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Instructional Leadership

QUOTE

I love problem solving and puzzles. I love to find solutions and my goal is to make all teachers successful. I have learned that leadership emerges when things are going badly. Powerful lessons are learned by making inadvertent mistakes. It is not just a job—it goes beyond that. It is getting people to know how we do things here and creating a culture that is purposeful and task-oriented.

—Ynez Olshausen, principal

STORY FROM THE FIELD

Ynez Olshausen is the principal at Waddell Language Academy. She has been an administrator for 26 years, having begun her career at the Department of Defense. Her school is a public K–8 magnet in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District, and offers students the opportunity to become fluent and literate in a second language. Waddell Language Academy offers second language immersion instruction in Chinese, German, French, and Japanese. Ynez's staff is unique in that they represent a diverse number of cultures and experiences, many of which are not common in American schools. They have the skills, motivation, and desire to be exemplary

educators, but they often do not know how American schools operate. Ynez continuously asks herself: "What else do I need to teach them, and how do I find out what they need to know and share with them in a nonblaming way?" She addresses terminology and vocabulary, dress codes, grading, and parent communications on a regular basis. One of her teachers told a parent that the child was "lazy," a term used in the teacher's native country. Ynez had to talk with the teacher about using appropriate language terms so that the teacher could continue to build positive relationships with the students and parents.

THE ADMINISTRATOR'S ROLE

It has been said over and over that the building principal has the largest impact on new teacher retention and job satisfaction. What you do in the beginning will determine what happens over the span of a school year. New teacher programs have been implemented across the country with great success in some areas and no success in others. Many school districts are still providing "rookie camp" during the professional development days before school starts. New educators gather in a large arena, and people come in and talk at them about all aspects of their new teaching career. Other districts provide monthly seminars or mentors so that support can be ongoing throughout the year. In some cases, districts provide a book that addresses what the new teacher can do to build the skills and knowledge needed for a successful teaching career. There are a lot of pages with suggestions and strategies, but my experience has shown that most new teachers really don't have the time to read them.

While these books are excellent sources of information, they do not provide the practical application and support that new teachers need. Nor do they support administrators with information about what their role is in new teacher support. The problem with these books is that they provide too much information, while administrators provide no modeling or demonstration of the practices by the instructional leader of the school. New teachers want to see a strategy demonstrated, practice it, and then get feedback on how they are doing.

The Importance of the Building Principal

My principal is totally with it and really cares about me. Instead of asking me "How are you doing?" she asks me "What can I do for you today?" If she asked me the first question, I would tell her "fine," which is really not the case at all. She walks the hall every morning and makes an effort to speak to all of us. I see that she has a small notepad with her and writes down a to-do list for each of us. If she were not present, I would not feel as good about being here as I do.

—Elizabeth, K–8 media specialist

John Hattie, in *Visible Learning* (2009), wrote about his extensive research into and synthesis of 800 meta-analyses on what works in schools, and he has provided educators with the research data needed to significantly impact teaching and learning. Hattie's work presents research involving millions of students and represents the largest compilation of evidence-based research into the multiple influences that affect student achievement.

A report by the Public Education Network in 2003 clearly found the importance of the principal's role in making a first-year teacher successful. The report shows that new teachers who stated their schools were run by principals they described as *effective* and *competent* had an easier transition into teaching. At the top of their list was the attribute of being *accessible.* A principal who had time to meet with new teachers, so they could ask questions and discuss successes and challenges, was a critical component of effective new teacher support models.

The building principal's role has changed over the past few years. A study from the Wallace Foundation in 2010 found that principals are second only to teachers in the impact made on student achievement and overall school success. Effective leaders work on being effective, and it takes time and effort.

This study suggests that effective leadership encompasses five key responsibilities:

- **Shaping a vision of academic success for all students,** one based on high standards.

- **Creating a climate hospitable to education** so that safety, a cooperative spirit, and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.

- **Cultivating leadership in others** so that teachers and other adults assume their part in realizing the school vision.

- **Improving instruction** to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn at their utmost.

- **Managing people, data, and processes** to foster school improvement.

What Kind of Leader Are You?

