

Leadership Practices That Pay Off in the Real World- A Top-Ten Count Down to a Successful Start to the Year

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#10 The School Building

- Wander around before the building gets crowded.
- Notice what looks great and note any areas of concern for future improvement.
- Set a tone of celebration for the first student day by placing “Welcome Back” balloons at the entryways.
- Ask the art teacher to display student artwork in your office- have her/him change it at least once per quarter.
- Place posters with motivational messages in strategic places around the hallways.

#9 Fellow Administrators

- Your new superintendent/personnel director may have given you information or advice about your school— listen and consider it!
- Get to know the members of your administrative team.
 - * They might become your best friends.
 - * Listen for their areas of strength and weakness so you know of whom to ask which questions.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions.

#8 Custodians and Secretaries

- You need and love these people – don't ever forget it!
- Notice their work and openly appreciate it.
- Publicly recognize them for their summer work in getting the building ready for the staff and students.
 - * Thank the secretaries with a vase of flowers in the office.
 - * Thank the custodians with \$5 fast food certificates.
- Be a teammate of these folks- don't be “above” answering the phone or picking up trash you find in the hallway or school yard.

#7 Teachers

- Many will come to meet you (check you out) during the summer.
 - * They likely are apprehensive about you being their new boss.
 - * Give them time- they need to know you care and want to know each one individually.
- Take any information you know of individuals with a grain of salt- everyone deserves a fresh beginning with a new principal.
- Value teachers' knowledge of the school, listen to their concerns and wishes, and ask them questions that show you're interested in them both professionally and personally.
- Do not make any quick promises for changes. Do thank them for their advice and let them know you'll certainly consider it.
- You'll find yourself naturally drawn to some people over others- be careful not to show favoritism.
- Let the teachers know you have high expectations for them and their students and that you'll go out of your way to support them in making their great school even better.

#6 The Successes and Goals

- Research the academic success and opportunities for improvement through the school's website, school improvement plans, published scores, etc. Then, push that information into the back of your mind for a while. The people come first, not the scores.
- Survey every staff member (perhaps in a small tear-off section of your summer staff letter in which you introduce yourself and welcome them back to school) with two questions:
 1. What are the best two things about the school?
 2. What is the one thing you'd like to see change in the school?

Ideally, have them drop off the survey slip into your mailbox before school starts. Use this information to report out to the full staff at the back-to-school staff meeting.

#5 Traditions and Special Events

- During the first year, don't plan to change any traditions or special events- just take the time to learn about them.
- Do start to infuse your own personality into the school to begin new traditions. Some examples:
 - * Make the first staff meeting fun- have a theme such as "Happy New Year," use music to pep things up, facilitate a staff team- building activity.
 - * Plan and facilitate a brief "Welcome Back" assembly/pep rally for the school during the first few days.
 - * On the first day of school, pay a quick visit to every classroom.
 - * Add "learning research tidbits" to your weekly staff memo to establish a tone of continuous learning.

#4 Morale and Climate

- It will not take much time to determine the current state- Does the staff laugh, smile, complain, glare, converse readily with other grade levels/departments? How about students- do they seem happy and confident throughout the building?
- Your actions will establish the climate for the school!
- Positive climate building tips:
 - * Walk your talk and model what you want to see from others!
 - * Develop a social contract with and for the staff.
 - * Focus most of your energy on the “high performing” staff and students, not the “problems.”

#3 Parents

- You'll get to know past practice by how involved they are and what they ask of you.
- Learn the past parent-culture problems and take advantage of the fresh start.
- Be wary of the first few who come to visit with you. They may have a specific agenda in mind. You don't have to answer immediately-“Thanks so much for this information. I'll need time to process it/ investigate it.”
- Actively let parents know that you highly value their partnership in educating their child. Add parent-involvement research to your first parent newsletter.
- Get to know how the PTA functions. If it isn't already, guide the group toward helping with your school's continuous improvement action plan.
- The best “PR” with parents is getting to know their individual children.
- Realize that you will be put in the middle between a parent and a teacher. Remember, you can't please everyone – stay true to what you believe is best for the child.

#2 Students

- Students will “check you out,” just like staff, during those first few days.
- As with staff, be positive and build confidence in them.
- Make every student feel important. Some examples:
 - * Meet & greet each day.
 - * Lunch with the principal for new students.
 - * Hand deliver a birthday card to each child.
 - * Bond with the kids that need it most- assign them a special “helper” job.
- When handling discipline issues, approach it as problem-solving so the students will learn cause and effect. Hear them out, build rapport and respect. Show them an attitude of “I'm not giving up on you.”

#1 Yourself – Leadership Style & Valuable Practices

- **Character is doing what's right when nobody is looking**
 - * Live by the highest standards of honesty and integrity.
 - * Never violate information shared to you in confidence.
 - * Realize you cannot be good at everything. Be honest about that and rely on others with expertise in your weaker areas.
- **People don't care what you know until they know that you care**
 - * Walk your talk
 - * Be a role model
 - * Even constructive criticism shows you care
- **Eat that frog (Do the difficult first.)**
 - * If you have to eat two frogs, eat the ugliest one first
 - * If you have to eat a live frog, it doesn't pay to sit and look at it very long
- **One of your highest callings of leadership is to develop and grow people**
 - * Your success as a leader will be dependent on how well your staff performs.
 - * The great leader is one who develops personnel to the point that they surpass his/her in knowledge and ability.
- **Through the courage of one, the spines of others are stiffened**
 - * Feel comfortable with your leadership style. Be flexible when appropriate, but always be guided by what's best for kids.
 - * Be able to say no and take positions on important issues.
 - * Look at failure as an opportunity to learn.
- **Elephants don't bite- it's the mosquitoes that will get you**
 - * Attend to details- return phone calls promptly, acknowledge gestures and kindness
- **Good is the enemy of great**
 - * Set high expectations for yourself and others
 - * Lead by example
 - * Insist on high expectations for ALL children
- **Leaders are charged with recognizing events to leverage change**
 - * If you're not riding the wave of change, you'll be underneath it
 - * The only difference between a rut and a grave is the depth of the hole
- **Seek balance**
 - * Being on top is lonely
 - * By maintaining a positive, happy school for others (students, staff, and parents), you'll take on a lot of stress for yourself. Learn how to manage the stress level- be sure to maintain your status as a parent, spouse, friend, human being – not just a principal!