



Leading the Journey

An E-newsletter on EXCELLENCE in Leadership

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Humor and Leadership

Cyril Connelly

Does humor have a part in your leadership style? Are you able to step back and inject some lightness into your faculty meetings? A good sense of humor can help to make some situations more tolerable.

B. Lee Hurren notes an interesting study on the role of humor in the principal's job. The teachers surveyed found higher job satisfaction when humor was used in direct communication with and in meetings led by the principal. (Educational Studies, Dec. 2006)

I have found that humor can be an important release in tense situations, either in dealing with issues in faculty meeting or in one-on-one confrontations with students and/or parents. It is essential to have a relationship with the individual so that any remarks shared are taken in a positive and non-demeaning manner.

It is easy to overreact negatively in a tense situation. A smile, and even appropriate lightness, in dealing with tense situations, such as disciplinary problems, may sometimes help in bringing an agreeable conclusion to a problem.

On occasion parents have burst into the office in a confrontational manner. They usually started with "Do you know why I am here?" or a similar statement. One response that I have used is "Well, I don't think you are here to tell me that I am doing a great job!" I found that this or another rejoinder accompanied by a smile and an invitation to sit and talk things over has helped to disarm and also assure the individual that I was there to listen.

It is good to share a humorous story or an amusing incident in faculty meetings, after worship, perhaps in the middle of those boring announcements. It is heartening to hear your faculty laugh, and it usually results in positive bonding as they smile and laugh together with you.

It has been affirming to reminiscence with former faculty colleagues about good times together. Many remember the mutual trust we shared accompanied with a good dose of humor as we struggled with the daily pressures of a school program.

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My Most Important Task

Vern Biloff

You know the routine. My life as principal includes paperwork, phone calls, pressing financial issues, committees, and the interpersonal challenges of staff and students. It seems like most of my time is spent keeping the proverbial machinery running smoothly. The stress and joy of graduation comes and goes. Then summer brings a change of pace. You take a deep breath, take a graduate class, recruit students, put on jeans and work on unfinished plant maintenance.

I came to realize through the years that the success or failure of my year was not attributable to my ability to keep the machinery running. Faculty, staff and students were successful years before I arrived.

I eventually learned that a school is successful as a result of a shared community vision created and perpetuated by those who care. That being true, my most important task is to be a catalyst ensuring the vision is nurtured and renewed in a way that will attract future generations of stakeholders. This vision includes what is important to parents and school benefactors. My role as leader becomes significant when I promote plans that are perceived as important for their children and community.

How is this shared vision recreated and maintained through the years? How can a principal work in an intentional manner to renew and keep relevant this vision that moves a constituency to enthusiastically support its school with students, funds, and prayerful devotion? Here are some ideas that have worked for me:

1. A successful principal will build relationships with school constituents, learning their history and support levels for the school. Without history and relationships, the vision will not flourish. A new leader does not impose new directions without knowing the context of the existing vision.
2. A successful principal will base a proposed renewal of the vision on a broad spectrum of thought. A vision should be as inclusive as possible to a range of ideas held by stakeholders of the constituency.
3. A successful principal will assess and understand the spiritual climate and spiritual imperatives of

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Humor and Leadership

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Educating our children is a serious business, but the use of humor can serve as a uniting factor in fostering a warm, accepting climate. ☸

Most Important Task

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- the constituency. The principal learns the world views that drive the pastors, elders and prominent thought leaders.
4. A successful principal will cast vision roadmaps that are flexible in a rapidly changing world and church. Your school vision and strategic plans should be annually reviewed and adjusted.
 5. Processes that will help promote ownership of the preferred future of the strategic plan will include visiting church board meetings, pastoral luncheons, initiate town hall meetings, brainstorming sessions with parents and teachers.

Successful principals lead. There is no greater symbol of your leadership than a fresh vision and strategic plan that you nurture and promote. ☸

Lessons I am Learning

Bill Keresoma

New principals learn both from experiences and lessons shared by seasoned administrators. Here are some “Keresomaisms” that I have learned and still learning as I mentor school leaders. The following practices will empower your mission to serve.

