What are the Fundamentals of Leadership in Developing an Effective Culture?

Twenty-first[t] Century organizations are all about quality and excellence in performance. Effective 21st Century superintendents understand this and embrace the challenge of developing a high performance, student-centered culture that embraces continuous improvement. Dr. William Glasser (1992) contrasts the differences between bosses and leaders:

- A boss drives   **- A leader leads**
- A boss relies on authority   **- A leader relies on cooperation**
- A boss says "I"   **- A leader says "we"**
- A boss creates fear   **- A leader creates confidence**
- A boss knows how   **- A leader shows how**
- A boss creates resentment   **- A leader breeds enthusiasm**
- A boss fixes blame   **- A leader fixes mistakes**
- A boss makes drudgery   **- A leader makes work interesting**

As we navigate some important fundamentals of effective leadership which will transform and foster a culture that is student-centered, high performing, and embraces continuous improvement, it may be helpful to refer back to this list and re-read it.

Leadership is about Relationships

Success in leadership and life has been, is now, and will continue to be a function of how well people work and get along with one another. Success in leading will be wholly dependent upon the capacity to build and sustain those human relationships that enable people to get extraordinary things done on a regular basis. Leadership is after all, the relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow (Kouzes & Posner 2003). In fact a study at the Center for Creative Leadership found the #1 success factor to be the relationship with subordinates (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 2).

Common patterns of actions by effective leaders (Kouzes & Posner 2003, p. 3-10):

- Model the way – your actions speak louder
- Inspire a shared vision – paint the picture
- Challenge the process – chief disruptor
- Enable others to act – leadership is a team act
- Encourage the heart – inspire others to keep trying and moving forward, even when its hard

Survey results consistently show the majority of constituents must believe the leader is (Kouzes & Posner 2003, p. 11):

- Honest
- Forward-looking
- Competent
- Inspiring

A Leader must have a Vision

A leader must have a vision. Vision refers to a picture of the future with some compelling commentary on why people should strive to create that future. A strong vision tells people "this is how our world is changing, and here are compelling reasons we should set these goals and pursue these new strategies to accomplish these goals." A good vision acknowledges that sacrifice will be necessary but makes clear that these sacrifices will yield particular benefits and personal satisfactions that are superior to those available today or tomorrow – without attempting to change (Kotter 1996). With clarity of vision, managers and employees can figure out for themselves what to do without having to check with the boss or their peers. Twenty-first Century superintendents are forward-looking leaders, who understand the importance of painting the picture of possibilities available in the future for a better tomorrow.

The vision of the organization shapes the mission, which explains how the vision will be accomplished. The bedrock of cultural vitality and stability lies in the mission, values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms that people share (Deal & Peterson, 1996). An effective superintendent leader uncovers these attributes to shape and cultivate the culture to ensure alignment with the vision and mission of the organization.

Deal and Peterson (1996) describe values, beliefs, assumptions, and norms, which are powerful attributes of the culture shared among the people. Values are the conscious expressions of what an organization stands for. Beliefs are how we comprehend and interface with the world around us. Assumptions, not as easily uncovered, are often referred to as the preconscious system of beliefs, perceptions, and values that guide thoughts and actions in powerful ways. Norms consolidate all of these to form a behavioral blueprint which influences the way people act and interact in the group. High performing superintendents use stories, traditions, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols to shape and galvanize the people around a powerful and compelling vision for the future.

Trust is a Prerequisite for Leading

Leading requires trust. It is an essential fundamental of effective leadership for a 21st Century superintendent. Trust is a prerequisite to getting anything done. It is the social glue that binds

human relationships (Kouzes & Posner 2006). Without it, we'd be unable to get anything meaningful accomplished.

What does trust look like? Trust is openness. Trust is valuing other people such that you respect their opinions and perspectives. You listen to them. Trust means moving outside your comfort zone and letting go of always doing it your way, or even the way it has always been done before.

Trust requires honesty with oneself as well as with others. Trust means not making commitments you can't keep, it requires not over-committing or over-promising. Trust requires willingness to let others take charge, and to let others, at times, make mistakes in doing things they have never done before. Trust is relying on others and this can be difficult for the best of us, but especially leaders. In the game of trust, it is the leaders who have to ante up first.

Leadership is Personal

Leadership is personal. Unless you know who you are, what you're prepared to do, and why – then you can't hope to achieve anything very grand. As Covey (2004) teaches, you must first lead yourself effectively before you can effectively lead others. Additionally, your people need to know something about who you are as a person – your hopes, dreams, talents, expectations, and loves (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). They want to know your values and beliefs – your aims and aspirations, hopes and dreams. To be the best you must reveal your humanity.

