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Hearts-on Approach to Educational Leadership

Russell H. Adams

Liberty University, rhadams@liberty.edu

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U N I V E R S I T Y.

Introduction

God blessed Daniel with the gift of interpreting dreams. Those around Daniel recognized this special gift and wanted to see that gift in action. This story reminds all leaders that when we work in the areas of our gifts, "people will watch and listen" (Maxwell, 2002, p. 1029). Followers want to be part of an exciting vision, and a competent leader can share his or her desire, ability, and confidence to make that dream possible in the hearts of those who care. In education, leaders are being called to serve and make our children's education better than it has ever been before. Those leaders will need to rely heavily upon their gifts to relate to and communicate with others to get the job done.

Unfortunately for our children, there are too many public schools that are not performing well. Students lack adequate moral values and social skills. Dropout rates remain high. Law enforcement based in high schools is now commonplace to control the incidents of violence and alcohol and drug problems. Students are performing poorly on state assessments, and students who graduate from high school often require remedial classes before taking the more rigorous college classes in English and math. The situation in these schools is much like a runaway train. Too many educational leaders lack the desire and/or skills necessary to turn this negative situation around. The conductors of these schools have lost control and at best are only maintaining the status quo to keep the train on the tracks. It is only a matter of time before the train wrecks. How many people will suffer before schools and communities realize something has to be done? One fact is evident: people will show up for a leader with gifts who has the promise of brighter vision, but they will also be there when a leader experiences the proverbial train wreck. The choice for educational leaders becomes, will we be proactive in the future to realize our children's potential or remain reactive in nature, continuing business as usual?

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For educational leaders to accomplish the necessary changes in schools, a multitude of skills and abilities will be required. Many of these skills and abilities are in the essential make-up of the servant-leader, a concept introduced by Robert Greenwood in the 1970's. Stephen Covey (2002) recognizes that many top leaders of great organizations are servant-leaders and that they live their daily lives with moral authority.

> Moral authority comes through sacrifice in the four basic elements of our nature: physical and economic sacrifice is temperance and giving back; emotional/social sacrifice is surrendering self to the value and difference of another, to apologize, and to forgive; mental sacrifice is placing learning above pleasure and realizing that true freedom comes from discipline; and spiritual sacrifice is living life humbly and courageously, living and serving wisely (p. 11).

This paper will present a review of the current literature related to various leadership styles with an emphasis on communication. Communication has been identified as one of the most important and effective tools an administrator can utilize to improve a dysfunctional system: "We rarely think or talk about where we come from or what we are here to do. We need to. Otherwise we deaden our souls, stunt our spirits, and live our lives half heartedly" (Bolman and Deal, 2001, p. 228). The discussion will highlight the multi-faceted, complex activity of communication and identify numerous strategies to help the administrator accomplish his or her mission. Suggestions will include principles from both Christian and secular literature and are meant to provide leaders with a practical understanding for implementation in the schools.

Leadership Communication Styles

To appreciate properly the role of communication for the educational leader, one must understand several leadership communication styles: authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire. The democratic style allows leaders to utilize a vast array of effective strategies to change their schools positively. Both the authoritarian and laissez-faire styles somewhat restrict leaders' abilities to be their best, resulting in a diminished return on their effort and energy due to the lack of focus on relationship building.

Authoritarian leaders believe workers do best under constant supervision. They control discussions and dominate interactions with minimal positive feedback. Obedience is rewarded, and mistakes are punished. The workers' opinions are neither solicited nor valued, with goals for the group being set unilaterally by the leader. Communication tends to be one-way: down to the workers. Schultz (2006) issues a word of caution in his book *Kingdom Education*, which can be utilized in effective parenting, but is also applicable to the workplace: "Rules without relationships always breed rebellion! And, anger assassinates relationships!" (p. 74). While the authoritarian style produces results, the leader can severely damage the morale of the workers by constantly focusing on the workers' mistakes and frequently reacting in anger, resulting in a diminishing return on his or her investment of time and energy.

