Leading the Journey

An E-newsletter on EXCELLENCE in Leadership

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School Climate
Leadership, NAD Principals' Handbook (excerpt)

The principal is primary in establishing the climate of the school. School climate is the school's collective personality or atmosphere. The school climate reflects the effectiveness of the spiritual and scholastic growth taking place in the school. The climate, good or bad, is determined by the school spirit of the students, by *esprit de corp* in the staff, and by the communication program between administration, staff, students, parents, and the local community. Because school climate affects teacher productivity, the instructional quality received by students will generally be affected. Following are some of the effective principal's roles in fostering and sustaining a positive school climate:

- Involves students, staff, parents, and the community to create and sustain a safe learning environment.

- Uses knowledge of the social, cultural, leadership, and political dynamics of the school community to implement effective change.

- Models respect for students, staff, parents, and the community.

- Develops and implements a plan that manages conflict and crisis situations in an effective and timely manner.

- Utilizes shared decision making.

"And" is the Secret
Dick Molstead

After completing a recent "interim Principal" stint, I flew home on a regional airline. It was interesting to observe the similarities of the operation of the local school with this company of airplanes. The pilots and crew of both organizations are committed to getting their customers from a starting point to a destination safely and on time. The passengers comprise a highly diversified group of people with special needs and abilities. The pilots and crew are highly trained in procedures and skills to get the plane and passengers to the selected destination. Occasionally, the plane encounters some "rough air". While other airlines can deliver their planes and passengers safely from point A to point B, this airline is committed to safe and reliable travel AND making every effort for the crew and passengers to enjoy the flight. The secret is in the "AND".

Our Adventist schools belong to a system dedicated to providing quality, faith-based education. A typical mission statement emphasizes quality academics, spiritual health, healthy lifestyle choices, and service to God and the community as essential aspects of the Seventh-day Adventist educational philosophy. Historically, this approach has seemed to work, but today's culture might be asking for something more. To continue to be a system of education that fosters trust and confidence with our customers, we need to identify the "AND" in our mission statement. Educational leaders, especially at the local school level, need to dedicate time to the discussion of improving not only the curriculum and pedagogy, but to improvement of school climate among the staff and students.

Hewlett-Packard is a truly exceptional company founded on the premise of creating and manufacturing innovative products for a constant stream of new and happy customers. In his book, "The HP Way", David Packard tells the story of what is needed in an organization to maximize its efficiency and success. In the *HP Way*, it is of prime importance to create an environment where people have a chance to be their best and to be recognized for their achievements. Some of the strategies HP implemented to foster trust within the

MISSION: STRENGTHENING ADVENTIST EDUCATION ONE LEADER AT A TIME

Assess, Analyze, and Act
Ed Boyatt

School culture is similar to the air we breathe. No one notices it unless it becomes foul (Freiberg). How toxic is your school climate and culture? How communicative and friendly is your staff? How positive are the attitudes of your colleagues?

Administrators should know the perceptions of all stakeholders when assessing their school culture. Since school climate is the most important variable in school improvement and in selling your school, you should take the guess work out of identifying the climate/culture of your school.

I recommend to you a survey instrument from the Center for Improving School Culture. The title of this survey is the *School Culture Triage Survey and Audit* by Wagner and Masden-Copas. Go to their website to evaluate the various instruments that may fit your needs.

According to this center, the major indicators of the health of a school's culture are collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy.

- **Collaboration** is characterized as the degree to which people work together, share information, and are encouraged to have constructive discussions and debates.

- **Collegiality** is about a sense of belonging, emotional support, and inclusion as a valued member of the school. Is there respect and harmony or disrespect and discord?

- **Efficacy** focuses on how stakeholders view themselves. Do they feel they have control of their destinies or do they view themselves as helpless victims of "the system?" Are they rigidly attached to the status quo? Do teachers tend to live with or solve problems?

The director of the Center for Improving School Culture, Christopher Wagner, suggests that the signs of a positive school culture include:
- Staff stability and common goals permeate the school.
- Curricular and instructional components are well defined.
- Open and honest communication is encouraged.
- Staff members demonstrate humor and trust.
- Students and staff are recognized in school-wide celebrations.
- Leadership in the school and district provide tangible support.

Our challenge is to shed toxic characteristics of complaining and negativity and put in its place a warm and caring environment that promotes learning and positive relationships. Principals should work to develop shared visions of what the school should be, face conflict rather than avoid it, foster collaboration and collegiality, and nurture teachers as leaders on the path to efficacy. Put people before paper and work on team-building that inspires a more positive school culture.

Every school has a culture. Which kind will you choose?

"And" is the Secret (continued)

company included:

1. A degree of enthusiasm at all levels.

2. A continuing program of education and staff development.

3. Participatory management that supports individual freedom and initiative while emphasizing commonness of purpose and teamwork

4. Celebration of successes, both at the corporate and individual level.

5. Development of a set of values and traditions.

Certainly, the school leader and staff can create a list of similar ideas for their school.

Adventist Schools are committed to a purpose even larger than defined by the standard mission statement; what is the "AND" at your school?

The Roles of School Leaders
Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson

- Historian: seeks to understand the social and normative part of the school

- Anthropological sleuth: analyzes and probes for the current set of norms, values, and beliefs that define the current culture

- Visionary: works with other leaders and the community to define a deeply value-focused picture of the future for the school

- Symbols: affirms values through dress, behavior, attention routines

- Potter: shapes and is shaped by the school's heroes, rituals, traditions, ceremonies, symbols; brings in staff who share core values

- Poet: uses language to reinforce values and sustains the school's best image of itself

- Actor: improvises in the school's inevitable dramas, comedies, and tragedies

- Healer: oversees transitions and change in the life of the school; heals the wounds of conflict of loss