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Advancing Women In Leadership

Visionary Leaders by Design

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...women as visionary leaders must keep in mind the advantages they possess over their male counterparts by way of facilitative leadership.

With the advent of educational accountability and the increase in job related stress, school districts are having a very difficult time getting and keeping quality public school administrators. Administrators across the country are finding themselves being pulled into a million directions. In some cases, administrators are facing each dilemma of the day alone – no assistant principal or key support to help with the stresses and strains they must face as leader of the phenomenon faced in schools. That same phenomenon has also had a great effect on university systems to produce quality administrators who “want” to serve in the leadership capacity. Not only are school districts scrambling to attract certified and qualified leaders, universities are redesigning their leadership programs to try to supply the demands of the public school settings.

The ever-changing dynamics of schools has had a great weight on what occurs in schools as well as the perception of school leadership. Academics should be in the forefront, however, it often comes just after the mandates of paperwork, deadlines, discipline issues, building safety, morale building, technology needs, financial reports, parental concerns, community bridges, and student needs. The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) suggests the demands placed on principals do not equal the demands of the profession, and experienced principals are reporting the job is simply not doable.

And yet, despite the demands, commands, and mandates of administration, there is an undeniable truth – leaders will always be needed to govern the operations of schools across the country. The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000)

released a Report of the Task Force on the Principalship that explored the reinvention of the principalship. Among the findings of this report, it was noted that schools of the 21st century would be compelled to have leaders who possess instructional leadership, community leadership, and visionary leadership.

- Instructional leadership focuses on strengthening teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and accountability;
- Community leadership is manifested in a big picture awareness of the school's role in society; shared leadership among educators, community partners, and residents; close relation with parents and others, and advocacy for school capacity building and resources; and,
- Visionary leadership demonstrates energy, commitment, entrepreneurial spirit, values and conviction that all children will learn at high levels, as well as inspiring others with the vision both inside and outside the school building (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000).

Bennis (1990) suggests that all leaders have the capacity to create vision, one that takes people to a new place, and the ability to translate that vision into reality. He also writes that leaders "manage the dream" (1990, p. 45) thus the concept of visionary leadership. Blumberg and Greenfield (1980) indicate that visionary educational leaders have a clear picture of what they want to accomplish. The vision of their school or district provides purpose, meaning, and significance to the educational aims of the school and enables them to motivate and empower the staff to contribute to the realization of the vision. According to Westley and Mintzberg (1989), visionary leadership is dynamic and involves three stages:

- An image of the desired future for the organization (vision) that is
- Communicated (shared), which serve to
- Empower those followers so that they can enact the vision. (p. 19)

Visionary leaders embrace the unknown with a sense of security and assuredness that "the dream" will somehow come to fruition. Sharing of the vision serves as the foundation as to how that vision will be shaped. A strong, clear articulation of this dream serves as the declaration of what is sure to come. That declaration will most often become the motivation for others as they participate in the events that lead to the expected outcome. The institutionalization of the vision is of great importance as noted by Robert Starratt (1995).

Although visionary leadership serves as one component of 21st century educational programming, it must be clearly understood that new visions do not automatically mean new implications for teaching (Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996). Consistent evaluation and re-evaluation of the vision process must be adhered to for the development of the vision to truly become a living reality.

Who will go for us?

"Although the pool of principal candidates is large – many individuals possess the

required certification- there is reason to believe the number of 'highly capable' applicants may be dwindling" (Anderson, 1991, p.30). Although the issue of principal supply and demand is complex, the growth of the number of school principals grew from 77,890 in 1987-88 to 79,618 in 1993-94 (up 2.2 %) (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 1997). Among the number of capable and qualified principal candidates, women gained ground in the area of principalship from 24.6% in 1987-88 to 34.5% in 1993-94. The percentage of new female principals also rose from 41.2% in 1987-88 to 48.1% in 1993-94 (NCES, 1997). Since the mid 1980s, women have comprised at least half of educational administration enrollments according to Bell & Chase (1993, as cited in Logan, 1998). With the growing number of female leaders in educational administration, it is apparent that women must be adequately trained to participate in the rigorous demands of leadership while appropriately utilizing the female attributes of nurturing, being sensitive, caring, cooperative, and accommodative. Those attributes are also increasingly associated with effective administration (Grove & Montgomery, 2000).

