toward stretching teachers and students to their fullest potential. The "Golden Rule," to treat others as you want to be treated, guides my behaviors when dealing with others as a principal.

The idea of "catch them doing something right" (Blanchard & Johnson, 1982, p. 40) is a basic tenet of my evaluation process with my



staff. Articulation of this value set could create the collegial environment necessary for instructional improvement. Caldas and Maxey (1991) pointed out the need for openness in society, institutions and options in education. I interpret this to mean that I need to be open and honest with my staff about my belief in catching them doing something right. They need to be assured that, as an instructional leader, I am there to help them become better educators and not to solely judge whether or not they will remain on staff.

### Site-Based Management

The trend toward site-based management is an exciting change for education. The rationale for site-based management really focuses upon Herzberg's (cited in Hanson, 1991) satisfiers--particularly job satisfaction, professionalism, autonomy, decision-making and productivity. Herzberg found the primary components that encourage teachers are bottom up structures, collaboration and ownership. Hoyle (1994) also pointed out that when the people have a say in the decisions that affect them they are happier and more productive workers. Because of their involvement, faculty, staff and the community get a real sense of pride about their district. Administrators are equally excited,

because this system allows them to be the instructional leader. The principal is required to take on a new role--one of facilitator, coach and supporter, rather than manager. Hoyle echoed this statement, saying the term boss is being replaced by the term enabler.

Implementation of site-based management is a process that must be carefully nurtured. Burns and Howe (1988) identified six steps for such implementation: (a) communication, (b) planning, (c) assessment, (d) set goals and objectives, (e) develop an action plan, and (f) evaluate and monitor.

Communication. A key element for getting on the right track is communication. Informal communication will foster innovation. Crow (1994) points out this issue becomes one of balancing organizational stability and innovation. The intense informal communication system will act as a remarkably tight control system. Staying on top of happenings in the school, frequently talking to staff members and listening to their concerns will help keep the school system in proper balance.

Kindred, Bagin and Gallagher (1990) stated that people in the community need to know all the good things going on in the school. I

have communicated formally by way of brochures, media, letters to parents, newsletters and personal communication with staff, students, parents and community members. I also encouraged my staff to do at least one activity that brings parents, grandparents and other patrons into the building. My informal communication centered around personal student and teacher contacts and being very visible in the building every day.

Planning. The most effective planning involves a wide variety of people. Everyone's input, whether they are directly or indirectly involved with the school, must be sought, heard and processed. I want students, teachers, secretaries and janitors to give input to whatever situations we are dealing with that could effect them. Kindred et al. (1990) alluded to school administrators and boards coming to understand the importance of good internal communications. School boards and administrators can no longer get that support alone; they must enlist the help of employees. Guthrie and Reed (1991) pointed to participation in organization decision making by individuals who will be affected by the decision and who are knowledgeable about the area in which a decision is to be made has several advantages. Where there is

group participation, feelings of satisfaction are enhanced, creativity is encouraged, and participants' acceptance and commitment to the decision are strengthened. The quality of the decision also may be improved by the larger number of alternatives that can be generated and analyzed. Forming a school improvement plan that utilizes such input would enhance chances of school success. When others are enrolled in the planning process through such collaboration, their commitment to the goals that are identified is increased. Such ownership by staff and parents is critical to school improvement.

Assessment. It is important to understand and answer the question, where is the school right now? As principal, I will want to initiate change. However, if I do not answer this question first, I will set myself up for failure. Success will be difficult under any circumstances: the absence of long range planning for an undertaking of such complexity virtually assures its failure (Guthrie & Reed, 1991).

I believe people can change as long as they know the point of the change and that the change is going to be a process. The following authors' comments demonstrate the means for accomplishing this process. "Change must be facilitated not dictated, in order to be

successful” (Chamley, Caprio & Young, 1994, p. 2). “We need to create an environment that would nurture risk taking and support change”

(Krewer & Mosley, 1994, p. 1). “Involve team members in every step of an improvement effort. Give them a role in identifying the need for a change” (Howell, 1994, p. 4).