Democratic leaders encourage the workers to be a part of the process. Involved in setting goals, developing policies and procedures, and offering suggestions and ideas along the way, the worker is instrumental to accomplishing the best outcome. The communication tends to be two-way, characterized by effective listening, open discussions, positive feedback and encouragement, and with conflicts mediated and utilized to improve the group. Workers are rewarded for good work, and punishment is rarely used in response to mistakes. People represent

the organization's most valuable resource, and, as such, leaders must make a priority of developing the interpersonal skills to effectively deal with their followers. Proverbs 27:1-21 suggests some principles to strengthen relationships: "don't brag, don't envy, be forthright, don't forsake your roots, stay close, add value, and don't be moved by flattery." Healthy relationships are vitally important to democratic leaders.

Laissez-faire leaders allow workers free reign for all aspects of the process in the workplace. This type of leadership has been also called "non-leadership" due to the leader's avoidance of discussions, interactions, conflict, positive or negative feedback, punishments or rewards. When invited, the laissez-faire leader will offer possible suggestions or ideas to reach the desired goal but is not likely to participate in the decision-making process again unless requested to do so. Communication tends to be superficial and noncommittal. In Luke 4:3-10, Jesus dealt with three temptations during his forty days in the desert. Through self-discipline and by not succumbing to legitimate needs, spiritual gifts, or personal worship, "Jesus teaches leaders the first person you must lead is you" (Maxwell, 2002, p. 1234). Laissez-faire leaders realize their limits in controlling and manipulating others; therefore more effort and energy are focused on maintaining the leadership style. There appears to be an element of trust on the leader's part and a belief that the followers will do the right thing or take the necessary steps to accomplish the goal. Lamentations 5:14-19 reminds us, "Leaders act according to their gifts and callings, but trust God to bring about the desired results." The laissez-faire style works best with adept, highly motivated workers.

The democratic style unleashes the educational leader to combine Kouzes and Posner's (2002) five practices of successful leaders. Those practices include modeling the way, inspiring a vision, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart. The practice of

modeling the way has a significant effect upon how you as a leader communicate with your followers. To be an effective communicator, you must have a clear understanding of who you are and what you stand for. First, find out what is important by determining your own values. What are those values about which you are passionate and which resonate in the very core of your being? Perhaps you value the fact that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect: co-workers, students, parents, and people from higher and lower socio-economic classes. Show others the importance of this through your behaviors and the words you speak, which are your values in action. How people perceive your behavior communicates volumes about who you are and what you believe is important. The old adage of "do as I say, not as I do" will not work in a leadership position and will undermine any confidence you hope to develop with your followers. There is rarely a time when a leader's behavior is not up for interpretation. The implication for you as a leader is that you are always on the job and are accountable for the messages you send to others. Will you be a model others will want to follow? As Kouzes and Posner (2002) said, "People first follow the person, then follow the plan" (p. 15). As leaders, we must first gain others' confidence, respect, and trust before we can be our most effective selves. Learning to lead others is about uncovering that for which you care and value the most, what inspires, encourages, challenges, and gives you energy and a feeling of competence. When you know these things about yourself, you will also know how to bring these qualities out in others (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Organization

The effective educational leader recognizes "Organizations are formed through the process of communication" (Hackman & Johnson, 2004, p. 222). A recent Gallup survey polled nearly two million people who identified 34 strengths of effective leaders. Communication was

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identified as a strength leaders use to bring people in. As Buckingham and Clifton (2001) stated, "Your word pictures pique their interest, sharpen their world, and inspire them to act" (p. 90). The second practice of successful leaders identified by Kouzes and Posner (2002) is to "inspire a shared vision." Through words, leaders begin to paint a new reality of possibilities for their followers to rally around and support, but critical to this process is the leaders' willingness to listen. Good leaders not only give good advice, but they also follow it (Maxwell, 2002). As a result of opening the lines of communication, trust begins to build between the leader and the followers. This trust and two-way communication are extremely important to the implementation of the next practice, to challenge the process (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