John Hattie (2009) discussed two types of leadership: instructional and transformational. He stated,

> Instructional leadership refers to those principals who have their major focus on creating a learning climate free of disruption, a system of clear teaching objectives, and high teacher expectations for teachers and students. Transformational leadership refers to those principals who engage with their teaching staff in ways that inspire them to new levels of energy, commitment, and moral purpose. The evidence from the meta-analyses supports the power of the former over the latter in terms of the effects on students' outcomes.

> It is school leaders who promote challenging goals then establish safe environments for teachers to critique, question, and support other teachers to reach these goals together that have most effect on student outcomes. (p. 83)

When you talk with Ynez Olshausen at Waddell Language Academy, you get the sense of her leadership style after several minutes of conversation. She is well versed in current research on effective schools, instructional best practices, and leadership skills. Her expectations are fair and consistent across the K–8 grade levels, and she recognizes that challenge is part of all district and school programs and initiatives. She is very good at sharing current data and information—not perceptions—from the national, state, and local agencies so that her teachers are well informed on what is happening in educational trends. Her philosophy is that the school is not a "have it your way" school but one that is built on communication that supports shared decision-making that is in the best interest of everyone in the building.

Lessons Learned About Leadership

The heart of school improvement is in improving daily teaching and learning practices, balanced with the appropriate level of evaluation, including daily collaborating at the school setting. School leaders are responsible for cultural changes, and what they do with modeling practices and behaviors makes an impact on teaching and learning. Permeating the cultures of effective schools were nine principles that I found to establish positive communities for teaching and learning. When I interviewed leaders around the country, I found that each one of these was in the forefront of their leadership styles and practices.

Ask yourself how you implement and model these principles in your daily connections within your school community. Write down your reflections as you read through the actions, and choose several in which to improve throughout the year.

1. Model and implement high expectations for all.

All of us in education believe that all children can learn. It is written on mission and vision statements across the country, and we have spent countless hours helping our school communities understand that this is truly what we see as our goal in education.

- Determine your expectations for teaching, management, and behavior in your building.

- Post your mission and vision statement within the school, and refer to it often.

- Have grade levels and/or individual classrooms establish their own mission and vision statements, and refer to them often.

- Start the school year with high expectations. Define what excellent teaching will be in your school, and establish a set of goals for making the environment a better place for teaching and learning.

- Meet with your new teachers, individually, to talk about implementing their goals.

- Establish the fact that you are a support for your teachers.

2. Develop and maintain strong interpersonal connections between students and adults.

The adults in the building are your strongest resource, and what happens between classroom teachers and their students will impact the success of your school. Teachers have to like the students they are teaching. Building relationships is one of the most important aspects of effective teaching.

- Frequently recognize excellence in your new staff.

- Congratulate your staff members when they do exceptional work in the classroom.

- Recognize new teacher milestones during the year.

- Talk to your new teachers about staying for the next year. You should begin these conversations around the middle of November. Explain why you need them and need them to stay.

- Start every staff meeting or e-mail with a thank you and note of appreciation.

- Cover a class if there is an emergency. Sometimes substitutes are hard to find at the last moment.

3. Focus on student engagement and motivation in all classrooms.

Students should be engaged with learning, and teachers should be motivated to come to school.

Several years ago, I was interviewed by a local TV news crew about teacher morale and motivation. The anchorwoman asked me a variety of questions about what makes effective schools and how teacher retention impacted student learning. One of her questions struck me as really strange. She asked me, "What motivates you to come to school?" I did not have to think about the answer and replied very quickly, "If I have to motivate myself, then who will motivate my students?"

- Define what engagement means to you, your teachers, and your students.

- Talk about motivation and the impact it has on teaching and learning. Find out what motivates your new staff to come to work every day.

- Ask your students: "What are you learning today?" You should not accept comments such as "nothing," "I don't know," or "math." There should be a specific, standard-based response that indicates the teacher has shared the learning outcomes for the day.

- Find out what strategies the teacher has tried with the students. Talk about building relationships and getting to know the students.

4. Implement a rich and engaging curriculum, including standards and assessments.

The new Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics and the Next Generation Science Standards have once again changed the way we approach curriculum in this country. Whether you have adopted these is not important, but having a strategy that integrates best practices for curriculum design is critical to improving student achievement in your school.

