

The successful school leader

Malta Society for Educational Administration & Management

“Heads of school need to learn many an art including those of leadership, communication, caring and collaboration”

As we work towards developing schools into vital places of learning, into sites of professional inquiry and reflective practice, it is becoming obvious that heads of school need to learn many an art including those of leadership, communication, caring and collaboration. It is becoming quite obvious to heads that there is a lot of truth in the old saying, “*It is not what you say as much as how you say it.*” Practical and persuasive presentation skills are essential to us if we are to effectively communicate our school’s vision and mission. The best idea in the world will never get anywhere if it is not properly “sold” to the right people. Some of our school heads are learning this the hard way.

Let us explore some of the domains that heads as leaders need to address and master.

Leadership

A lot is said and written about this area. May I share with you just a few thoughts. Are you a risk taker? Are you willing to take up the challenge, which such a style calls for? Do you set a benchmark of electricity and excitement which others are prepared to emulate?

Oral and Non-verbal Communication

As leaders we also must learn to “work the crowd” both verbally and non-verbally to gain ground for our issues. Facts, proper documentation, and fluent communication skills make a formidable combination.

Planning and Implementation

Every football team that ever stepped on a field has had a game plan. Everyone sets out to win. Yet, by the end of the game there is one winner. Coaches will tell you the difference in winning is in how well the game plan is implemented. As educators, our programmes and ideas will be accepted more readily if we not only plan well but also remain focused on implementation.

Interpersonal Sensitivity

Do you come across as warm and caring, affable, approachable and professional? Are you genuinely concerned about students, teachers, and parents alike? Does the school project real human values in its day to day living? Relating to the deep personal values of community members is a powerful tool when used tastefully, and not in a maudlin manner

by educators. Remember, “*No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.*”

Motivation of others

As heads we need to motivate and persuade others to believe in our ideas and us. We will never do this by being dull and boring, harping on low test results, bemoaning the poor state of society, and continuously whining for this that and the other. We must concentrate on what we can do to merge the educationally sound with the not so sound, and come up with solutions our communities will buy into.

We are never going to get anywhere until we get excited about our vision of the way things can be, then share that excitement with our communities. We must persuade others of our vision before we implement it.

Excitement is contagious. We need to truly believe in what we are doing and express this in exciting and humane ways.

Problem Analysis

Problem analysis is an important component behind strategic planning. This involves hard work, which cannot be accomplished alone but must involve others. As a head you need not only be aware of things around you but also be receptive to how others feel and see things. As you work to address current and future needs determine the central issues, involve others, and plan strategies to address them and then work on implementation.

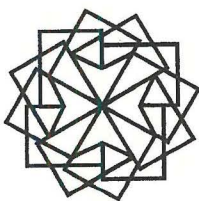
Organisational Oversight

Organisational oversight is very much tied to problem analysis. Analysts and strategists always look at the big picture of the issues they are called to address, they determine their strengths and weaknesses and how best to tackle them.

As school leaders it is important that we do the same kind of “big picture” thinking. Instead of chasing programme after programme, trend after trend, it is important to keep focused on the overall, collaboratively developed goals of the school community. That is not to say that you still will not have to make tough and unpopular decisions. The important thing is to study, analyze, collaborate, and reflect before making the decisions. These together constitute organisational oversight.

Garbage in, garbage out

Computer programmers wisecrack,



The Malta Society for Educational Administration and Management aims at promoting good practice, professional development and research in educational administration and management. Anyone interested in learning more about the Society can get in touch with the President, Dr. Christopher Bezzina (author of this article - Tel. 32902404; email: cbez1@educ.um.edu.mt) or the Secretary, Mr Carmel Busuttill (Tel. 433411; email: busuttill@global.net.mt)

“Having the right information to make logical decisions is essential to programme and personnel planning and evaluation. Without it, ‘Garbage in. Garbage out.’”

Do you come across as warm and caring, affable, approachable and professional?