1. Be intentional in practicing “be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” James 1:19 NIV
2. Be intentional in affirming your staff by sending a note, leaving a text, twitter, email or verbally. Begin this practice twice a school year and then increase this positive reinforcement.
3. Document your conversations with staff members when identifying areas of growth or dealing with sensitive issues. Document, document, and document.
4. Respond to your emails within 24 hours. Even if you are not able to give a complete answer, send an initial email that you have received their email and will try to respond

Anticipating Success

John Deming

Frank Sinatra never served as principal. But his lyrics, “Regrets, I’ve had a few . . .” have been occasionally muttered by principals.

Thinking of this fact, brought to mind a story shared with me by my father. Time has dimmed the purpose of the story, but its main point remains vivid and present.

It seems there were two businessmen; one quite successful in his endeavors and the other struggling at best.

One lived in the world of “if only,” seeking excuses and finding fault when a business plan or venture failed or achieved only mediocre results. If only this or that had or had not occurred how much better the result would have been. At best, life was a continual uphill and discouraging challenge.

The other lived in the world of “next time,” seeking answers and solutions when the business plan didn’t reach the level of success hoped for. “Next time” this or that will be done differently with more attention given to this or that. A plan would then be laid out for a more positive approach anticipating a successful completion of a task. While life might be a challenge, success was always anticipated and planned for.

It’s important to remember: regardless of the situation, “if only” has no future. It is much like driving a car while looking in the rear view mirror -- surely a recipe for disaster. However, “next time,” while not denying what may have occurred, brings the energy of anticipated success.

Christ’s teaching in Luke 9:62 is relevant today; the plowing of a straight furrow still requires steady hands and forward-looking eyes trained on the objective. Likewise, Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:14 that instead of dwelling on past mistakes and blunders we press toward a goal.

The school year is within weeks of completion. Who is the administrator who won’t look back and bring to mind a regret or two from the school year. Who is the administrator who won’t think, “what if...” “why didn’t...” or even “if only...?”

Obviously, any time during a school year is ripe for reflection, but certainly as the year ends, being reflective is a good thing. However, the key to progress and improvement for the following school year depends on which “world” one will be operating in. Will your perspective be “if only” or “next time?” It is your choice. ☸

Lessons I am Learning

within reason.

5. Respond to your correspondence (snail mail) within three days.
6. Return phone calls within 24 hours. Administrators will receive multiple calls; prioritize which ones you dread and return those calls first. If it is potentially a troubling call, pray before and during the call. Maybe take the ‘risk’ to offer to pray with the caller before ending the conversation.
7. Be intentional in your Sabbath rest. Give your mind the opportunity to enjoy the Sabbath without reading your email.
8. Be intentional in your schedule to plan classroom visits. Plan to visit each classroom monthly. These short visits will establish information that will contribute to your yearly formal assessment. Leave a short message with the teacher after each visit. Then schedule an appointment within 48 hours to share your observations.
9. Find someone on your staff that will keep you accountable. This professional friend keeps their ear to the ground and is level headed. This colleague has your permission to share with you what you need to do to improve your relationships. This prayer partner will be a source of strength and transparency.
10. Be intentional in making family time. It is quality, not always quantity time that counts most. Practice the Musk Ox mentality that nothing interrupts family time. I could have done so much better in this area as a young administrator. I thank God often for an awesome wife who surrounded our boys with time, love, and care.
11. Be intentional in your daily devotional life. We know the importance of this communication. Practicing the presence of God is essential as we lead and manage.
12. Practice what I preach. Like Nike’s slogan, I must remind myself to “Just Do It Keresoma!” My credibility as a school leader is found in what I do, not what I say.

Above all, remember God’s promise in Psalm 1:1, “God’s blessings follow you and await you at every turn.” ☸

Motivation gets you going, but discipline keeps you growing.” John Maxwell