In order to build trust and bring about change, leaders must demonstrate effective communication, which includes speaking, listening, matching non-verbal communication with your words, and writing in the form of proposals, letters, articles, memos and emails, to build more trust and confidence within your organization. As a leader, you must keep your word, and meet all of your obligations. You should set a good example of resolving conflicts through open communication with others. Leaders have a critical vantage point to view the school as a whole and can evaluate systems that may be setting people up to fail through miscommunications resulting in conflicts with one another (Brubaker, 2006). For example, Wal-Mart relies on a program called the "ETDT: Eliminate the Dumb Things" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 199). The directives of this program are similar to those of effective leaders in educational settings: get out of the office, talk to a variety of your constituents, and use their input for bringing about change. The people in the trenches want to be part of the process, and by actively soliciting their ideas and valuing their opinions the foundation is established for future growth and change.

The educational leader who takes the time genuinely to recognize the strengths of his or her employees creates a caring climate in which employees can excel. There will be times when an employee will make a mistake. The best response is to continue to support the employee by reiterating his or her strengths while recognizing the mistake is not a big deal. Rather, as a leader, you should view the mistake as something to learn and grow from, and move on. If you focus on their strengths, they will give you more of their best efforts in the future (Lennick & Kiel, 2005).

Group members need the opportunity to discover themselves, and this is best accomplished through group discussions because "Dialogue… allows a group to discuss a topic to discover the truth as perceived by the group. To engage in dialogue, the listener must suspend assumptions. Participants must view each as equals… colleagues and partners" (Moxley, 2000, p. 164). This process is vitally important to the democratic communication leader, for if we are to go from good to great, we must have frank and honest conversation, without hidden agendas or the fear of reprisals. Marazza (2003) explains:

Common understanding is achieved through authentic dialogue. Collaborative conversation rather than competitive discussions brings about commitment not only to ideas produced through conversation but, in a cumulative fashion, it fosters commitment to the ultimate vision and therefore to the goals of the organization (p. 24).

In order to realize the power of conversation within an organization, it is important to consider others' ideas without judging them, recognize others' feelings and ideas, work to find a common meaning, and make a final decision by reaching a group consensus (Marazza, 2003). Bakhtin, coined the term "heteroglossia" to describe the process of finding meaning derived through dialogue: "Meaning is never fully contained within one voice, within one individual, but

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is created through dialogue and interaction among multiple voices" (Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 130).

By doing the above, you will empower your workers, making them feel connected as a part of the envisioning, and they will understand the rationale for change as a shift begins for school improvement. Another simple way to get anonymous input from teachers and staff is a quick survey asking three questions as simple as what should we "start doing, continue doing, stop doing" (Hoerr, 2005, p. 113). You have now moved towards data-driven decision-making that is easier to track and gives feedback to staff as time progresses. Also, the fourth practice of effective leaders has begun, which is to "enable others to act" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

This whole process can be fun and exciting for everyone involved. As the educational leader, you need to look like you are having fun, not in an arrogant or sarcastic way, but appropriately proud of the good things that are happening. Laughing and smiling are great stress relievers and should be encouraged. In fact, "appropriate humor can lead to cohesion and bonding among coworkers" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 198).

Jonas (2004) writes in his book, *Secrets of Connecting Leadership and Learning with Humor*, that humor involves "the connections in the brain, the heart, the soul and the spirit of individuals, as well as the social, spiritual, emotional, and relational aspects of people" (p. 3). Humor offers the effective leader an opportunity to strengthen relationships and further the campus goal of improving communication. Jonas adapted the following suggestions from Gruner's work (1985) for utilizing humor to increase communication:

- Humor used appropriately will help produce a more favorable reaction for the leader.
- Self-disparaging humor will enhance the leader's image, while self-promoting humor has the opposite effect.

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- Apt and relevant humor can increase the interest and novelty of a leader.

- Appropriate humor can have a positive influence on the effectiveness of persuasive communication by leaders.

- Humor will make a speech or message more memorable and long-lasting.

- When using satire as a form of communication, be sure to know the intelligence level of your audience.

