

Leadership in Adult and Career Education

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The 21st Century requires strong leadership to enable others to fulfill their educational goals and facilitate future generations in becoming responsible citizens. A leader, born, acquired, or both, will use productive strategies to achieve organizational goals. It is the responsibility of any educator to possess good leadership qualities to help relate to the people they are leading and set higher goals for themselves.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) define leadership as a relationship between one who aspires to lead and those who choose to follow (p. 24). Kouzes and Posner (2007) further states “one of the most significant contributors to a strong and resilient workforce – and one that, in the long run, can get extraordinary things done – is a culture that builds and strengthens relationships” (p. 308).

Needed Skills and Knowledge

To be a strong leader in adult learning you must be able to build relationships, possess moral leadership, exercise diverse communication skills, be able to learn from experience, and enable others (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Maxwell, 2007). There are many other characteristics that can be used or will be used depending on the situation. Using the traits outlined as a compass, learners will follow and accomplish their goals and realize their potential. In education, a leader must be able to hold them to a higher standard. Followers, students or peers, will take notice of leadership actions and will instinctively mimic these actions. Maxwell’s 13th Law (2007) reinforces this notion by stating “the better the leaders’ actions, the better their people’s” (p. 135). In the 21st Century, all levels of education deserve leaders with moral character and a habit of doing the right thing for all. To demonstrate unethical actions, in or out of the classroom, penalizes society as a whole. Because of the vulnerability of society, educators must be held to higher standards (Tomasevski, 2003, p. 177). No other profession is more exposed to moral character than teaching.

Communication is an essential part of everyday life, as a leader you need to understand how to effectively communicate with everyone (Maxwell, 2007, p. 103); this includes gender, race, different cultures, and communities. Also understanding that communication does not automatically occur when two or more people are engaged in conversation. Furthermore, Communication is not limited to verbal, but also includes written, non-verbal, posture and even the way one dresses at work (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2002, p. 90; Bhatnagar & Bhatnagar, 2011, p. 177). To be effective as a leader requires good communication skills to facilitate building trust throughout the organization (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2002, p. 90). Mayfield and Mayfield (2002) states that “communication is a powerful catalyst for establishing and sustaining trust, the emotional state that is shared by highly committed workers and leaders” (p. 90).

There are many barriers that affect positive communication. Some examples of common problem areas are stereotypes, assumptions, lack of credibility, misinterpretation of intentions, and misperceptions of style differences. Consequences associated with these barriers are confusion and conflict (Bhatnagar & Bhatnagar, 2011, p. 170). The inability to communicate will create problems, hinder education, and goals will not be realized. Learning to communicate effectively requires training, patience, tact, sensitivity, and timing. Everyone communicates differently and this must be understood. Determine what styles work best for individual situations and for group meetings. Learning the cultures of others will help promote acceptance and a better understanding of the why they communicate as they do. As a leader it is important to know and understand the culture, background, and education to ensure that everyone feels needed and valued (Maxwell, 2007, p. 103).

To be a good leader you must be able to learn from your mistakes and allow your staff and teachers to make mistakes. Everyone is not perfect and there are going to be times when a wrong decision will be made. At times this is acceptable, as long as the mistakes are turned into learning opportunities (Maxwell, 2007, p. 37).

The notion is that the experiences are crucial for the development of future leaders. This connects to a fundamental part of the experiential theory, developed by David Kolb; which was built upon earlier work done by John Dewey and Kurt Lewin. Kolb's four-stage learning cycle demonstrates how experience is transformed through reflection into concepts, which are used as guides for the choice of new experiences (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 197).

Transformational Leadership

John Mac Gregor Burns introduced transformational leadership in 1978 after studying the leadership styles of politicians and military officers; Bernard M. Bass later reconceptualized this in 1985 (Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995, p. 468). According to Burns, transformational leadership occurs when people raise each other's levels of motivation and morality higher than before (Kouzes and Posner, 2007, p. 122). The main contribution that Bass made was in describing psychological mechanisms and setting forth ways of measuring the effectiveness of the Theory (Bycio, Hackett, & Allen, 1995, p. 468). Passion for their work and concern for those that are led are the basis for the transformational leadership and could be considered a values-based leadership style (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 123). Through a collaborated goal for an organization, a transformational leader's main purpose is to inspire followers to support that goal. A transformational leader will lead by example, serves as a role model, and builds confidence in his leadership by earning trust and admiration (Bass, 1985, p. 35). Their confidence in overcoming obstacles encourages others to do the same. They also encourage others to identify problems and propose new solutions. Through this approach, everyone is allowed to participate in the organization of the change process. Under the transformational leadership, followers are not penalized for their views and contributions, but are a valuable part of the organization (Burns, 1985, p. 37).

