

My Philosophy of Educational Leadership

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by

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We know what a leader looks like. He or she is organized, passionate, a listener, open to new ideas, driven by a clear vision, says what we need to hear and most of all invested in the team. Time is squandered too often. In the written word and speech, the audience's attention span is precious. The audience takes what it wants and throws the rest away. I am afraid we are afraid. We have fragmented our focus like ham being sliced to thin at the deli. Dare I boldly say that if relationships between teaching veterans, rookies, and conflicting team members is not improved, all else is building a house on the sand?

I have chosen to pursue teacher leadership, because I love helping others. There lies a deep rooted care and empathy within. If working relationships and generational gaps are not addressed, how can agenda items, new initiatives and the ever growing pressures be successfully managed? Leadership is a skillset that echoes throughout school halls and through the forks in the road that we face. My Philosophy of Leadership paper will provide a definition of leadership, skills of an effective leader, expectations from the team and expectations of the educational community.

My definition of Leadership: *Empower the collective strengths and embrace human weakness while working towards a clear goal.* Leadership is guiding the greatness that is already there. In *Awakening the Sleeping Giant*, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) note, "Valuing individuals for the diversity they bring to the situation can be essential to the success of the teacher leaders" (p. 79). Every great team fully utilizes each member. Even Superman cannot do it alone.

It is vital to know oneself before leading a team. I am a deeply relational human being. Overwhelmingly positive, empathetic, brimming with ideation, inclusion and valuing connection with others are at the core. Likewise, I am blessed with the gift of being proactive to change. On the flip side, I struggle with confrontation and facilitation of groups, due to

lack of experience in education. Awareness of our short falls and an understanding of who we are, can move the collective towards the spire of self realization.

Henry David Thoreau, Anthony Robbins, and the brevity of Charles Bukowski have recently had an impact on my life. Although these gentleman come from varying educational backgrounds and experiences, each seemed to live from a position of love and knowledge of who they were. I strive for, embody, and consistently chase this carrot.

Within leadership, I firmly believe that an awareness and understanding of diverse backgrounds is fundamental to a successful functioning team. The Teacher Leader Model Standards: Domain 6 (2011) explain further the necessary awareness of, “using knowledge and understanding of the different backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, and languages in the school community for promoting effective interactions among colleagues, families and the larger community” (p. 19). Putting ourselves in other’s shoes, can lead towards an efficient use of time and clarity towards empowerment on pertinent agenda items. Many times we drift through the days and waste our thoughts at night on the things that are out of our control.

Most people leave education because they are working in silos, not interacting with adults and they are not empowered. This is a sad way to live. Teaching does not have to be this way. Leadership needs to be approached from a position of love and genuine care. True leaders builds capacity in others through empowerment. Building relationships, leading by example, delegating appropriate workloads as well as sharing and accepting new ideas to create an efficient environment.

Building relationships will create a strong foundation for the team. When we learn more about others it can be easier to work alongside them towards an end goal. With leading by example, we can collaborate with team members and grow. There is a balance necessary for successful initiatives. Delegating too many tasks can drown others. Ensure balance and

share the work loads with teammates. The joy in leadership is that we are always learning from others and ourselves. It is a fruitful process that is forever in a flux of change.

We all want control and because of that there are power struggles. Jim Fay and David Funk created a love and logic approach to the classroom and parenting. I would like to apply their principles to leadership, “Power is a major issue between adults and children... when we offer a choice instead of making a demand, no power struggle begins” (Fay & Funk, 1995, p. 8). I can bet that power is also an issue between adults and adults. Give appropriate and reasonable control while utilizing individual strengths for the ever growing stack of educational agenda items.

A teacher first and a leader second. Leadership will be harnessed once the team observes mastery in the classroom. Once the classroom is mastered, I will efficiently read the culture before changing it. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) explain, “Teachers can benefit from reflecting on and analyzing their school culture. Know what is supporting or hindering their leadership efforts” (p. 59). The team will first learn who they are and who their teammates are. The foundation of relationships, collaborative opportunities, a sense of community and much more are required before facilitating groups with educational endeavors. Everything else is like building a house on the sand. Period. Once established, then we will focus on our mission with clarity and brevity.

Most teachers are here today because they love what they do. Affirmation and support from within the team, and administratively, can create a better tomorrow. A few years ago I was inspired by Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus also known as The Minimalists. Millburn and Nicodemus’ definition of success has resonated with me deeply, “Success= Happiness + Constant Improvement + Contribution” (Millburn & Nicodemus, 2016). I only see an increase in the overwhelming initiatives, expectations, and high demands

of teaching. Together, focusing on teaching, growing and helping others we can move the educational landscape forward with a smile.

We must look at the teaching team's generational differences and needs. In order to keep new teachers and veteran teachers in harmony a scope and understanding of the diverse needs must be brought to everyone's attention. If principals and teacher leaders continue to force old work ethics or mindsets on younger generations, the turnover ratio may increase. Job satisfaction will drop and enthusiastic minds will flee from the scene.

Leadership has not examined generational needs and differences. We briefly touch upon building relationships within our teams and this causes us to fragment further. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) clarify, "Current teacher leader idealism to work long hours with few rewards will not satisfy the younger generation of teachers. Baby boomer teachers often become frustrated when teachers from younger generation do not exhibit the same work ethic as them" (p. 71). I understand that we all have roles and responsibilities to uphold, but I would love to have more input from veteran and new teachers to constantly improve the system. We need to step out of our shoes and take into account the expertise of veterans, while providing voice to the young.

Understand your role and know your community. Students are first and adults second. As a leader, I expect the educational collective to be selfless. We are distracted by our shiny inventions. There are excellent things going on today. Growth is inevitable. We must think outside of the box. When we compare to others, whether it is a colleague, or another student who is scoring higher on exams, we will never be satisfied. I expect the educational community to give change a little patience, as we tend to romanticize the past educational successes. We are getting better all the time. Leadership is a collective endeavor. We must empower the greatness that lies in our community. A leader needs to be

encouraging with love and empathy. Specifically, looking at the international teaching community, acceptance and love in work, and personal life, are fundamental to success and the soul.

My Philosophy of Leadership paper provided a definition of leadership, skills of an effective leader, expectations from the team and expectations of the educational community. We have two choices in life: love and fear. Love will bring us together. Fear will continue to drive us apart, as our desks pile with more expectations. With leadership we are simply inspiring what is already there. Build upon the great idealist that was lost along the way. It may seem, outwardly, that it is gone. Cynics may run amuck in the meetings, but the rose colored lens of a utopic education exists within them somewhere. Give a little love, control, and time may produce a happier tomorrow. The collective educational community will expect and receive a venue for support and affirmation. A leader who chooses love over fear. Specifically, one who sees the good intentions in others, which is often misconstrued. Perhaps the culmination of failed initiatives and disappointment, as their voices and daily hard work are overlooked?

## References

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