Women often lean toward facilitative leadership, which is contrary to their male counterparts. This type of leadership style allows others to make contributions through delegation, encouragement, and nudging from behind (Porat, 1991). Many women support contributive, consensual decision making and emphasize the process by encouraging feelings of self-worth, active participation, and sharing of power and information (Porat, 1991; Getskow, 1996). Chliwniak (1997) states that while women embrace relationships and the sharing process, men often focus on the completion of tasks, achieving goals, the hoarding of information and winning. Conner (1992) notes also that men tend to lead through concrete exchanges while Eakle (1995) states that women are more interested in transforming people's self-interest into organizational goals through the empowerment process.

The work of Shantz (1993) outlined evidence that women administrators are effective at fostering collaboration, sharing power equitably, vision building, collegiality, and encouraging risk taking. This work was further supported by Regan and Brooks (1995) who defined leadership attributes as feminist (from women's experiences) or feminine (given to women by their role in the culture). Feminist attributes include collaboration, caring, courage, intuition, and vision, while feminine attributes include nurturance, compassion, and care.

With the evidence indicating the growth of women in this most demanding career choice, these questions must be addressed: What are the visions of women in this male dominated industry? Are women better suited to fulfill the requirements of school leadership? Are women of vision part of the new redesigned leadership paradigm?

Vision: Sustaining Power of Administrators

Although there are a myriad of statements attached to the term "vision," the ultimate emphasis is discovered in the final result. What is the expected impact? The final destiny? The supreme outcome? While many school leaders have become diffident concerning the usefulness of vision, experts continue to maintain high

regard for this make-or-break task for the leader (Conley, 1996). Conley (1996) equates the concept of vision to an internal compass. Vision is further characterized as an "educational platform" which includes the school's beliefs about specific aims, methods, and climate, thereby creating a "community of mind" all focused on behavioral norms (Sergiovanni, 1994, p.170). Sergiovanni (1994) further states that vision is the capacity to create and communicate a view of a desired state of affairs that induces commitment among those working in the organization. Nanus (1992) agrees that vision provides guidance to an organization by clearly stating what it wishes to attain. The provision of a picture or mental image not only describes an organization's direction or goal, but also the means for accomplishing it. Vision then becomes the picture of the future for which people are willing to work.

While vision may take on a variety of definitions, it is highly customary for resistance to become a part of the visionary process. "To prevent from becoming stranded on the mudflats of an obsolete ideology, you must become a champion of change" (David Lodge, as cited by Donald Clark, 1997, ¶ 1).

As noted by Donald Clark (1997), organizations experience four new changes throughout their growth:

- Formative Period – The founding vision is present; however, there are no formal definitions. Experimentation and innovation usually takes place during this time.
- Rapid Growth Period – Growth and gains are sustained through direction and coordination. Change is centered on the purpose of the organization and on the mainstream business.
- Mature Period – Growth levels are off during this period. Changes are needed to maintain what has been established and to assure maximum gains are achieved.
- Declining Period – This period includes tough objectives and compassionate implementation. The goal is to get out of the old and into something new. Since visions must be periodically assessed, it is during this phase of change where decisions are made to continue the focus of the original vision or to take a new direction.

With a clearly painted picture for the stakeholders to embrace, vision also serves to inspire, motivate, and engage people. Manesse (1986) describes vision as the energy that structures meaning for the people of the organization. Properly designed, vision will address the following questions: Who is involved? What is the plan and how will it be accomplished? Why is it necessary to stretch toward this vision or dream? For educational leaders who implement change in their school or district, vision is suggested to be a hunger to see improvement (Pejza, 1985 as stated in Mendez-Morse, 1991).

The power of a structured, attainable, articulated vision has far reaching results.

The key is to create the vision while fundamentally allowing all stakeholders to participate in the development of this mantra. As vision statements are written across the country – in rural, urban, big, little, affluent, and at-risk schools – the focus should always be the same: to improve the quality of education received by all students. Regardless of student backgrounds, the vision of successful educational leaders and the educational communities they serve is to attain a higher standard for all students. The power of a well-written vision statement points all stakeholders in the same direction with the same desired result focused in each and every action of those stakeholders. “Statements about vision incorporate the values and commitments that guide the system as well as the beliefs about structure. These statements appeal to hearts as well as to minds; they command loyalty and emotional attachments and provide orientation for specific action” (Schlechty, 1997, p. 31).

