
Importance Of Leadership in Schools

Every leader brings to the table a set of beliefs, theories and practices. The leader from Villa Park High School, Mr. M, took time to explain what he brings to the table at his school. This is his second year as the Principal of Villa Park High School. Previously, he was a Junior/Senior high school teacher At Villa Park, followed with two years as an assistant principal at an elementary school in the same school system. While teaching he coached at the middle school and has done various of leadership tasks at his church. Mr. M explained his foundations of leadership, critical issues, and effective practices.

Everyone can become a leader. Mr. M believes that, you're a leader no matter what, but it's your choice what kind of leader you will be. Some are born to be a leader, but others, by what they interact with or grow up around, develop into being a leader. The characteristics and attitudes that are most important for effective leaders to develop are humbleness, a vision, and be relationship driven. An effective leader is willing to ask questions and be approachable. He communicates a vision to build culture. Mr. M quotes part of the verse Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish....". Relationships are important to establish; everyone in your organization is a colleague. The leader sets the culture, this is how they welcome relationships. Mr. M's style of leadership is democratic. According to Peter Northouse (2012), democratic leaders treat their people with the respect that they will get their work done. He is not a micro manager but sees himself as a person who guides his employees rather than directing. Mr. M, desires to mimic the good leaders he grew up around. When he started to get his master's in administration he was challenged with the philosophy that as a Principal you could influence many students over five years instead of just one year. With the influence of his father, he wanted to be the next Paul from the Bible and have his school be his mission field. Mr. M has the ambition that carries a purpose to invest his life as wisely as possible to fulfill God's purpose for his life (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011).

One of the most critical issues facing a leader is Academic Accountability. As a leader, one is accountable for data and a lot of examination is done from data. There is a disconnect with trying to provide something structurally with the lack of funding for the resources. With the lack of funding, Mr. M has to juggle maintaining and improving moral while the teachers are being under paid. To resolve some of these issues, Mr. M focused on prayer and building relationships with his staff and the families that attend his school. With building relationships with his staff, he hopes to create a culture that shows that his teachers are valued and appreciated. He hires good people, not just the best teacher. Mr. M explained, "I can help someone become the best teacher they can be, so the desire to be a good person will make them exceptional." The right people are the most important asset in your building, therefore leaders are intentional at hiring the best people possible for their organization (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011). In comparison of Mr. M's point of view to nursing, Health care is about 'the love of people and the care of people', and always put 'people' first. Many people talk about health care industry regarding health economic and money. However, the leader thinks the most important thing in health care is the love of people and careful the people. If we put it as number one, then we can run a good business. When people like, honor and respect you and they know you are really care for them that will make a business profitable. Making a business profitable is not only think about money or put money first. When you put people first, money will be coming.

The vision of Mr. M's school is to grow constructive leadership and creating successful leaders." He desires his students and staff to take ownership of their education and position in the school. Each person should expect more out of themselves and believe that he or she can be a leader. To improve the over-all understanding of this vision, Mr. M is trying to figure out how to get the community to "buy in" and to think outside of the box of being a leader. Mr. M believes in programs rather than plans to improve academic achievement and management of behavior. His school developed a program, that was just an extension of the day, for about 60 students, called, "Dolphin Academy." As a leader, he needed to be creative with the time that is allowed in a school day. Leaders should be the visionary, the example, and the salesman of the mission. To be this significant leader, he sees the needs of great communication between all participants and planning ahead of time, not last minute.

An effective program needs to have effective practices. At Villa Park, Mr. M has implemented three practices to make effective leaders in his school. First, is the "FINS" program, which is to strengthen growing leaders within his schools. Second, is a positive behavior intervention support practice, "Ladder Management." The practice involves the moving of dolphins up and down a stick based on behavior. The idea behind this practice is that a negative behavior doesn't determine the rest of their day. Lastly, the practice of teachers recognizing other teachers with a wall of fame in the teacher lounge. People have a need to recognize and to have their contributions acknowledged (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011). When producing future leaders and helping them to become effective, Mr. M focuses on feedback and modeling. He gives constructive criticism by giving "grows and glows", not just when an evaluation is given, but anytime he spends a good amount of time in that leader's classroom. People want their leaders to be honest, but respectful at the same time (Northouse, 2012). Mr. M allows his school to be a "teaching school." With his belief, "people need experience to be exceptional," He opens up his school for practicum students and interns to do their hours; "They will learn by our example." This approach is challenging, but "leadership occurs when you move people from where they are to where they ought to be" making it a valuable practice (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011). To be a good model, leaders need to be aware of the common mistakes they make. One major mistake a leader can make is not being visible. People need to see you are available and the students need to see your presence. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby (2011) explain the lack of presence as a demoralizing behavior, "the best leaders find ways to be present with their people." Along with this, a leader needs to be careful that he or she doesn't micro manage, but trust that their staff will get the job done. Another mistake a leader can make is being detached from the experiences their staff goes thru in the classroom and materials that are being used. He believes a principal should be able to walk into the classroom and teach as he or she expects the teacher to teach. As there are many mistakes a leader could make, one last one that is detrimental to an effective environment would be making a lot of changes quickly and with either too much communication or not enough communication of expectations. People find change intimidating when it happens quickly; the change is not given a proper introduction and people feel unable to understand it or control it (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011).

Even though, Mr. M has only been a principal for a short time, his focus as a developing leader is contagious. The staff in his school is receptive to his vision and his relationship-based philosophy is building the moral in the school. By completing this interview, it is notable that even though working in a secular environment, his biblical views and morals don't change but influence his behavior and decisions. There is much for Mr. M to grow in, as he confesses, but with the grace of our Lord, He has the confidence that he will receive the wisdom and direction to help him lead effectively.

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