- Share your expertise about the curriculum with your teachers. What are the skills and content that students must be able to do and know in order to be successful?

- Provide a systematic method to "tame the standards" using a curriculum design process for writing rigorous units of study by grade level and content area.

- Discuss the informal components of the school day, such as social, emotional, and physical learning activities.

- Provide opportunities for teachers to learn what the standards are saying and what they mean in terms of implementation

5. Implement and monitor effective teaching practices in all classrooms on a daily basis.

Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock's *Classroom Instruction That Works* (2001) and John Hattie's *Visible Learning* (2009) clearly define the best instructional practices that make a difference in schools.

- Conduct a book study of best instructional practices focusing on one or two each month during a staff meeting.

- Allow your new teachers to observer master teachers, either in your building or at a colleague's site.

- Use videos to show model classrooms. These are readily available on the Internet for all content areas and grade levels. Many offer discussion questions to guide the viewing.

- Model best practices at staff meetings to show that you are aware of current research-based strategies that work.

- Hold a round table discussion at a staff meeting. Place selected best practices on index cards, and have teachers share how to actually use these in the classroom.

- Explain the importance of the Standards for Mathematical Practice for Common Core Math, the Practices for Common Core English/Language Arts, and the Science and Engineering Practices in the Next Generation Science Standards. Using chart paper, have teachers find the key points and the implications for instruction and assessment.

6. Provide data analysis and feedback to ensure teacher and student improvement.

The responsibility for data analysis and feedback is one of your most important jobs in the building. You have a lot of numbers to crunch and must decide how to share the most important data with your staff. Data sources inform and guide actions, and without meaningful data, you will not know the effectiveness of your initiatives. Your role is to constantly review, refine, and realign practices that reflect specific needs based on data analysis.

- Decide which data are the most critical to use to inform your decisions. For example, this could include behavior, attendance, assessment, or other related data points.

- Design your learning community teams so that there is uninterrupted time to collaborate and share information.

- Establish goals for student achievement that are specific, relevant, timely, and measurable. For example, improving algebra scores from 33% to 45% proficient is more realistic than setting a goal of 100% proficiency over a span of 6 weeks.

- Determine the type of feedback that will make a difference in teacher actions.

7. Learn what to say and what not to say.

All of us have said things that we regret or have said something in the wrong way or format. A group of teachers recently shared with me comments that they had heard their principal say during the year. These statements reflect the culture that is established in the building. Decide where the culture of your organization falls within these two sections.

- Here are a few things to say that will make a difference in teacher morale and illustrate that you are taking an interest in your new staff.
  - "I appreciate you."
  - "What do you need?" or "How can I make your job easier?" or "How are you doing for materials and supplies?"
  - "You handled that situation very well."

- ○ "I respect you and your dedication to our students."
- ○ "Thank you for letting me know. I will investigate your concern and get back to you with more information."
- ○ "I want your input on something. Can we find a time to chat?"
- ○ "Thank you for being confidential on this matter. Trust me to follow through."
- ○ "We work for our students and school community."
- ○ "Do you mind if I share this success at the staff meeting tomorrow?"

- Here are a few things to never, ever say out loud.
  - ○ "How are you doing?" because the response will be "Fine."
  - ○ "Before I make a decision, I want to hear the student's version." You just need to rephrase this one, so is doesn't sound like you doubt your teacher's judgment.
  - ○ "If you could only handle your classroom . . ."
  - ○ "Put it in my box and I will get to it."
  - ○ "I don't know what to do about that."
  - ○ "We have a difficult group of students, parents, situations . . ."
  - ○ "Don't you know where these kids come from?"

8. Minimize disruptions for teachers and students. Allow teaching and learning to occur.

I was recently in a middle school where it seemed that the priority was on interrupting the instructional day as often as possible. Announcements, class change bells, people coming and going from classrooms, custodial cleaning, bathroom breaks, students wandering the halls, and fire drills were destroying every teaching moment possible. New teachers are often thrown off course in their lesson implementation when the class period is constantly in disarray. These interruptions waste time that could be used for instructional learning and can also lead to behavioral problems for students.

