



LEADING THE JOURNEY

An E-newsletter on EXCELLENCE in Leadership

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Spiritual Leadership

Leadership, NAD Principals' Handbook (excerpt)

The principal is the spiritual leader of the school. While many aspects of spiritual leadership may be delegated to others, the personal influence of the principal as a positive role model to students, teachers, and parents cannot be underestimated. It is the pervasive influence of the principal's actions and concerns that inspires and encourages others to be drawn to Christ.

Why Would You Do That?

Greg Gerard

As usual, I lagged behind the others in our group as we approached the chair lift at Copper Mountain. Consequently, I ended up getting on the chair lift with a middle-aged lady I did not know. As we rode up the mountain, the usual question arose – “What do you do for a living?” This was many years ago and I was in graduate school at the time. When she asked what I was preparing to do with my graduate degree, I told her I wanted to be a high school principal. She turned in the chair (a somewhat startling thing to do on a chair lift, which may be why I remember the conversation) and said, “Why would you want to do that?”

Anyone who is a teacher or school administrator has had people comment, “I could never do your job.” Working with teenagers (and their parents) can indeed be challenging. For some of us, our personalities and gifts just seem to line up to make working in schools an exciting and wonderful experience. But what is our motivation to do our best in whatever field we work?

Ecclesiastes 9:10 says that “whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might.” When you look at the context of that part of Solomon's book, you find a rather fatalistic reason to work hard – because you will die someday. Then you won't get much done.

When you go to the New Testament, you find a similar exhortation. However, Paul provides an infinitely better reason to work hard – “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men ... you are serving the Lord Christ” (Col 3:23, 24 CEV). That change in the reason we spend most of our waking hours in our career makes a

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Spiritual Leadership: An Example

Author's name withheld

Many years ago a new principal arrived at our school. “He is bright,” they told us. “He is very good,” they said. “He wears well,” they assured us. At best we were skeptical; after all we were pretty good ourselves! He came from a school with a culture that was quite different from ours—probably inferior—he couldn't be **that** wonderful! Because we were cordial we feigned openness to his new ways.

Gradually, he challenged the best of us. He was thorough. Monday morning worships led by him were deep and profound. He challenged us to think hard. This was serious business! There was something about him that compelled us to do our best to follow his thoughts. He made us want to understand what he understood.

If he was careful in his Bible study, he was the same when it came to professional development. He studied. He evaluated. He was cognizant of the latest educational trends and measured each of them by his understanding of the Bible and education. He encouraged us to raise our eyes above our toes and applauded us for trying new approaches—even when our attempts were less than stellar. Months passed, and we realized he was very bright.

This man was real. He hinted at some shenanigans from his junior high days, but we doubted they could be true. He was too committed, too zealous, too serious to have had such a past. Yet it was exactly his past that showed him how real spiritual commitment had to be. Week after week, he shared from his personal Bible study and applied his

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Why Would You Do That?

huge difference. Because of my relationship with Jesus, I am driven to love my students in the same way God has loved me.

When I show that I care about little stuff, when I show I care about others' feelings, I model how a follower of Christ is to live. When I raise the standard for myself, not settling for mediocrity, I raise the standard for my students. Every teacher or parent knows that young people learn from what is taught, but even more from what is caught. When they see me put forth extra effort to help them, they are learning what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

When you hear from a student, "I don't care," it causes you to care even more. When you hear, "I don't understand," it drives you to try some new way to explain or demonstrate. When you hear, "I give up," it causes you to try harder. When confronted with the student's silence or anger, it causes you to continue to love. You're not doing it because it's your job, "you are serving the Lord Christ."

Question: What was the essence of this principal's spiritual leadership?

Spiritual Leadership

learnings to us and our school. Charts and diagrams accompanied his talks, and over time he developed simple, yet profound ways to help us remember the essence of and application to the Christian walk.

In faculty meetings when issues were discussed and we strayed from our purpose and goal, a line or two from a recent worship brought us back. Usually there was a rendering on the wall, a silent reminder. How was it that his worship thoughts were so applicable to our daily business? His worldview of Christianity had feet and hands that worked among us. There was no compartmentalization in his life. His Christianity permeated everything he did. He was very good.

This man did more than study and preach. There were plenty of times when he joked with us and his wry humor smoothed out bumps in our road. When we went looking for him, his laughter often signaled his location. Yet even in fun—especially in fun—we knew his commitment to Jesus. His walk matched his talk.

In his mind everyone was his equal; he was no more important than the slowest kindergarten student, the recalcitrant teacher, or the poorest parent. In fact, when he came to the lunch line he joined at the back—behind the students because he knew he was no more important than they were. This man lived his love of God moment by moment. He wore very well.

Question: What brings you the most satisfaction in your administrative role?

At the Heart of Leadership

Darren Wilkins

A visit to your local Barnes & Noble will confirm that leadership is the topic of the day. Shelves sag under the weight of literally hundreds of treatises on how to lead effectively. I don't think I could add much to this body of knowledge in a few words here other than to tell a story that, I feel, captures the heart of Christian Leadership in a school.

A few years back a colleague shared with me an experience he had concerning his school's dress code. While strolling through the hall of his high school, he discovered a young lady sitting on the floor looking distraught. Tears coursed down her cheeks as she related a story of loss. This was not a story of a deceased loved one or a broken home. The girl had lost an earring somewhere in the school.

At this point it's important to note two important bits of context.

1. Jewelry was not allowed at this school.
2. The school was going through a difficult decision-making process concerning the adoption of a school uniform. The community was divided on the issue and the principal was receiving even more pressure on the hot button issue of dress code than normal.

Now back to the story. I don't remember if this small piece of metal was a gift from an amorous boy or a doting father. In any case, my friend sat down on the floor beside her and acknowledged the importance of the loss. Then he suggested they pray together that God would guide them to the missing relic. After brain storming a few possibilities, they searched, on hands and knees, the landing area beneath an open stairwell. He was the one that saw a glint of metal wedged between the carpet and the baseboard. The lost was found! There was a little celebration between a veteran principal and emotional student right there, followed by a quiet prayer of thanks.

In subsequent months the school adopted a uniform and the principal was left a bit bruised from the fight. He demonstrated tremendous leadership by implementing this change while keeping the community together and minimizing bloodshed. I have a hunch, though, that one student will remember how he led in a quiet hallway more than how he guided a community through a tough policy fight. I think she'll remember a principal that led her right to the Throne of Grace when he could have lectured her for her non-compliance.

For a school principal to be a spiritual leader, he/she needs to see people with Jesus' eyes in the big moments (like policy fights) and the small ones. We have a responsibility to lead our schools on a Journey to Excellence. In the process, let's remember that we lead **people**, not just an institution. Let's take our students, parents, and employees straight to that Throne of Grace every time opportunity knocks.

Question: Would Christ have responded differently in this situation?