The Best Leaders Foster Leadership in Others

The best leaders turn their followers into leaders, realizing the journey ahead requires many guides (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). People want to be free. They want to shape their own destiny. People want to be in charge of their own life. It means listening carefully to others. It means getting to know about their capabilities, needs, and aspirations.   It means talking about values and being clear about norms – what's acceptable and not acceptable in terms of how people treat one another, regardless of their place in the organization.

Remember, leadership is not an affair of the head. It is, in fact, an affair of the heart. People commit to causes, not plans. Commitment is fueled by what we cherish.

Organizations have changed, and so must Leaders

Twenty-first Century organizations cannot be defined as clearly as we once could. Organizations have now entered a highly competitive, quality-conscious environment where flexibility and responsiveness are paramount. These changes have led to a dispersal of authority and expertise, and a decentralization of power. Peter Drucker depicts the organization as inherently unstable because they must be attuned for innovation, for the systematic abandonment of whatever is established, customary, and comfortable (Lee & King, 2001, p. 18).   This can be challenging for

organizations and leaders stuck in a misaligned paradigm. Twenty-first Century leaders create and cultivate paradigms that support and promote innovation and creativity.

What do these changes mean for leadership?

Old patterns of command and control are replaced by or intermixed with relationships in which no one controls and no one commands (Lee & King, 2001, p. 21). More than ever, leadership is about influence rather than authority. This has led to shifting boundaries where leaders and managers will be most effective if they focus on good relationships. Successful organizations push management and problem-solving closer to the front line where the work is actually occurring. This has serious implications for the leadership style of those who aspire to lead.

Transformational Leaders foster Adaptive Cultures

 Successful and enduring organizations, including schools, have adaptive and flexible cultures. To sustain high-levels of performance over time, the culture needs to be adaptable and able to anticipate change. Organizations with adaptive cultures are typically led by transformational leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders are those who inspire, develop, and empower the people they lead to achieve extraordinary results. They empower others and challenge them to take ownership of their work. They are able to develop a collective identity around a compelling vision and mission.   This collective identity fosters more of a family atmosphere which inspires more long-term commitments to the organization.

Adaptive leaders continuously develop and foster the adaptive culture through effective communication. They do this by regularly writing and speaking about the core values of the culture, sharing stories, traditions, and symbols to reinforce the commitment of the people. High performing leaders implement systems to ensure they hire, promote, recognize, reward, and discipline people in the organization consistent with the core values of the adaptive culture.

Effective leaders blend Transformational and Transactional Leadership Strategies

Most organizations and leaders benefit from moving toward a transformational culture, while also maintaining a base of transactional tendencies (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transactional culture and leadership leads to motivations around work as a matter of trade-offs of employee effort in exchange for rewards and the avoidance of disciplinary action. The overuse of transactional leadership can lead to more short-term commitments and self-interests become emphasized. With the proper blend of transformational and transactional leadership, an organizational culture can thrive and lead to amazing results for the school and school system.

Management vs. Leadership

The difference between leadership and management is an often debated topic. Twenty-first Century superintendents must be in tune with both concepts to lead in today's complex organizational environment.

Kotter (1996) defines management as a set of processes that keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly. Leadership is contrasted as a set of processes that create organizations or adapts them to significantly changing circumstances. Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with the vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles.

Leadership Creates –   Vision – a sensible and appealing picture of the future

Strategies – a logic for how the vision can be achieved

Management Creates -   Plans – specific steps and timetables to implement the strategies

Budgets – plans converted into financial projections and goals

A Principle-Centered Culture

Stephen Covey (2004) studied, taught, and wrote about principles of effectiveness he called the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. The seven habits are timeless principles that have proven to help individuals and groups find success in all aspects of life. Integrating these universal principles into the organizational culture can have a dramatic and positive impact.

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People presents an "inside-out" approach to effectiveness that is centered on principles and character. Inside-out means that the change starts within oneself. For many people, this approach represents a paradigm shift away from the personality ethic and toward the character ethic. The personality ethic is attributed to outward personality traits, skills, techniques, and a positive attitude. Character ethic is attributed to more underlying characteristics such as integrity, courage, justice, and patience. These more inward characteristics are the foundation needed for real and sustained success.

Our character is a collection of our habits. These habits have a profound impact on our lives. Habits consist of knowledge, skill, and desire. Knowledge allows us the ability to know how to do something; skill gives us the ability to do something; and desire is the motivation to do something.

