



Leading the Journey

An E-newsletter on EXCELLENCE in Leadership

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 5 • A PUBLICATION OF THE PACIFIC UNION CONFERENCE • January 2013

In this issue:

- Love, Listen and Live
- Front Burner
- Receiving Gifts
- Boardmanship
- Join the Journey



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Love, Listen and Live

Ruben Escalante

I like the number three. It's a good number. Not quite four and more than two. It even has biblical references you may be able to recall without much effort. So although I could easily come up with more pieces of sage advice for up and coming administrators, I have chosen to submit only three—3 L's to be exact. The first is the most basic: **Love**. Leading is relational. In fact, life itself is relational. I learned that as a Christian administrator I must love people. Period. That means respecting them even when they are wrong or obnoxious; accepting them for who they are and not for who I would rather they be, and; building them up through words of kindness and appreciation. People follow a leader who genuinely loves them.

The second is often the most neglected: **Listen**. I had to learn to listen. I am much better at fixing things. But I caught on after some painful experiences that listening creates an environment, which both benefits me, as I actually learned something new, and also draws the other person in to resolving the problem at hand. There is buy-in only if there is participation. Listening to students came easy to me. Listening to teachers I had to learn. Listening to parents was occasionally a challenge, but I learned to enjoy even the difficult moments. I even learned to listen to detractors and learn from those stimulating encounters. And I made the time to listen to God; I was lost when I neglected to do this. Remember: One mouth, two ears; that's a good ratio of speaking to listening. Life is about learning—about being teachable. This is impossible without listening.

The final one is both the easiest and most difficult to grasp: **Live**. In short, I neither live to be a leader, nor am I a leader in order to live. Life does not begin and/or end with my role as an administrator. If I have learned anything, it's: I

Continued on page 2

Front Burner

Dick Molstead

The job description for school administrators typically is several pages in length. And a principal rightfully wonders how and where to begin. It is not uncommon in the normal workplace for principals to become so occupied with the urgent problems of the day that the important issues of vision and mission implementation get shuffled onto the back burner of priority.

The challenge is for school leadership to stay focused on the most important goals. I believe the measure of the successful school leader is not how much is being done, but what is being done well. Three areas which school principals will want to keep on their "important" list include: creating a positive climate, juggling many tasks successfully, and staying strong with God.

1. Positive School Climate

Many researchers consider positive school climate to be the single most important component of effective schools. It has been said, "If you have a really positive climate in your school, you can do anything you want." School climate has to do with the feelings teachers, parents and students have about their school values and meanings. Nothing can give the principal a generic recipe for creating a positive school climate, but there are an abundance of resources available on this subject.

2. Juggling Tasks Successfully

Principals will always have urgent tasks. The challenge is to evaluate the present and plan for the future. As a principal, I found it important to schedule regular guidance and evaluation meetings with my board chair and superintendent. I also made important use of ad-hoc advisory committees. These were opportunities to participate in big-picture thinking and strategic planning.

3. Staying Strong with God

We are living in a time when local churches, conferences and unions are redefining their spiritual identity. Adventist schools, when led by principals who engage in religious thinking, can be safe places for students to read and study the Bible. Such study

Continued on page 2

Love, Listen and Live

live to love people, and because I love people, I actually take time to listen to them. That's the order. I had to learn not to let my role as a leader swallow or suffocate my life. I learned to bask in the joy and privilege I had to be a principal. I laughed with people. I played with the children. I ate with friends, old and new. God called me to live abundantly (John 10:10). I enjoy my role and I bask in the opportunities it affords me. But that *Joie de vivre* would go with me if I were to find myself suddenly teaching, or preaching, or sweeping, or cooking.

Perhaps this is too simplistic for some. That's OK. I've learned that often life is simple and we choose to complicate it unnecessarily. Try it. **Love. Listen. Live.** You will see results in your leadership and life. ☸

Front Burner

can empower students to develop a framework about the large issues of life, and provide spiritual handles to hang onto after leaving the spiritual security of the school.

When parents, students and teachers feel they are part of a team working towards a common goal of student success, they will support and cooperate with school administrators. Effective school leadership is all about creating the environment for teachers and students to do their best work. ☸

Join the Journey

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paucedu.adventistfaith.org/leading
-the-journey](http://paucedu.adventistfaith.org/leading-the-journey).

Boardsmanship

Berit von Pohle

In previous newsletters, we have discussed the activities of the board and administration in completing two of the four major tasks: What and How.

The next major task of the board, in collaboration with administration, is to determine "how well?" Evaluation of various components of the school program must be an ongoing process. Some of the areas for evaluation include:

- Student achievement: Regular reports to the board summarizing the level of student achievement. Generally, this is accomplished through a review of standardized test scores. The board should be clear that achievement expectations are being met and/or that action plans are developed in cases where achievement expectations are not being met.
- Financial stability: Each month, the board (and finance committee) will review the financial statements in terms of the dashboard measures the board has developed. In reviewing the cash position, in comparing the budget to actual figures, and in assessing the current status of accounts payable and accounts receivable, the board determines how well the school is doing financially.
- Program review: On a regular basis, various programs of the school should be reviewed. In some cases, the board will ask for a report on this type of review from administration. In other situations, the board may establish a small ad-hoc committee to review the effectiveness of a program. A program review will include financial viability, customer satisfaction, and effectiveness of the program.
- Teacher evaluation: The board is never directly involved with the evaluation of teachers. This is the responsibility of the principal and the local conference office of education. However, it is important for the board to know whether or not the evaluations are being conducted as outlined in Union Education Code policy. Additionally, it would be well for the board to know whether steps are being taken to provide an improvement plan in cases where teachers may not be performing at their optimum level.

Before the board can complete the fourth task (coming next month), the board members must have a clear understanding of "how well" the school is doing, including plans for improvement in areas where the school is not doing as well as expected. ☸

Receiving Gifts

John Deming

"Hello, we have six years of National Geographic magazines and we were wondering if the school library could use them? They'd be wonderful for students to use in their research projects." What school hasn't received such a call?

Donations (whether financial or in-kind) are wonderful for a school to receive. However, there are times when some careful and thoughtful discussions might be in order. This brings to mind one such "gift" accepted many years ago at a school where I was principal.

A caller had a motor home he wanted to donate. Our Director of Development and I talked together as visions of an Air Stream or Winnebago filled our mind's eye. Wrong.

We found the gift surrounded by weeds higher than the vehicle windows, a hole in the roof (caused by an off-course dynamited tree stump), a stripped interior (a remodeling project gone bad), dead engine, and pieces of outside trim hanging from the vehicle. Still, the owner was upbeat as he

pointed out that "a few hundred dollars" could make it into a "first-class motor home".

Space prohibits the continued and painful description of this experience. The engine finally did come to life and we slowly made our way back to the school campus where the vehicle was parked next to the bus barn and the roof covered with a blue plastic tarp.

Unfortunately, it was going to take far more than "a few hundred dollars" to convert it into a "first-class motor home", but all was not lost. It was used to store the 3000+ carpet samples given to the school to sell, but that's another story for another time! Eventually, the vehicle was disposed of with the school realizing very little value from it.

The point here is not to discourage the acceptance of gifts. People are good-hearted and desire to help our schools, but the bottom line is some donations may not be the blessing the school had in mind. Yet, hindsight, being 20/20, can and should instruct foresight. A bit more thought, discussion and discretion on our part would have been the wiser choice. ☸