Assessment must involve staff and student performance.

Authentic assessment of both would give an accurate picture of growth by students and staff. Taking documented work performed by a student at the beginning of the year and comparing it to documented work later on in the year utilizes authentic assessment. Students can see how they have grown educationally during this time. Too many times educators get caught up in grades and lose track of actual growth by students.

Authentic assessment can provide this alternative means of seeing how our kids are actually doing. Not only can this technique be used for students but I believe it is an excellent vehicle for teacher growth.

Teacher evaluation of specifically identified areas being documented and compared to later evaluations in the same identified areas can only serve to improve teacher effectiveness in the classroom. Planning steps

of growth and realizing this growth through demonstration will be visible proof of enhancement.

Set goals and objectives. Now that we know where we are, which direction do we head? I would sit down with my staff and have them share their visions of an ideal school. My vision, as supported by Johnson and Johnson (1974) and Doyle (1983), emphasizes cooperative learning, high expectations, technology and alternative assessment as means of change and implementation. My vision of an effective school is one where students experience success every day. I want every student to have at least one experience every day that makes them feel good about themselves.

Shared vision, however, requires collaboration and consensus. Through dialogue in faculty meetings, discussion of readings, seeking opinions in informal settings and involving faculty and students in long range goal setting and staff development, I hope to stimulate development of a shared vision of student and staff success. Setting goals and objectives that stretch everyone's abilities while at the same time creating a sense of pride and enjoyment in quality performance would highlight my expectations for our school. Ownership of our plan

triggers its success. Chamley et al. (1994) stated principals are the key to bringing about results. They must be catalysts and facilitators of change.

Develop an action plan. Action planning involves goals, strategies and tactics for putting the plan into action. Many schools fall short in this category. To accomplish such action planning, I believe in the action team concept. Generally, action teams consist of administrators, teachers, support staff, students and, if possible, parents. The purpose of the action team would be to identify the problem, develop solutions, come to consensus on a final solution and implement the plan. Action teams form to deal with problems identified by staff as critical to the success of our school. These problems may be perceived as big or small but their effect could have long lasting results. A key aspect of the action team is that all members have equal voice; the administrator has no more power than a student. I would also want people who are directly involved in the problem area to be on that particular action team. I feel that plans collaborated in this fashion would have great opportunities for ownership and success. Kindred et al. (1990) pointed out that involvement of staff will provide many new

ideas that ultimately will help the instructional program either directly or indirectly.

Evaluate and monitor. These actions are taken to make sure the program is doing what it is supposed to be doing. Evaluation and monitoring should make it possible to adjust policies and programs before they are too far off course. Action teams would continue to meet after the plan has been implemented. It would be their responsibility to annually monitor and evaluate implementation of the plan. If the plan was not working, the action team would make necessary adjustments to better meet the problem. By monitoring and evaluating, those involved in the problem would be expected to follow through with the plan. If the plan was found to not be working we would utilize their input to make the plan a better one.

Site-based management will require a lot of personal and group commitment. The burden of authority will rest on many shoulders. However, the fruits are worth the labor. Developing efficient techniques for teaching, stretching teachers to their fullest potential and requiring principals to become instructional leaders can only help education.



### Situational Leadership

Blanchard, Hersey and Natemeyer (1977) differentiated ability as a person's skill and willingness as a person's motivation. These two ideas form the basis for situational leadership. The term itself describes when and how leaders use this type of information. What the principal should do depends on the specific situation you have and the people with whom you are dealing. Maturity levels and the use of power and authority are very important elements that need to be understood. Respect for authority comes by way of actions not by words.

Blanchard et al. (1977) suggested that low maturity levels require the principal to provide much direction. They also pointed out that greater maturity requires less direction and more socio-emotional support. Highly mature employees on specific tasks allow for decreased control and increased socio-emotional support and autonomy. Maturity results from a combination of continual professional growth and experience in the position.

