

FORMULA



RESOURCES

ARTICLE

EFFECTIVE LEADERS, EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

By

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Abstract

Effective leaders judge their success by determining how well they create great places for students to learn, teachers to teach, and parents to send their children to get an education. Evidence shows that leaders tend to lack effective communication processes to develop effective teaching. In fact, teachers identify poor communication as the area leaders need to improve the most. We offer eight strategies used with leaders and their teachers that align to leaders communicating effectively with teachers to help students achieve.

Effective Leaders, Effective Teachers

Effective leaders judge their success by determining how well they create great places for students to learn, teachers to teach, and parents to send their children to get an education. A leader's success depends on the success of his or her teachers. Marzano (2003) and his team conducted a meta-analysis that reinforced that the teacher was the most important variable that affects student learning. Years prior, Black and Wiliam (1998) focused their meta-analysis on the specific aspect of teaching that improved student learning. They discovered that students of those teachers who provided descriptive feedback to students scored higher on standardized tests with the greatest effect occurring for those students in the lowest quartile. These two studies plus decades of best practices tell us that the primary role of school leaders is to create work environments where teachers have every opportunity to help students learn. Effective leaders develop and support effective teachers. When teachers are effective and students are learning, parents are usually happy with their child's education.

So, what do teachers and parents say about their school leaders? In the past several years we surveyed teachers on their level of satisfaction with their work environment and parents on their level of satisfaction with their child's school. Here's what we found. For teachers and parents, the lowest scored items indicated that leaders lacked effective communication skills. Teachers did not believe leaders provided them with every day resources they needed to do their jobs, gave specific feedback on their performance and recognized teachers for good performance. Parents did not believe leaders communicated positive actions their students exhibited at school, sought their input in decisions that helped the school achieve excellence, and consistently communicated the achievement of school goals. Ironically, when we asked existing leaders to identify the most important skill they believed school leaders need to be successful, they identified effective communication as the number one skill set needed.

Effective leaders must have a skill set to develop and apply a communication process that engages students, teachers, and parents. If a leader's primary goal is to improve teacher performance so that students achieve and parents are happy with their child's education, the leader

must 1) communicate clearly defined teaching performance expectations; 2) align professional development experiences to those expectations; and 3) coach and provide specific feedback to improve teaching performance. Does this sound familiar? Thinking back on what Black and Wiliam discovered, how do



we recognize effective teaching? Effective teachers 1) create and communicate clearly defined learning targets; 2) align the daily instruction to those targets; and 3) coach and provide specific feedback to determine areas performed well and learning gaps that identify areas needing improvements.

To be effective, educators need to apply the communication processes described above that engage students, teachers, and parents and cascade throughout the organization. We offer eight strategies we've used with leaders and their teachers that align to these communication processes. The outcome is classrooms with engaged teachers and parents who reinforce student learning.

Strategy 1: *Teacher Preference Card*

What do most teachers want from their principals? They want to feel valued, have the tools and resources to do their job, be recognized when performing well, and be developed in areas where they need to improve their skills. Leaders value teachers when they ask teachers to complete a *Teacher Preference Card* at the beginning of the school year. By doing this, leaders show they have a genuine concern for recognizing the needs of their teachers. A preference card should always ask teachers two important questions: 1) What are the three most important things to you when you are teaching? 2) What is the one item you would like to have improved? Sometimes principals' actions interfere with teachers' needs and preferences. With greater knowledge of these preferences, principals will be more informed about the needs of their teachers and therefore,

better able to create a productive work environment.

Strategy 2: Leader Rounding

Leader rounding was invented by Studer (2008) and initially applied with healthcare leaders. He took the idea from physicians rounding on patients and transferred the value of this medical process to leadership. The primary purpose of leader rounding is to establish good relationships with teachers so that leaders can make sure they open communication lines for improving processes that are not working and recognizing teachers identified by others for doing good work. In a casual and informal way leaders take three to five minutes to connect with a teacher by asking a question that engages a genuine conversation between the two, and then the leader asks questions such as what's going well, what tools and resources do you need to do your job well, and is there anyone in particular that has been helpful to you this week or made your job a little easier or brighter?

