What Great Principals Do Differently: 15 Things That Matter Most

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What Great Principals Do Differently
15 Things that matter most

PRESENTED BY DR. TIMOTHY L. HEATON
FROM TODD WHITAKER’S BOOK OF THE SAME NAME
1. Why Look at Great!

A. Study what effective principals do.

1. Adapt to change without losing sight of what’s really important.

2. How does one create a school for 21st century learning?
It’s People Not Programs

- Two ways to improve Schools
  1. Get Better Teachers
  2. Improve the ones you have.
  3. Programs are never the solution and are never the problem
  4. What really makes the difference is the teacher!
2. A Good Teacher can succeed in any Environment!

- They make the best of what they can (girls locker room...first classroom)
- They take programs that are “canned” i.e. assertive discipline and make it work in their classroom for positive reinforcement.
- The teachers are aware of individual needs and address these.
- An effective teacher research shows has someone who has encouraged them and supported them. Focus on individual teachers not just an overall whole school program.
- Rewards Punishment or Encouragement It all depends how you use it.
3. Who is the Variable?

1. Who can predict which teacher will send the most students to the office next year? Or even today? Work with that teacher.

2. What if students do poorly? Who’s to blame? Good teachers know they are the one to blame. It depends on how the teacher responds to situations.

Motto: If a student is failing, the teacher is failing, until they find out the reason why....the root cause not the symptoms such as not trying, not caring, rebelling....answer the why question....why do they seem not to care, not to try, are rebelling. You need to be a diagnostician...not a blame shifter.

3. Who’s responsible for this school? You are!!!!! You have to be the ultimate problem solver, not blame outside influences.

4. Are high expectations important? For teachers, and students and you model this yourself. What do you expect of yourself?
How do we deal with the demands of others?

“ The problem with the education these days is:

- Students can’t think, Students can’t do math, Students are lazy,
- How come out of the 4 McDonald’s in town, two have great service and two have very rude employees?
- All paid the same, all went through the same training, the variable is who is managing that business.
- Accept responsibility...you hired the teacher...take them through the gauntlet Interview well. Model behavior yourself.
4. Treat Everyone with Respect, Every Day, All the time

- Remember that one time? The negative comment, the bad experience, the cutting remark, we don’t remember the good things, we remember that one time.

- Getting students on your side.....It depends how you handle situation with one student.....respond appropriately and professionally

- Maintain a high level of dignity

- Love every student, teacher equally (though you may have some you like more than others...keep the balance)

- Positive approach each day. G.R.E.A.T. Good reports edify and testify!
Barriers to Praise

- If I praise people, they will stop working.
- I might miss someone and hurt their feelings.
- I don’t have time to do this with authenticity.
- You set the positive tone for the building as the principal. You are the principal teacher.
- One of the most important tasks for teachers and administrators is to model appropriate behavior.
- Being nice all the time is a “gift” to your school.
5: The Principal is the Filter

- How is your day going?
- The sense of calm
- Dealing with the angry parent
- No knee jerk reactions to Test Scores.….Look at the positive and what needs to be improved….not the negatives
- When the Principal sneezes….our impact on the school is either good or bad. If we lack credibility people work against us.
- Focus on main issues not trivial matters.
- Stop Thumping!
- The Goal of every faculty meeting……teachers leave more excited about teaching tomorrow than they did today. How do you end the meeting.
- Dealing with a teacher who says” They have the worst group of kids” If you begin to say this, then you begin to believe it, Perceptions can ruin a school...change your perceptions.
6. Teach the Teachers

- Great principals focus on students by focusing on teachers.
- Teachers do the best they know how
  1. Classroom management,
  2. The Screacher is not the Teacher, “how many times have I told you this?”
  3. Boring and non-engaging instruction
  4. Show how adults solve problems to the kids
  5. You can’t teach from the office. Visibility (Recess, Lunch, Morning watch, Evening watch, etc)
  6. Get teachers into other’s classrooms/ PLC Professional Learning Community
7. Hire Great Teachers!

- Hire for talent not necessarily GPA’s.
- Don’t get good teachers get great teachers…..give them scenarios to handle…..ask them how they would lead in a given situation.
- Do background checks of Social Media. See how they interact with others online, blogs, face book, etc.
- Experience is not the best teacher, The best teacher is the best teacher.
- Provide PD, Coursework towards degree, licensure, get and give help with technology.
- “I want to hire a teacher who wants to be part of the best school in the state….how can you help this be the best school?”
8. Standardized Testing

- Because of mandates “from on high” many principals lose focus of what is really important.
- How do we go about dealing with the reality of standardized tests?
- Just do it!
- Bring community together and decide “What should our schools be doing?
- Standardized Tests are just a small part of an overall big program...never should control what the schools really need to be doing?
- What do standardized tests measure? Keep testing in perspective: Students social skills, self-worth, behavior, responsibility, involvement in school and character qualities. Always do what is best for students!!
9. Focus on Behavior, then Focus on Beliefs

- What really matters is not beliefs but behavior.
- Make teachers aware of their behaviors that are negative.
- Understanding incentives. The greatest impediment to change is fear.
- (have a “mole”)
  - Teachers should always call parents!!! Give a good report early. Principals need to teach teachers how to deal with specific language in a phone call and self control.
- Improve instructional practices
- Be willing to admit mistakes and apologize.
- Changing programs...do scaffolding, not total immersion.
10. Loyal to Whom?

- Effective students insist on loyalty to students and what is best for the student.
- Bottom line: Always what is best for the student.
- What is Best for the School, for all teachers and all students.
- Sometimes we don’t want to deal with difficult issues because we are afraid we will hurt feelings when it is our feelings we want to protect.
11. Base Every Decision on Your Best Teacher.