“Garbage in. Garbage out, “ signifying the importance of having the right data to get the right output. Too often in education we jump on the newest bandwagon or follow the latest trend without being careful to make sure it is based on sound research and pedagogical principles. Having the right information to make logical decisions is essential to programme and personnel planning and evaluation. Without it, “Garbage in. Garbage out.”

Resource Allocation

Just as having the right information is essential, so is its proper use. As educators we are constantly lamenting the lack of resources without determining how we can maximize the use of what we have. Educators should conduct evaluative studies in schools, districts and communities to find out exactly what services are needed and where they are provided, address any duplications, and target special needs.

Often more than one entity is competing for limited external and internal funding. We should develop collaborative processes to cultivate, share, maintain, and grow additional resources. Since huge amounts of additional tax money are highly unlikely in these budget-shrinking days, creative use of limited resources is essential.

Public Relations

Public relations savvy is vital to the success of school heads. Sooner or later everyone is confronted with unforeseeable problems or unfriendly audiences. How you handle the situation is as important as what you say. How we carry ourselves at all times affects the public perception of our schools. We must set the stage, and invite others to the dance. If they do not come, we must work collaboratively with others to figure out ways to entice them. Our public is our success! Our students are what this is all about!

Concluding remarks

Today’s heads, as leaders, need to utilise these domains and more. On the one hand, heads have to utilise the functional domains through leadership, information collection, problem analysis, organisational oversight and implementation. Heads need to be particularly strong in interpersonal areas such as motivating others, interpersonal sensitivity, and oral and nonverbal expression. Heads will also need to score high in public relations. They will need to integrate philosophical and cultural values, legal and regulatory applications, and policy and political influences, which in the end, are important in the running of institutions.

These ‘ten tips’ encourage heads of school to come down from the podium both literally and figuratively. Get involved in the grassroots happenings in your school and community, and then tie them to school goals and objectives. Then stand and deliver in more ways than one! As futurist John Hoyle is fond of saying, “*You can’t light a fire with a wet match.*”

Notes for Contributors

Education 2000 is a magazine, published twice yearly (March/April and November/December periods), distributed free to all teachers, school administrators, student teachers and other educational practitioners who are interested in the study and development of the various areas of the school curriculum, teachers’ professional development and school management. Its main objective is to facilitate the dissemination of research findings, effective practice and teaching and learning ideas. It carries contributions related to education in the primary, secondary, post-secondary and tertiary sectors. We welcome the following kinds of contributions:

- Reports of research which has implications for the school/classroom situation. (A considerable amount of work in this regard is carried out in the form of dissertations for education degrees. Often this kind of work is shelved and forgotten. This journal will seek to assist in the publication of such work);
- Accounts of school/classroom curriculum-related activities and teaching ideas;
- Discussions of current issues in the teaching of the various curriculum areas and subjects at all ages.

Advice on suitable material in any area of the curriculum and help with the preparation of submissions will be given by the Editorial Board. Articles should not normally exceed 2,000 words. In fact shorter contributions are encouraged. Manuscripts and all bibliographical material should be set out in standard A.P.A. style. The Editorial Board reserves the right to make changes to manuscripts to be consonant with the scope and style of the publication.

ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL: Authors are encouraged to submit illustrative material with their articles. Such material (photographs, children’s work, diagrams, etc.) should be in its original form rather than photocopies. Copyright permission, when required, is the responsibility of the author.

Contributions should be submitted:

- on 3.5” diskette, containing the original file of the submission (for example Word, Word Perfect documents, etc), and a **rich text format (RTF)** version. Both PC and Macintosh formatted diskettes are acceptable; alternatively, both files may be sent as attachments via e-mail (gmal1@um.edu.mt).
 - a hard copy of the contribution, including detailed notification of the insertion points of illustrative material, as well as the author’s photo and a short biographical note.
 - all illustrative material in a separate envelope, but with the name of the author and contribution noted on it.
- Contributions are to be submitted to *any* member of the Board, or sent to:
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