The principal has to figure out where individual staff, students and community members fit into this scheme. This is not to say that once someone fits into this scheme that they will stay in this particular

spot. The principal, as leader, must nurture those teachers who need to move higher in maturity level and remediate those who have slipped. I spent much of my first year, as principal, identifying the maturity levels of each member of my staff. Staff members that were at higher maturity levels were stretched by challenging them to be mentors and/or coaches for the less mature teachers and also by having them explore methods in teaching that could make their lessons more effective. Staff members at lower levels were provided the necessary direction and support to gain security in their positions.

My job as principal is to create a collegial environment, so that those with whom I work trust my leadership. Once trust is established, I will work with them on teaching challenges until proficiency is reached. Gaining proficiency can only improve maturity levels. Using mentoring by staff members, providing professional articles and providing staff development are a few means I have used to bring about these improvements for these educators.

Power is the other important element that figures into this style of leadership. Power, as I see it, is two-fold. One type of power is making people do what you want them to do. Another type of power challenges

people to strive toward growth while all along the way encouraging and nudging them toward that success. The first type of power is gained primarily due to the leader's position in the organization. The second type of power is gained primarily through the individual personality of the leader. Either way, a principal may be able to accomplish the end result, which is developing a better educator for kids.

Guthrie and Reed (1991) established that leaders and followers have influence over one another. Leaders exert influence through power and authority. The manifestation of power by followers is associated with the extent to which leaders depend on information they generate, expertise they possess, or their cooperation shown in meeting organizational goals. Leaders derive power from two sources: the position and personal characteristics such as expertise or charisma. Kindred et al. (1990) remarked that aside from the superintendent, perhaps the most important administrative officers are the building principals. Their attitudes and actions determine the way in which many teachers and other school personnel think and feel about the school system. Constantly seeking improvement in their performance and not being satisfied with the status quo would define this end result.

One key is how much power it is perceived that you have. I believe that being fair with staff but standing firm in my beliefs along with setting high expectations will create the best perception for instructional leadership. Consequently, “to maximize effectiveness of your staff, you must use the powers that will provide consistency with the maturity levels of the individual group that you are trying to influence” (Blanchard et al., 1977, p. 6).

Situational leadership, like site-based management, is a gradual process. It takes time to learn the maturity of all the people with whom you work. It takes time to develop your power bases. Communication is the main element in securing these power bases.

As this all comes together, trust and respect--conditions essential for a professional teaching force--are more likely to form. According to Cooper and Mulkeen (1992), sharing, planning and decision-making responsibilities should be done in collaboration with the staff. This is a basic tenet for shared instructional leadership.

### Shared Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership, in my vision, is keyed to visibility, visitation and vulnerability. I want to know the students personally. I want the staff to see that I care about what they are doing. I plan for my visitations to be frequent. I also want students and staff to be comfortable when I am in the classroom. I am hoping that, even though these visits are non-threatening, they will foster accountability. Vulnerability refers to myself. I need to realize I am not the expert in all areas in the building. Thus, I need to call upon the expertise of all my staff so that we can learn from each other. This concession will help develop shared instructional leadership.

Obviously, management issues often cloud instructional leadership. If a principal is to be an effective instructional leader, he must also learn to deal effectively with specific managerial tasks.

### Managerial Tasks of Instructional Leaders

Donmoyer and Wagstaff (1990) suggest six examples of management tasks with which effective leaders must deal:

(a) scheduling, (b) articulating policies, rules and norms, (c) hiring

personnel, (d) supervising personnel (e) coordinating pupil services, and (f) staff development.

Scheduling. It is important to not become caught up in efficiency, tradition or political considerations. Schedules are not just done to get them done or to please. Providing time to teachers for integrated projects, scheduling students so that their needs and staff needs are met and providing course offerings that will meet state standards along with offering chances for students to explore professional options that might suit them later will maximize a child's likelihood to learn.