The fifth practice, to encourage the heart, results from recognizing the efforts and success of the school and staff. Celebrations on a regular basis help bring the school community closer, further developing relationships for continued campus success. Personal recognitions for staff and students from a sincere administrator provide a model for the same to occur in all areas of the school. This will solidify a sense of pride in the members of the school community, for "Any leadership technique will be that much more effective when you genuinely care about and believe in your employee and his or her potential" (Lennick & Kiel, 2005, p. 156).

A word of caution to principals is to not get too focused on the mundane activities that do not contribute to the goals of communication and relationship-building for your campus. Hoerr (2005) has observed that "Unless principals are careful, they can spend so much time doing the tasks that are necessary to survive that they ignore the building of relationships that are necessary to succeed" (p. 32). Resist falling back into the status quo trap, and sustain the momentum for change.

Biblical Directives

The Christian educational leader understands the power of being right with God before beginning a new project. Don't act or speak for God until you are sure you represent him (Maxwell, 2002). As we begin the work of leadership, we are reminded once again of the power

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of words, for the Bible reminds us, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21).
We have the opportunity with our words to mobilize the masses for good or sow the seeds for much sorrow. The educational leader should frequently remind teachers of the power of their words and the results of those words and actions upon the students in the classroom. The following realization by Haim Ginott is an excellent teaching tool for the administrator to use when working with teachers and their classroom management:

> I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or de-humanized (Sprick, 2006, p. 2).

> Proverbs 10:6-32 suggests that leaders use words as powerful tools to skillfully build positive relations within organizations. With these words, a leader encourages others and establishes justice, hope, wisdom, and truth (Maxwell, 2002, p. 755). As educational leaders, we must remind ourselves of God's mandate in:

> Genesis 2:15, where He orders Adam to protect and cultivate the Garden of Eden. Here we find that God did not intend his perfect world to remain as it was. He demanded more from Adam than that he merely avoid messing up. He commanded Adam to develop his creation…God wanted Adam to participate in his ongoing work of creation, to take the raw materials of a perfect world and arrange them to produce the highest possible benefit (Christian Worldview, 2003, p. 3).

To accomplish this mandate, a different approach to leadership is required, which Jesus modeled the way for us to follow. There is a need for "a leadership which is not modeled on the power games of the world, but on the servant-leader Jesus, who came to give his life for the salvation of many" (Nouwen, 1989, p. 45). As leaders, we must embrace responsibility for serving others because when we do our work from this frame of reference, we enrich not only the lives of our followers, but our own lives while giving glory to the Kingdom of God. Lennick and Kiel (2005) state, "if we do not work to serve others, we fail to act as morally intelligent leaders. Serving others is a great way to show integrity and to encourage others to model it—in other words, to lead by example" (p. 100). Greenleaf (2002) sees exponential positive power of the servant-leader,

> All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant leaders to show the way, not by a mass movement, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his or her own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group (p. 53).

The Education Service Center, Region VI in Huntsville, Texas, has a servant-leader as its executive director, Mr. Tommy Poe. He is a man who believes in the power of prayer and includes prayer in center-wide meetings. His motto for all the employees to live by is, "You call, we haul." Since the agency exists to serve 16 counties in the area, this motto is very fitting. It is not unusual for employees to log over 40,000 miles per year serving and helping the school. Rarely does an interaction occur without Mr. Poe expressing his love for others. Acts of appreciation and love from those who care are invaluable and help any organization to be its best. Proverbs 16:23–24 says, "The heart of the wise teaches his mouth and adds learning to his lips. Pleasant words are like honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones." *The*

