

Thursday, July 31, 2008

Teacher Survival Strategies

Peep through the Eyes of a Principal and Broaden Your Perceptions

Teacher open their perceptions to the viewpoints that students carry to school because great teaching hinges upon: Communicating in the language that students understand

Explaining concepts by using relevant examples from students' experience is sound instruction

Sharing appropriate real-life experiences so that students develop the "The teacher was once like me" attitudes

Reframing ordinary experience to a more mentally healthy and emotionally mature interpretation creates a climate for students' growing up But, teachers need to step into the stress-filled world of principals to develop an understanding of the oft-times "war-zone world" of campus administrators. Captain of the Ship-- Struggling not to "Go Down" with it The campus principal is in charge of a couple of dozen, to more than a dozen dozen faculty and staff members.

And, most of those, the faculty members, are found with a independent bent, folks who spend most of their at-school hours in their own quadrilateral fiefdoms.

Teachers are difficult to control, even when their supervisor has them in sight and under thumb; but once they close the door of their classrooms, only the loud wails of (legitimately) complaining students rouse a principal's nose for snooping.

Sidebar The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a weasel-in -the-hen-house law that seeks to prove that our public schools are ineffective. The purpose of this charade is to allow vouchers to be used to pay for students to attend church schools.

Showing that our public schools produce poorer than acceptable results reflects poorly upon the person at the helm, the principal. It is this pressure on the campus principal that teachers must take into account to overcome the natural tendency to place the principal in the "enemy or adversary" category. Span of Control "Out of Control" The span of control for our schools is out of control. And in the profit-making world, companies that implemented a similar system would fail. The Span of Control is the number of folks that a supervisor directly supervises. In the business world, this is generally "maxed" out at seven. Sidebar Come to think of it, the span of control for the students that teachers supervise, i.e., class size also exceeds the span of control by three to four times industry standards. What needs to happen is that the "report-to" pyramid needs more layers, so that seven (or less) folks report to the principal...and seven or less people report to each layer.

But, the span of control has to be real.

For example, supervisors must be able to hire and fire, make decisions, and be held accountable for their decisions.

So, a system of department chairpersons and grade-level leaders, acting as title-only lackeys…responsibility without authority…figurehead puppets…achieve no desired, positive outcomes.

This means that principals have authority over too many folks to guarantee effective supervision.

This also means that the number of hours that a campus principal must work each week eclipses the 65 hours that the average teacher works. The missing rungs of the span of control ladder explain most the principal's workload (overload).

First Teacher Reality Check: Principals spend more hours working than you do.

Competitive Edge Since few staff members understand just how much work that principals do, lots of folks would like to become principals.

What this does is put a job replacement pressure, similar to the pressure that teachers feel, on principals. Principals have to produce to keep their jobs.

The real competitive edge should be to help teachers perform better. Unfortunately, competition for the principal's job comes from...Home schooling, Independent schools, Charter Schools

NCLB's threat of vouchers (given to allow students to leave and enter private schools)

Competition for limited funds within the district

Competition with other principals to display (test) results

Competition to get the better teachers to transfer into their campus School Status Quo and School Reform Probably every principal in the nation would agree that school reform was an important goal, if reform meant that teachers would perform better and student test scores would increase.

But, a far fewer number of principals might agree that school reform starts with the principal mending ways, changing tactics, working smarter.

But school reform also means: Content area standards for every subject

Curriculum frameworks and curriculum standards

High quality, relevant professional development

Specialized programs for Special Populations of students

Specialized progress reporting to parents Second Reality Check: Principals face pressures on every side that conspire to prove that they are inadequate, pressures similar to the pressures that teachers face.

Corollary: Principals experience pressure to learn more (participate in professional development) to learn: More about

Technology Integration and using the Internet for instruction

National and State standards that affect the teaching of each content-area subject

Methods to communicate with and to involve parents in their children's education
Dependent upon the Efforts and Performance of Others to Show Competence
Principals depend on high-performing teachers to spark students to ever higher levels of performance.

This means that principals have two levels of dependency, while teachers have only one level of dependency to be accountable for.

But, where a teacher depends upon only 20 to 30 students, a principal may depend on 120 teachers and 1,200 students...and each must show improvement so that the collective, measurable progress paints the quality of the principal's supervision in a positive light.

Final Reality Check: The principal depends upon the performance on two dependency levels, rather than the single level that plagues teachers.
Summary
When teachers place themselves in the heavy duty work boots of campus principals, they discover that the pressures affecting principals are much like those that affect teachers...only heightened and more difficult.

This leads to the obvious question: "Why would someone want a principal's job with so much stress and so little control?"

The money isn't all that great, either since a software or network engineer without a college degree can earn more (in business and industry) after about the same amount of relevant experience.

And while individual motivations vary, we can be grateful that there are enough dedicated (or naive) educators that are willing to step up to the plate and face the major league challenges of campus leadership.

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