Moral leadership

Based on Burns' conception, transformational leadership is moral if it pertains to real needs and is founded on an informed choice. The moral transformational leader is directed by global ethics with respect to equal rights and human dignity (Bass, 1985, p. 38). "Moral leadership helps followers to see the real conflict between competing values, the inconsistencies between espoused values and behavior, the need for realignments in values, and the need for changes in behavior or transformations of institutions" (Bass, 1985, p. 38-39). All views of those with an interest should be considered in a decision's outcomes; keep an open-mind you never know who will have the next great solution or idea. In this way, moral leaders use their own power to convince others of the rightness of their choices.

Moral leadership entails being committed to doing what is right corresponding to cultural beliefs and societal values. Moral leaders recognize their own values and are able to maintain a level of accountability for them. A level of integrity must be maintained, as well as, emphasizing trustworthiness. Trust assists in the acceptance of the leader and their vision by those that are led (Bass, 1985, p. 39). To be effective, research new strategies that can be used to build trust and make a connection with the staff. Listen, build relationships, inspire, be honest, set a good example, and hold yourself to higher standards to encourage those that follow (Maxwell, 2007, p. 154). This will lead to improvement of the organization and the results will yield benefits to all, establish trust, and raise moral.

Productivity and change

In an unhealthy environment, the need for change is necessary and transformational leadership can be the foundation for that change. This will assist in making for a better place to work, create growth and productivity, and the process of building human capital will flourish and begin to prosper for all; thus creating a welcome change towards a healthy work environment (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 122-123). Teachers and staff working in a stagnant or hostile environment will not be as productive or supportive of the mission, objectives, and goals needed for change; their needs should be valued and appreciated. If the staff is happy, productivity in all facets of the organization is increased and creativity is raised. Encouraging involvement and continual growth will pilot new purpose and skills to the organization (Bass, 1985, p. 35). The people that will benefit most from this type of school environment are the students; the reason that we have schools in the first place. The students need to make a connection with the school to be able to feel engaged and positive in their education. Transformational leadership allows leaders to create a calm, happy, and accommodating environment for the teachers, students, and the entire staff (Bass, 1985, p. 27). Benefits will be abundant if everyone looks forward to coming to work and school in a productive environment.

Meng-Chun Chin (2007) stated in the findings of his meta-analysis that “a high degree of transformational leadership is seen as superior by the schoolteachers in promoting satisfaction with the leadership of the principal, causing a heightened perception of effectiveness as perceived by teachers, and producing a higher student achievement” (p. 174). This would indicate that leaders, who are proactive, possess understanding, and respond to the individual interests of the teachers will produce positive results. The positive results, according to Meng-Chun Chin (2007), will be a greater satisfaction and higher school effectiveness.

Relationship Building

Maxwell (2007) discusses 21 laws of leadership including, the law of solid ground, the law of connection, and the law of the inner circle. These three laws are fundamental to building relationships. The first step is to build a strong foundation through trust. Maxwell says “to build trust, a leader must exhibit competence, connection, and character” (p.64). No one will follow you if you are not trustworthy. The second step is to connect with the people you plan to lead. Without an emotional connection your followers will not be long lived. “You can’t move people to action unless you first move them with emotion” (Maxwell, 2007, p. 115).

Once you have built a solid foundation, and made a connection of the heart, the third step to build lasting relationships, is to build a partnership. Maxwell (2007) believes “when you add value to people, you lift them up, help them advance, make them a part of something bigger than themselves, and assist them in becoming who they were made to be” (p. 53). You can build partnerships by making your followers part of your “inner circle” or team. Leaders need to focus on learning to replace “I” with “we,” and this will help change their perspective in many ways.

Barriers to building relationships

Besides some of the common barriers in leadership such as trust, motivation, etc., try thinking outside the box; the biggest barrier for anyone to overcome is their mind. Taking a look at some different ways that the mind can control how we operate would give an added advantage to every leader. Knowing how to appeal to someone and recognize how they think gives a leader a greater control mechanism.

Summary

Leadership is leadership; it does not matter whether it is in a school, a small business, or a corporation. The goal is to make everyone around you better. The morals and values that a leader possesses will be viewed and spread throughout the organization, therefore leading by example should be at the top of every leaders list. There are going to be different times and different situations that require a leader to use many traits or just one, such as listening. A leader should not expect to get the same results from every person because of different personalities, culture, gender, and background; however if you treat everyone fairly, with no bias, then you are headed in the right direction and transformational leadership is a great way to accomplish goals and objectives. If you want to be a successful leader, you will have a desire to build strong, lasting, relationships with your staff. To create this type of bond you must build trust, an emotional connection, and partnerships with every person in the organization and being a transformational leader provides you the strategies to make these connections for a healthy work environment. Maxwell (2007) states, “for leaders to be effective, they need to connect with people” (p. 115).

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