Articulating policies, rules and norms. This will have direct and indirect influences on the effectiveness of teaching by the faculty and learning by the students. It will directly influence faculty and students by ensuring there is adequate time in the school day for teaching and learning. It will indirectly influence students, faculty, staff and parents by demonstrating that academics are important. An example of these direct and indirect influences would be that classes are not interrupted except for emergencies. Articulating policies, rules and norms characterizes the importance of why we are here--teaching kids.

Hiring personnel. Effective principals take this seriously. They need to invest time in recruiting talent and developing networks to find talent. Teaching is an art that exists in special people. When recruiting this talent I must be cognizant of student and staff needs and utilize staff input during the hiring process. These people are the primary stakeholders to our success and they deserve input.

A very important talent that I feel is critical to candidates I might hire is their technological proficiency. Schools need teachers who understand and are willing to implement technology into their curriculum. Other traits that I value in candidates include a strong work ethic, ability to get along with kids and staff, discipline and organization. The more talented your staff, the more effective your instructional program will be.

Supervising personnel. Every principal needs to provide assistance to his or her teachers. Even if it is only telling them they are doing a good job, take the time to provide this feedback. As Fredericks and Brown (1993) point out, "Faculties must maintain their expertise by interacting with school-based professionals on current issues and problems. Additional support, mentoring, coaching and induction

services must be made available” (p. 16). I believe it is important to allow teaching to be varied. Building upon that teacher’s own personal style will create an effective classroom.

Collaborating with the staff is critical to meaningful growth. I want to find out what their beliefs are regarding the delivery of education to our students. I also want to share my own feelings. Once consensus about such issues is articulated, the next steps are to reinforce good teaching practices and monitor whether norms are being violated.

Coordinating pupil services. Pupil services, such as advisor/advisee programs, must be coordinated. The idea behind such a program is to provide students with the opportunities to develop positive relationships with at least one adult staff member along with a small group of peers. This program can be very effective if it works hand in hand with the school’s mission and maximizes student learning.

I have developed more awareness to the importance of our guidance program. Our students going through elementary and middle school need to understand themselves better and the resourcefulness provided by the guidance counselor is critical to meet this need. Gorton



and Schneider (1991) stated, “younger students tend to be more receptive to guidance, and problems can be addressed in their early stages before they become more complex and difficult” (p. 455). I must coordinate this service so that our guidance counselor has location accessibility for students and has schedule freedom to do counseling.

Special education services must center on self-esteem and individual education plans. My effective involvement hinges upon open communication between myself and those involved in special education in my building. Whether it be the S.C.I. teacher, resource teacher, social worker, school psychologist, regular education teacher or the parents we need to work together so that students in special education will have better chances of experiencing success. As pointed out by Gorton and Schneider (1991), “school administrators should provide a model of behavior indicating to all observers that the education of the handicapped in the least restrictive environment is an important and desirable educational priority, rather than an unnecessary legal mandate” (p. 454).

Student discipline is another critical service that can enhance or destroy an instructional program. Student discipline, I believe I must follow the ideas stated by Hughes and Ubben (1989):

Schools should be dedicated to the twofold task of helping students understand that (1) every human being inherently possesses dignity and worth and (2) inalienable rights are accompanied by inescapable responsibilities of freedom.

Children generally learn better from what educators demonstrate than from what they advocate. (p. 122)

As long as students realize that we are going to do everything possible to guarantee a safe environment and promote democracy in our actions with them, discipline problems can be headed off before they begin or at least before they become a problem.

Staff development. I believe the most critical factor in helping teachers grow in their profession is staff development. Effective staff development means allocating time and money so teachers can decide upon, develop and lead staff development sessions that they believe will help their fellow staff members achieve their instructional goals. I believe that members of my faculty are dedicated individuals. They are

dedicated to a profession of giving to students the necessary tools to be successful in the future. They are dedicated to creating a caring environment for learning to take place. They are dedicated to professional growth and life-long learning. It is the duty of the district and faculty to look forward and meet state, national and world educational standards. To do this staff development must give every teacher the maximum training to prepare them for future trends, pressures, and demands on their skills.

