

## Tips for Administrators

The school year is now well underway. School leaders are now into the routines of both leading and managing their schools. If you are serving in one of these roles, now is opportunity to more fully embrace the principal leadership trinity -- getting to know your people, talking about performance, and leading for results. The focus for this PEP article is on the first part of the trinity—getting to know your people—students and staff (both certified and non-certified). Use the following tips to forge more solid relationships that can contribute to better results—improved teaching and support for learning for all children.

### Tip 1. Structures and Strategies

Part of getting to know your people requires intent blended with structures, strategies, and tactics. With students, most schools, depending upon the grade configuration, have a student council and other organizations, clubs, teams and activities. Being with students ought to be intentional—beyond knowing their names to listening to how they feel about school and learning. One strategy to learn more from children is to have lunch with them and to talk about what they like about the school and what could make it better.

A similar strategy for learning from teachers and staff can apply here, as well. Many schools have some form of team structure. The structure may be horizontal—across a grade level, or vertical, as with content areas at each grade level within the school. Astute leaders take time to be with both types of teams, PLCs, or whatever the group is called in the school. Making time to meet with these groups provides added insight into the issues that they face, as well as to share information from a leadership perspective.

Effective leaders understand the need to be with both groups and individuals. Scheduling 1-on-1 meetings with the staff needs to be a regular part of what happens. Of course, the size and scale of the school affect the frequency of these meetings. However, the 1-on-1s allow leaders to listen to whatever the staff member wants to discuss, and then provide an opportunity to share information and perspective on a more personal level connected to performance and results.

### Tip 2. Listening

Some school leaders are skittish about talking with their professional and non-certified staff. In fact, this is a core leadership responsibility. What many school leaders fail to understand about this is an assumption that the leader knows the issues and will provide solution to perceived problems. Rather, effective leaders will actually engage with listening to the concerns, interests and needs of their staff. They find out what the staff need from the process that will help to improve performance. Specifically, what the most distinguished teacher, administrative assistance, paraprofessional and custodian need from the experience may be quite different from those performing at a proficient, basic, or mediocre levels.

### Tip 3. Follow-through

Along with developing the structures and strategies for meeting with staff and discussing concerns, interests and needs, is leadership follow through. Active listening is just part of the process. Determining next steps and the responsibility for taking them ought to be a focus of any of the actions discussed above. Using a golf analogy, the first two tips are akin to teeing up, addressing the ball, and backswing. The key is the follow-through with the swing and hitting the ball. Follow through failure is a limiting factor in many schools and organization. It erodes trust and breeds cynicism, whereas engaged follow through contributes to what it takes to have an effective, higher functioning school.

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