Covey's(2004) 7 habits move us through stages from dependence, to independence, then to interdependence. The first three habits represent the private victory - Harnessing the principles for personal independence. Habits 4 through 6 represent the public victory – harnessing the principles of interdependence. The last habit is the habit of personal renewal of mind, body, heart, and soul.

Summary of the Seven Habits

Habit 1: Be Proactive - *"I am in charge of my life!" "I am a product of my decisions!"*

Change starts from within, and highly effective people make the decision to improve their lives through the things that they can influence rather than by simply reacting to external forces.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind - *"Have a plan!" "I live by design!"*

Highly effective people create mission statements which drive goal-setting for achieving desired results. Any goal begins with a mental creation or the plan; the physical creation or the work follows.

Habit 3: Put First Things First - "*Work first, then play!" "I put important things first!"*

Spend time doing what fits into your mission, observing the proper balance between production and building production capacity. Identify the key roles that you take on in life, and make time for each of them.

Habit 4: Think Win/Win - "Have a plan!" "I live by design!"

Seek agreements and relationships that are mutually beneficial. In cases where a "win/win" deal cannot be achieved, accept the fact that agreeing to make "no deal" may be the best alternative. In developing an organizational culture, be sure to reward win/win behavior among employees and avoid unintentionally rewarding win/lose behavior.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood - *"Listen before you talk!" "I listen to understand!"*

First seek to understand the other person, and only then try to be understood. This habit is the most important principle of interpersonal relations. Effective listening is not simply echoing what the other person has said through the lens of one's own experience. Rather, it is putting oneself in the perspective of the other person, listening empathically for both feeling and meaning.

Habit 6: Synergize - *"Together is better!" "Together we create a better way, a higher way!"*

Through open, honest communication, find ways to leverage individual differences to create a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts. Through mutual trust and understanding, one often can solve conflicts and find a better solution than would have been obtained through either person's own solution.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw - *"Balance feels best!" "We must renew ourselves – body, heart, mind, and soul."*

Take time out from production to build production capacity through personal renewal of the physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Strive to maintain a relative balance among these dimensions.

These 7 powerful habits encompass principles of effectiveness that are universal, objective, and timeless. An effective superintendent can use these principles for personal and organizational effectiveness to develop and shape a high performance, student-centered culture that embraces continuous improvement.

One powerful way a superintendent can integrate these principles into the school system culture is by implementing the *Leader in Me* program (Covey, 2008). It is a whole-school transformation model that acts like the operating system of a computer — it improves performance of all other programs. It produces transformational results such as higher academic achievement, fewer discipline problems, and increased engagement among teachers and parents. Better yet, this powerful initiative equips students with the self-confidence and skills they need to thrive in the 21st century economy.

12 Elements of Great Managing that Influence Culture

Evidence is clear that the creation and maintenance of high employee engagement is one of the most crucial imperatives of any successful organization. Effective superintendents take intentional steps to enhance employee engagement and commitment. Twelve elements of work life emerged from research by the Gallup Organization as the core of the unwritten contract between employer and employee (Wagner & Harter, 2006, p. xi-xii):

1. I know what is expected of me at work.
2. I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
3. At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
4. In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
5. My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
6. There is someone at work who encourages my development.
7. At work, my opinions seem to count.
8. The mission and purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.
9. My associates are committed to doing quality work.
10. I have a best friend at work.
11. In the last six months, someone at work talked to me about my progress.
12. This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

Evidence is clear that the creation and maintenance of high employee engagement is one of the most crucial imperatives of any successful organization. Twenty-first Century leaders must develop a culture where these 12 elements are a part of the way things are done in the organization. With these elements present, employees are more likely to be engaged and productive in their work and make a longer-term commitment to the organization.

Final Thoughts on the Fundamentals

Leaders of today's complex organizations, including schools, must have a wide array of leadership skills and be very adept at reading and shaping the culture of the organization. Because any organization is only as good as its people, relationships are fundamental factors in success or failure. Effective leaders invest time in building positive, professional relationships with the people they aspire to lead. These relationships are founded on trust. Successful leaders balance their leadership styles blending transformational practices with transactional leadership depending on the situation and people involved. They understand effective leadership and the importance great managing to build commitment and engagement from the people doing the work to achieve the vision. Finally, effective leaders live by and operate on principles of effectiveness such as Covey's (2004) 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. They effectively lead themselves first, and lead everyone else to do the same.

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