- Decide on when whole school announcements will be made during the day.

- Pull students out of class only when necessary.

- Make sure teachers have consistent schedules for lunch, recess, and restroom breaks.

- Establish a respectful noise level for the halls and for transitioning time between classes.

- Establish a schoolwide hall pass or escort policy.

- Walk your halls and identify students out of place. Take action when you see something.

9. Develop strong positive relationships within your school community.

Your actions and your new teachers' relationships within the school community are important in establishing good working conditions for all stakeholders.

- Keep your communications short and to the point. People will read about 30 seconds of what you send home.

- Do not use acronyms. Most people don't know what they stand for.

- Do your job, and do it effectively.

- Have a school community communication plan. Base this on your audience; you will need to create differentiated methods for communicating with your parents and students. This may include writing information in different languages, establishing a consistent time for newsletters or e-mails, and scheduling school-based activities at times and locations that are convenient for your diverse community.

- Quickly dispel misconceptions or rumors. In a crisis, communicate the facts as quickly as possible—using all media sources—to staff, parents, and students.

- Communicate face-to-face as often as possible. Use focus groups, phone trees, blogs, and e-mail. Walk the halls and talk to people.

- Tell families, if applicable, that they can get into district athletic events with no charge. This helps them connect to what their students are doing outside of class and at no cost to them.

Ynez will tell you that "leadership emerges when things are going badly," and effective leaders make decisions that include showing confidence, modeling expectations, and inspiring others to do the same. I have often heard her tell people that she uses the Swiss watch as an analogy for making her school work. Every piece has to be in place, and all pieces have to work together for the 1,400 students in her building. She adds that a fair and consistent plan to get from point A to point B must be well executed on a minute-to-minute basis. When challenges get in the way, you deal with them in an equitable fashion and move on to the next thing. The way the staff and students present themselves to others is what they are all about and it sends the message that school and learning is important to all.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO?

Several principals suggested that leaders have a Principal's To-Do List (Figure 1.1) as they develop an action plan for supporting their new staff members. With the changing role of administrators, it is easy to forget or put to the side the things that we need to accomplish on a daily basis that show the support and guidance that is needed to create great teachers.

Take a moment and use the list to focus on one or two priority areas that will support your new staff members. Write down your thoughts as an action plan.

Figure 1.1 **Principal's To-Do List**

Focusing on School Climate	My Strategies
Defining high expectations • Academic • Behavior • Attendance • Instruction • Assessment • Communication	
Modeling respect, confidence, and trust	
Encouraging collegiality and effective teaming	
Promoting risk taking and experimentation	
Providing honest, open communication	
Honoring traditions and individual cultures	

Focusing on School Climate	My Strategies
Modeling appreciation, celebration, and recognition of all school community members	
Promoting the vision and mission	
Using teachers' and community members' strengths	
Including everyone in the decision-making process	
Supporting professionalism in all areas	
Monitoring engagement and motivation in the classrooms	

SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Take time to reflect on the questions in Figure 1.2 related to your role as a leader and your support of your new teachers. Your responses in both the strengths and challenges columns should help guide you with implementing strategies that will impact your school community. You should be able to chart your journey as the instructional leader as you progress through the year.

Figure 1.2   Self-Reflection Questions

Reflection Questions	My Strengths	My Challenges	My Strategies
How do I let my teachers know that I am part of their instructional team?			
How do I practice effective listening skills?			
How do I pick my battles and evaluate all sides in a situation before making a decision?			
In what way do I have an open-door policy and meet with my new teachers at least once a month?			
Do I remember being a teacher?			
What people connections do I make every day?			

Reflection Questions	My Strengths	My Challenges	My Strategies
Which is better: identifying problems or identifying solutions? Why?			
How do I value everyone in my school community?			
How often do I say "thank you"?			
How do I design quality professional development based on my staff's needs?			
What opportunities do I provide so my staff can attend professional development at local, state, and national conferences?			
How accessible am I to my staff?			
How visible am I on a daily basis?			
How do I let my new teachers know that they are special by providing small goodies and notes of appreciation for them?			