

Principals, Here's What Your Teachers Need From You

I've been pretty fortunate – in my 10 years in the classroom, I've had some standup and stalwart principals. Beginning with my principal during student-teaching and all the way through my current principal, I've come to learn three important characteristics that are present in all great school leaders:

Great principals have an open door policy – and it's used by the staff

Principals are pulled into so many conversations, discussion, and issues, that *it can become unbearable within the first few days* on the job. Anybody who is exposed to that much concern, negativity, and difficulty should have the first inclination to **turn, run, and scream all the way back to the classroom**. I mean, why wouldn't one want to avoid a multitude of meetings with parents, discipline with students, and frustrations from faculty? I mean, they have a school to lead and ideas of their own to implement!

With all that in consideration, **great principals leave their door open**. In the midst of an email, paperwork, or their best-laid plans, they stop themselves and listen to those they're expected to lead, which include everyone from 6-year-old Kindergarteners, 6 year veteran teachers, and 60-year-old cafeteria workers.

Additionally, it's one thing to say that principals have an open door policy, but what about its implementation? In this case, **is this open door policy being used?** Every teacher has a rule they implement and don't follow through; principals should never make this one of those exceptions. If their door is open and teachers aren't coming to them, they need to get out in the corridors and hallways and come to them.

Great principals have a backbone

I can't tell you how painful it is to watch certain administrators *roll over and concede to parents, students, and teachers for all the wrong reasons*. Sure, everyone involved in education wants to do what's best for kids, it's just that each group there has different definitions and directions in getting there. **What a great principal has- is a true compass master, committing themselves to what's right and defending that**. They're going to get push back, but if they can lay down at night knowing that they didn't violate the contract, were mutually respectful of the parties, and can come to agree to disagree, then you can see into their personal strength and fortitude.

Much of that includes **going to bat for their students, staff, and faculty**. When principals stand their ground and draw their line in the sand, that's an important and awesome moment. It's a true test of character. It's a reflection of what their core beliefs are regarding their school. And that is what defines their leadership.

Great principals don't forget what it's like to be a teacher

The last and most important rule is often the most disregarded one. When some teachers "turn to the dark side" and join the administration, they do it with the best of intentions. However, it's very easy for these converts to become caught up in the red tape, dealing with vocal and/or unionized teachers, and feeling like their agenda is tilted and spilled like an apple cart.

It's interesting to note that, in hospitals, even the top administrators still see patients. Comparatively, as educational leaders move up the ladder, they get further from the trenches and the students. They disconnect from what it means to lesson plan, use the technology, try (and sometimes struggle with) the latest initiative, tap an inexhaustible well of passion while balancing it with regulations from the national, state, and local leaders, all while doing the most important thing – making true connections with students and curriculum.

It's vital for principals to ground themselves in the work of the average teacher at their school. A great principal finds that teacher – someone who does a pretty solid job each day, has some concerns, a family, a life outside of school – and channels him or her when making decisions. They also make quick connections to concerns and frustrations. It's a shame to see empathy disappear as one moves into the front office.

This great principal has that vision to see their staff and students on a regular basis, opening their door for them, their concerns, and their celebrations. This great principal has the backbone to set the course for their school and their beliefs for what educational leadership means to them. Lastly, this great principal has the heart of a teacher that beats in the best interest of students and colleagues

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