



Leading the Journey

An E-newsletter on EXCELLENCE in Leadership

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The Change Process

Leadership, NAD Principals' Handbook (excerpt)

One certainty in the role of school leadership is that there will be change. Many books have been written on the leadership of change, specifically school change, and an effective principal will become knowledgeable about this subject.

Change may come about as a result of:

- Data about student achievement which demonstrates needed changes in curriculum and/or instruction
- Action plans developed through the accreditation self-study process
- Study of best practices which will enhance student achievement

When leading change, the principal will be most successful when including various stakeholder groups. Specifically, the board should be involved and should vote support for changes when appropriate.

Leading Through Change

Kelly B. Bock, Ph.D.

Instead of quoting what others have discovered on the change process, I decided to share some tips gained from 40+ years of my own experience through tough, and not-so-tough, changes experienced in Adventist educational leadership.

Change comes in a number of packages: a teacher admits to sexual contact with a student early in the school year; a need arises for a radio station and major construction project; the principal suddenly and unexpectedly resigns mid-year; a “by the way” after accepting a position, finding a huge plastic extrusion renter-gone-bad requiring major cleanup and re-renting of space. These are just a few of the changes I faced during my career.

The most important tip I would suggest is to spend quality and quantity time with Christ early in the morning. My hour with him makes a significant difference in my outlook throughout the days. He makes me most successful through my pleas for His leading in my life and my prayers for others.

Here are the other tips that I have found helpful in facing change:

1. **Identify the players.** When facing a challenge, find the people who are the true difference-makers. Then, ask lots of questions and listen carefully for their input. Key staff members, board members, pastors, and constituents can provide a wealth of perspective as you chart a change of course.
2. **Focus on the strengths of the organization.** Where are the “quality world pictures”? Celebrate the positives you find as you move toward change.
3. **Find one or two initiatives that will move the institution forward.** Get something done! In one situation when I replaced a principal who suddenly left the school mid-year, I stood by the front door and greeted parents and students at the drop-off zone. This simple gesture was the most talked-about change people noticed. Noticeable campus improvements followed.

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Change from My Perspective

Doug Herrmann

There are many good books out on change and managing change. Read them. They are based on research and will give much good guidance. It is not my intent in this article to summarize what you will get from these excellent authors. Rather, I will give you several observations from my experience. See if any of them makes sense to you.

1. **See the change.** If you don't know what the change is, you're not ready to begin. As much as possible, anticipate. What will the change you are proposing look like? What are the implications? Who will it affect? Spend time with the idea.

I recently met a man who has a vision for a series of schools. He sees each school and knows what the enrollment will be. He knows the curriculum. He even has visualized the parent meeting at the end of the first school year, how it will look and what he will say. He knows the change.

2. **Talk the change.** Tell people about it, describe it to them. I'm not talking about PowerPoint presentations necessarily, though these may be necessary. But mention it in passing. Engage others in conversations. Let people be aware of the change. Let others become familiar with what may be happening.
3. **Listen to the chatter.** This is done concurrently with the second point above. Listen to the responses. Be attentive to people's views, questions, concerns, fears. You will learn from them. A question asked may send you in another direction or help you avoid a major problem in the future.
4. **Be patient.** This is usually the best course. Of course, some change cannot afford the wait; that is a different matter. But most change is not harmed by slow and steady.
5. **Give the change away.** Be willing to let others own the change. Share the credit with others. When the change is successfully made, let others enjoy the celebration as well. By the same token, if it doesn't go well, it's good to not be alone. Of course, when you bring others into the formula the change may take some different turns and look somewhat different, but the more who feel ownership, the better it will be.
6. **Allow emotional responses.** Whatever the change, it will mean that something is no more. Somebody will grieve. That's okay. Let people do so. Don't argue, don't fight. Listen. Use all of your good personal interaction skills.
7. **Symbolize the change.** Consider whether the change can incorporate some of that which will be replaced. This may not always be possible and depends on the

type of change you are orchestrating.

A major change that we are in the midst of on our campus is the removal of a venerated old building. It was sad to see it go, but the change was necessary. In our plans we have included a memorial to the building so that neither it nor the person for which it was named will be forgotten. But we took it one step further and designed key fobs out of the wood floor from the chapel. These simple items have done much to salve the hurts of alumni who have fond memories of this building.

8. **Be open to the idea that the change you are proposing is not appropriate for the time and circumstances.** It's not the worst thing to propose an idea and then learn that something else may be better.

Change is not really an option; it will come. It's better to manage it, to be intentional about it. Thinking carefully about the process and the product is the first move of successful leaders.



If you don't like something change it; if you can't change it, change the way you think about it."

~Mary Engelbreit

Leading Through Change

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4. **Lead the Board.** Anticipate questions in the constituency and pre-emptively schedule presentations before they arise. Bible and English are subjects that often bring questions from parents and others. I generally scheduled these teaches to make presentations to the board, especially on sensitive topics (inspiration, fiction, etc.) to answer any questions that the teachers had heard. Board members are more likely to support when they have the information before the questions appear. Work closely with the board chair to prepare the agenda.
5. **Be honest and as open as possible.** At times, every detail of the reasons for change cannot be shared, but keep the important people: staff, students, constituents, conference, in the loop. Communication problems are possibly the most commonly heard. You probably noticed threads of open communication appearing through the tips I shared above.

As I reflect on my career, I realize that the most enjoyable moments of my professional life were in the academy principalship. Revel in your opportunity, embrace changes that come your way, and find the true joy which comes from service to others through educational leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist school system.