The Role of the Visionary

With the advancement of more women in the world of administrative leadership, could it be that the vision of women for these educational entities is an expression of their unbridled passion for education? Women have made up at least half of educational administration program enrollments since the mid 1980s (Bell & Chase, 1993, as cited in Logan, 1998). This indicates a strong desire to enter educational leadership as a qualified individual as well as the desire to understand the male dominated leadership structure of the present. The facilitative nature of women gives support to the visionary process. The work of Aburdene and Naisbitt (1992) characterized women’s leadership into twenty-five behaviors. These behaviors were clustered into six central patterns of behaviors that empower, restructure, teach, provide role models, encourage openness, and stimulate questioning. Gillet-Karam’s study (1994) suggested four behaviors that characterize women leadership: a) vision behavior -women leaders take appropriate risks to bring about change, b) people behavior -women leaders provide care and respect for individual differences, c) influence behavior - women act collaboratively, and d) values behavior - women leaders spend time building trust and openness. What more then is a visionary leader than the culmination of these notable behaviors?

A persuasive body of research strongly suggests that the key to achieving high leadership productivity is through the school leader. Empowerment is initiated by four key components of the leader’s behavior: vision, communication, positioning, and self-management (Andrews, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Smith & Andrews, 1989). Here again, vision is the ability to see the future in its desired state. It has very little impact; however, without the ability to clearly, rationally, and concisely articulate exactly what the desire is toward the expected outcome. As the foundation for the vision is being cultivated, the leader must also position oneself to ensure things are done. The necessary actions that must be taken to secure the vision are often found in the self-management of the leader. The concept of “leading by example” may promote positive behaviors in others.

Planning your work and working your plan

How are visions erected? How are they constructed? Formulated? Postulated? How do they serve as vehicles for momentum towards change? Great visions are not born; however, the possibilities of conception lie within the minds and hearts of the stakeholders. Visionary leaders recognize this is a multi-step process in order to develop a vision that can be lived with and serve as the catalyst for movement toward the desired outcome. Those steps include:

1. Organize the vision team! Include representation from every group – administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community leaders – any one who can help others to embrace the message of the vision. The inclusion of a cross group of individuals helps to create a richer, more productive team. This leads to a variety of opportunities to stimulate questions for proactive rather than reactive decision making.
2. Construct the vision statement! The vision statement should be short enough for all who come in contact with it to remember it and yet meaningful enough that all may walk away understanding the message. Wording should be considerate of the school population as well as the school community. As the team evaluates and re-evaluates the vision statement, new meanings may be revealed to the team. Expect the team to experience the process of forming, storming, norming, and performing before adjourning with a statement that satisfies all and can be lived by all.
3. Commit the vision to paper! Include it in all correspondence from the school. Post it boldly in high traffic areas. Encourage all classrooms to post it in the same location, ie. near a door, on the front board, near the student work display area. Post it anywhere students, parents, and teachers may view it quickly.
4. Articulate the vision! Principals should walk the walk and talk the talk. Share the vision. Include the vision in your daily announcements. Require teachers and students to also be able to articulate it whenever necessary. Encourage open discussions with faculty, parents, students, and community members about the stages of development toward the end result. These open discussions will create readiness for the acceptance of the vision and the mental and physical work involved.
5. Recognize that vision brings about a change! Restructuring mandates a state of discomfort. That discomfort is often the fertilizer needed to cultivate the expected desire. The challenge change brings will often force people to evaluate their commitment to the vision.
6. Create readiness for the impact! Properly implemented, vision statements have had far reaching effects on the educational institution with special emphasis on the children. Visionary leaders promote “buy-in” by all who come in contact with their students.
7. Evaluate the vision! Spend time conducting informal interviews with all stakeholders. Reconvene meetings with your original vision team to discuss the status of progress and what can be done to energize the workers.

In conclusion, women as visionary leaders must keep in mind the advantages they possess over their male counterparts by way of facilitative leadership. A leader with an emerging, inclusive style of leadership could provide an institution with new values grounded in cooperation, community, and relationships within the community (Chliwniak, 1997). The results of that shared vision, as noted by DuFour and Eaker (1998), can have a significant impact on the entire school community. Shared vision will: motivate and energize people, create a proactive orientation, give direction to people within the organization, establish specific standards of excellence, and create a clear agenda for action. As women continue to prepare themselves for the awesome challenges of leadership, it is certain that each step of the journey will be clearer as they embrace the power tools of women of vision.

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