The key to effective leader rounding is follow-up. We suggest leaders use a *Stoplight Report* as a communication tool to display tools and supplies requested. The leader places things that have been taken care of in the green category, those being worked on in the yellow category and those that cannot be accomplished in the red category. If placed in red, the leader gives the reason the equipment or resources requested cannot be provided.

As important, leaders need to follow-up on opportunities for recognition. After reviewing the information provided by teachers, leaders can recognize someone in a faculty meeting, list the recognition



in a newsletter, congratulate the individual in person, send the individual a thank you note, or apply any other way that seems meaningful to those being recognized. The key to recognition is 1) be specific about the performance being recognized, 2) give credit to the person who communicated the recognized

performance to the leader, 3) only recognize teachers if done in a genuine way, and 4) don't recognize teachers who continue to have performance or attitude problems after receiving support and development. Teachers who desire to be developed and teachers who are the highest performers deserve to be recognized.

Strategy 3: 30 and 90 Day Meetings with New Teachers

We lose too many new teachers in the first year and many of them face their biggest struggles in their first 90 days of teaching. New teachers need formalized meetings with principals. To keep new teachers close, we suggest that principals schedule 30 and 90 day meetings with new teachers to give the leaders a sense of how things are going and a way for leaders to capture intellectual knowledge from a teacher's past experiences. Most teachers will not share their intellectual capital unless the leader asks them to do so. Sometimes a fresh pair of eyes helps leaders see things from a different perspective. Around the 30th and 90th days the principal meets with the new teacher and asks: 1) How do we compare to what we said we would be like? 2) Tell me what you like. What is going well? 3) I noticed you came from ___ (other school or from a particular teacher training program). Are there things you did there that might be helpful to us? 4) Is there anything here that you are uncomfortable with? and 5) How can I help you? To reduce a new teacher's anxiety, when scheduling the meeting principals need to let new teachers know they are a valuable team member in the school.

Strategy 4: WOW Cards

Recognized behavior and performance get repeated. One way leaders can gain more consistency in high performing behaviors from teachers is to send them a WOW card. The WOW card includes the teacher's name, department and date. The leader writes specific descriptions when responding to this statement on the WOW card, "Today, you "wowed" me when you _____". At the end of the card the leader thanks the teacher and signs the card. Teachers who receive these cards feel good about their performance and their leader, and other teachers see examples of performances and behaviors that the leader values in the work environment. Copies of the WOW cards can be posted in a particular location in the school so that everyone can see the performance and behavior that gets recognized.

Strategy 5: 30 Day and Weekly Plans

We have worked with hundreds of teachers and their principals to create what we call 30 Day and Weekly Plans (Pilcher, 2010). We find that when teachers are planning they naturally wrap their minds around a 30 day time period that could translate into somewhere between 20 and 30 days. On the 30 Day Plan teachers define the final or 30 day learning target(s) students will be expected to perform. These targets are usually created beyond the knowledge level on Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). Then they create weekly targets and determine summative assessment tools they will use to assess an instructional segment of targets.

Once teachers create 30 Day Plans they use the roadmap to complete weekly plans. To do so, we suggest teachers need to reflect on four questions:

- What will students need to know and be able to do to achieve the weekly learning targets? (*daily learning targets written in measurable terms*)
- What will I do this week to help students achieve the daily learning targets so that students can achieve the weekly learning targets? (*learning tasks*)
- How will I know if students achieve the daily learning targets so that students can achieve the weekly learning targets? (*feedback strategies –pulse check*)
- How will I communicate progress on the learning targets to students each day? (*feedback strategies - communication*)

Teachers then translate these reflections into actions by using each week's learning goal to determine what students need to achieve first, second, third, and so on with a goal of achieving more complex skills.

Strategy 6: Coaching Probe Tool

The *Coaching Probe Tool* helps leaders coach teachers on how they can help students improve their learning. It provides leaders with a way to record information when observing teachers as they apply 30 Day and Weekly Plans in their classrooms. Principals answer the questions:

- How well did the teacher communicate the learning targets?



- How well did the instruction or learning tasks align to the targets?
- How well did students receive feedback on the learning tasks?
- How well did students understand classroom procedures?