- Quick Guidelines for teachers who are superstars:
  - Former students remember them as their best teacher
  - Parents regularly request these teachers for their children
  - Their peers respect these teachers
  - If they left your school, it would be difficult to find a teacher as good as them as a replacement.
  - If my best teachers don’t think something is a good idea, what are the chances that the rest of the faculty will accept it and if my best teachers don’t think it is a good idea, what are the chances that it is a good idea?
  - Bounce ideas off the good teachers. Best teachers have a broad vision not a tunnel vision.
  - Most effective principals ask for and consider input from best teachers
  - Back to the idea of placing “moles” beginning to make change in small ways and sharing with their peers their success…..grassroot leadership from best teachers, bottom up not top down approach.
One box of paperclips/ 20 copy limit

- Don’t issue mandates, but explain situations or offer incentives. (Dean’s copy limit challenge to get an I-pad)

- Give Artificial Due Dates (A.D.D.) This gives you wiggle room on the teachers who don’t turn things in on time when they are due.

- Don’t single out the superstars, but do let them lead and trust their lead.
12. In Every Situation Ask Who is Most comfortable and who is least comfortable

1. Let every teacher feel like they are good and have good ideas.
2. If negativity begins to reign, say: “I’d like to discuss that idea more in depth with you in my office tomorrow morning” you’ve eliminated the negative person from having their audience.
3. The same applies to students....don’t punish the good students because a few bad apples exist. Have peer reviews and peer mediation.
4. The same with parents: You must pick up your child.....and only 2 or 3 families don’t do this....find out why and help them resolve the problem. Don’t send a note to all who are already doing it.
5. Be proactive with teachers, parents, staff and any others. Be a positive problem solver. Shift the focus from negative to positive.
6. Uncomfortable feelings make people change- One way or Another. If it makes your best teacher uncomfortable you need to change your decision, but it is OK to make the other teachers who are not the best uncomfortable because you have the loyalty of the best teachers.
7. Pay for performance Do a survey and see who is comfortable and who is uncomfortable. Weigh you decision based on this.
8. Fairness: Never Equal, but giving what another needs.
13 Understand High Achievers

- We need them freedom to do what they want to do and not hold them back in their teaching ideas.... Best teachers are like this.
- Even if minor errors, don’t make a big deal out of minor errors

- Never be critical or use sarcasm....
- High Achieving Best Teachers are very sensitive
- Let them have some autonomy and recognition
Teacher Evaluations

1. Walk continually around the building, make mental notes of what is going on.

2. A good teacher is never teaching from their desk or at their desk while students are doing work in groups. They need to be moving around.

3. Help the teacher assigned to Bus Watch, Playground, Lunch room. Even offer to model the expected behavior by taking the lead and even giving the best teachers a break during this time by taking their duty. The “good” teacher will soon learn.

4. Go in and read to a class or teach a class once a month at a different grade level. Of course you best be the best teacher also. The way the students act give you insights in ways you can help the teacher or make positive suggestions.

The above are all informal evaluations which you will make notes about.

When you do the formal evaluation, the teacher will be afraid of making a mistake. Meet with the teacher first and go over the lesson. Make sure they know what is on the form and you have already done informal evaluations all semester.
What about Burnout?"

- “Teachers who say they are burned out probably were not on fire anyway”.

- Delegation is difficult for all principals. However, the best rule of thumb is if someone else can do it...give it to them.

- When you take over a duty for a best teacher be careful that you have something else for them to do that is important otherwise they will feel hurt and unvalued.

- Many times a high achiever, best teacher will leave if they feel not valued, however the grappers usually stay on.
Make it Cool to Care

- Let students take the lead on this after instruction.
- When you see a student make a wise decision or do something kind, make sure to note it...the same with the teachers.
- Let higher grades adopt lower grades to “care for them” (the teacher still supervising)
- This is never mandatory, but is a suggestion you give to the best teachers and watch it spread.
- Who are the legends in teaching, touch that emotional side. (Dr. Lowrie)
Sometimes even the best teacher erupt... treat it as if it were your family member.

Be sensitive to home situations and the pressures all teachers are under, but also help them realize they are called to the classroom, but do your best to help them cope.

Best teachers always apologize, and are constantly repairing and improving.

Some always need repair but never do. We need to put our time and energy in helping this teacher build personal skills. It is usually do to their own lack of self-confidence.
Dealing with Difficult Parents

- Always begin with “I’m sorry that happened”.
- The more offensive the parent is, the more sorry I am that that happened?
- Teach these skills to all teachers.
- Take time out in a hostile situation....make up an excuse to leave the room when near the breaking point and come back refreshed. This gives you time to regain confidence, think through what is said and a cooling off period for the parent.
16 Set the Expectations for Next Year

- Collaborate with Teachers to Set the expectations for next year at the end of school.
- Check with teachers during the summer break to see if everything is going well. Keep the contact going.
- Think about have PD contractually in the summer for a day or two. (you pick up the returning teacher and get the new teachers also)
- Teachers do not want PD at the beginning of the year, they want to work in their rooms.
- Perhaps have PD in October or November….a nice interlude and the PD can be more focused
- Have a uniform discipline plan all teachers agree upon and practice in their own way. Again, they own it, you don’t tell them it top down orders.
- Be personable with teachers and their families. Have teachers and family over for dinner. Learn about their families. Mike Online
- Be sensitive to Personal issues and give time off even if it above the contractual amount.
17 Clarify Your Core

- What is your Mission

- What is your end product going to look like and how are you going to get there?