Achilles (1994) pointed out, "As teachers become better educated and better prepared to teach their increased ability brings with it the need to use that ability" (p. 14). The shared part of instructional leadership has to involve a partnership. Cunard (1990) conducted studies that show, "principals who share powers with teachers become more effective instructional leaders because empowered teachers are more likely to maximize their own potential" (p. 33). Hoyle (1994) emphasized democratic leaders work with teachers and patrons to create the best learning environment possible for all students. Teachers want responsibility. I believe as an instructional leader I need to let my staff become responsible for staff development. Some possibilities to

encourage this would be to create a curriculum council or allow for and encourage peer coaching.

### Conclusion

Leaders in education must create a vision of where they want institutions to be. Then they must refine that vision into partnership with the institution's employees. Cunard (1990) suggests that instructional leaders must develop appropriate plans to enable the institution to strive toward that vision and empower employees to make the vision a reality. I believe visioning should be a bottom up structure in the school. I must decide, from the information assessed about the district, what directions the school must pursue. However, I must be willing to share the decision-making process in the formulation of that vision so as to ensure ownership and success. This could free me to be an innovator of the future. Once I have gained the trusting relationship with my staff, I will be able to join with them to restructure our school for the 21st century.

The five basic areas of leadership mentioned throughout this reflective paper are key to my success as a principal. Having had the

chance to experience the role of principal for a year, these five styles of leadership have proved to be very useful.

My values set has been implemented through dealings with my entire staff, students, parents, board and community. I have had to stand up to my staff with regard to our pursuit of a computer lab. I have had to stand up to parents when they have questioned a teacher's judgment with regard to their child. I have had to stand before the board and community as I supported a controversial change in moving kindergarten from a half-day schedule to a full-day schedule. The values set built throughout my lifetime has been critical, I believe, to establishing myself as a principal. By abiding by the "Golden Rule," I have found that the staff is very receptive to this approach and the trusting relationship I hoped for is beginning to show itself.

Site-based management, in my opinion, is the only way to run a school system in today's world. Empowering staff has helped our system move ahead. Our computer lab project is moving in the right direction due to the input from all players: staff, students, community and administration. Our entire team has much valuable input to offer and is very appreciative of someone willing to listen. To be honest, the

value of site-based management is two-fold. It allows valuable input and takes some of the pressure off the administrator by providing group decision-making.

Situational leadership is one area of leadership I still believe is necessary. I am in the process of identifying the various maturity levels of our staff. Having so many different personalities to deal with, it is interesting to assess this information about them. As we move through both the informal and formal evaluative processes, these levels tend to show themselves in a way that helps the teacher and I come up with a growth plan for the future.

Shared instructional leadership has been a key part of my principalship thus far. I am striving to be visible, even though I am finding that a challenging task. I have visited every classroom at least five times, most of which have been informal. It is important that I let my staff know that I care about them as people and professionals. We worked hard on the second semester schedule so that both student and staff needs are addressed. I have worked hard at articulating information through daily oral announcements, written announcements

and weekly staff meetings. I have tried to encourage the importance of academics to everyone.

Having been in education in various capacities for the better part of 27 years I have experienced many styles of educational leadership. Having moved from an Industrial Age to an Information Age, the instructional agenda today needs to focus on problem-solving and reflective thinking. Administrators must be prepared to create and communicate a vision of what can and should be done for the best interest of educating kids for the future. They need to serve as catalysts and facilitators. As educational leaders, they must develop a positive organizational culture and work with individuals and groups in a democratic organization.

As a principal of the 21st century, I must be challenged with change. I need to understand that learning is life-long and expansive. I must always be aware of the history of education so that I will use this information to make good decisions about situations in the future.

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