The information collected gives leaders an opportunity to recognize good performance and provide specific feedback on areas that need to be improved. If several teachers are struggling in a particular area, the tool informs leaders on the type of professional development needed. Teachers are happier because their development is aligned to their greatest needs. Students benefit from better instruction. Parents are confident their child is getting an excellent education. Principals benefit from creating positive relationships with teachers for achieving a common goal – improving student learning.

Strategy 7: Connect with Parents

We encourage leaders to help their teachers be proactive rather than reactive with parents. To do so, principals and teachers need ways to build relationships with parents. We've found great success when principals coach and train teachers to make 1) an introduction phone call to parents before students come to school on the first day, and 2) three to five positive phone calls a week. Many parents are anxious about their child going to school. They wonder if their child is going to have a good teacher and if the school environment will be open, positive and engaging. We've found when teachers apply the two actions, parents' anxieties are reduced and they think more positively about the teacher (Pilcher and Lague, 2009). For example, teachers we have worked with sent a three question survey home

to parents each month. After making an introduction phone call before the school year began and making three to five positive phone calls home a week about students, on average 70% of the parents rated the overall experience of their child's education in that classroom a "5," or the highest possible score. Reichheld (2003) tells us that individuals who rate an experience at a "5" on a five point scale demonstrate that they have a sense of loyalty to the organization or in this instance, the classroom teacher. He further claims we should strive to gain loyalty from those we serve rather than think in terms of higher satisfaction. Satisfaction comes and goes; loyalty stays for a long time or until someone does something to damage the relationship.

Leaders need to train teachers on how to make these phone calls. When making the introduction phone call teachers need to acknowledge the parent and state why they are calling, introduce their skill set, let the parent know that they are looking forward to the year with their child, and ask if there is anything the parent would like for them to know about their child before beginning the school year. Once the school year begins, teachers continue connecting with parents by calling three to five parents a week to let them know something positive their child accomplished in class. Leaders should encourage teachers to make positive phone calls to parents of all children.

Strategy 8: Measure to Improve and Recognize

What gets measured gets valued in our schools. For leaders to show they value teachers' satisfaction of their work environment and parents' satisfaction with their child's education, they need to measure both. Data analyzed from surveying teachers and parents are valuable if the information is shared with teachers, used to make improvements and used to reward and recognize

teachers. It is best to make the surveys simple, short and aligned to items that measure teachers' satisfaction with their work environment and parents' satisfaction with their child's learning experience.

Conclusion

What we do as school leaders to support teachers influences the way teachers connect with students and their parents. Effective school leaders' judge their successes by how they help teachers become accomplished rather than how accomplished they become. We've found that when leaders apply the eight strategies they help teachers improve their skill set and work with great purpose and passion. Effective leaders believe their number one goal is to hire, retain and develop effective teachers.

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About the Authors

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Effective Leaders, Effective Teachers, Dec 2010

Abstract

Effective leaders judge their success by determining how well they create great places for students to learn, teachers to teach, and parents to send their children to get an education. Evidence shows that leaders tend to lack effective communication processes to develop effective teaching. In fact, teachers identify poor communication as the area leaders need to improve the most. We offer eight strategies used with leaders and their teachers that align to leaders communicating effectively with teachers to help students achieve.

Effective Teacher GPA, Jan. 2011

Abstract

Teachers are the most important variable that affects student learning. The most effective teachers walk out of their classrooms every day asking, how well did my students learn, rather than how well did I teach. Also, effective teachers transfer ownership of learning to their students and they provide students with ample time to practice while providing specific feedback to students on what they are doing well and areas students need to improve. Pilcher (2010) created a self-assessment Effective Teacher GPA for teachers to use to determine their level of effectiveness. In addition, the results provide teachers with areas they need to work on to improve.

Student Engagement, Feb. 2011

Abstract

Engaged students improve their performance in our classrooms. Our goal as teachers is to create learning environments where students want to learn and gain confidence as they experience success. For this to occur students want teachers who visibly care about them, engage them in the learning process, recognize them for progress made, believe they can learn, like being with them in the classroom, and teach them as individuals. Pilcher (2010) created a Student Engagement Scale as a way for teachers to check how students feel about their learning in class. Teachers can use the scale as a reflection tool or give to students to gain their input.