Maxwell Leadership Bible (2002) discussed how the evolution of leadership has changed over the past fifty to sixty years. Different styles discussed include the military commander, chief executive officer, coach, and the poet and gardener. The first three styles all have shortcomings or weaknesses that do not allow the individual to engage fully in the process. It was not until the poet and gardener style developed that there was a model that "allows leaders to express the heart of the team…They develop players using encouragement and direction. They recognize the power of words and use them wisely" (Maxwell, 2002, p. 766). Mr. Poe masterfully utilizes his oratory skills, blending the concept of poet and gardener to become the heart of the team. When combined with the principles of servant-leader, the final result is a highly effective leader. Mr. Poe never passes on the opportunity to brag about his employees. Also, "leaders understand that people represent an organization's most appreciable asset. No resource is more valuable than people" (Maxwell, 2002, p. 776). Mr. Poe touches the hearts of his employees through his interaction with others, for "Without employing people's hearts, organizations lose precious return on their investment in people" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 188). Mr. Poe's approach to leadership incorporates the knowledge of Jesus' heart. When you live in the world with that knowledge, you cannot do other than bring healing, reconciliation, new life, and hope wherever you go. The desire to be relevant and successful will gradually disappear, and your only desire will be to say, with your whole being, to your brothers and sisters of the human race, "you are loved" (Nouwen, 1989, p. 27). Just as Adam was commanded to take God's perfect world and make it better, so is the educational leader charged with taking the raw material in the form of students, teachers, and administrators and developing that potential into a living expression of God's perfect plan (Christian Worldview, 2003).

The Bible offers direction in the area of listening, prayer, and guidance in verses such as Psalm 5:3, which says, "My voice you shall hear in the morning, O Lord; In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up." Daniel prayed three times a day to God. The educational leader would also greatly benefit from guidance from above. Occasionally, educational leaders find themselves dealing with difficult decisions that they do not feel prepared to handle. In those instances, "Learn to listen again and again to the name of love and find the wisdom and courage to address whatever issues present themselves" (Nouwen, 1989, p. 31). We must learn to rely upon counsel from those around us. In fact, this strategy is very important to the success and survival of the educational leader. Listening to your administrative team or any other individuals you trust can provide a wealth of information, both positive and negative, for "Where there is no counsel, the people fall, but in the multitude of counselors, there is safety" (Prov. 11:14). With teams empowered to help accomplish the collective vision, we are positioned to effect positive changes that will most benefit our schools, and "We will be doing what humans were made to do: participating in cultural activities as we continue to develop the good creation that God entrusted to us" (Christian Worldview, 2003, p. 7).

<div align="center">Communication with Parents and Students</div>

McEwan (2003b) says, "The highly effective principal is a communicator[,] a genuine and open human being with the capacity to listen, sympathize, interact, and connect with individual students, parents, and teachers in productive, helping, and healing ways as well as the ability to teach, present, and motivate people in larger group settings" (p. 3). This quote again emphasizes the role of the administrator and the importance of his or her ability to effectively communicate with a variety of groups in a genuine and sincere manner. While all groups are equally important, parents can present unique challenges for the administrator. For the most part,

if the administrator can be proactive and keep parents well informed, there should be many positive interactions to build and strengthen the relationship.

Three proactive strategies useful in fostering parent and community involvement are communication, participation, and governance. Communication relates to the extent that a school promotes open lines of two-way communication both to and from parents. Some possible tools include the following: newsletters, email blasts, automated calls for special announcements, teacher-initiated calls home, teachers returning calls from parents in a timely manner, and a website that is up-to-date (Marzano, Waters and McNulty, 2005). Participation from parents can not only be helpful in getting things done with adequate supervision, but it can also leave the parents with a positive image of the school that will cause them to spread the good news. The administrator can use an informal setting to touch base with parents, listen to concerns, and share the vision for the future. Governance involvement from parents could be a part of the site-based decision-making committee. Here again is an opportunity for the administrator to hear from parents and listen to ideas from outside of the school.

If an administrator is doing a good job communicating with parents, the majority of interaction will be positive and complimentary, but on occasion, parents will have legitimate concerns regarding their children's education. They are frustrated and upset, and they want the best for their children. When dealing with a challenging, disgruntled parent, the educational leader needs a well-thought-out response to deescalate a tense situation and move the interaction towards a win-win conclusion. Without a plan in place, the administrator is more likely to be reactive and to go on the defensive and may not appear open to hearing to the parent's complaint. Tyson (2006) offers the following guidelines for effective communication:

- Effective communication is relational and is the most necessary step to the process and all other steps rely upon this to be in place. The administrator needs to use phrases that will build the relationship establishing trust and rapport. Relational phrases such as:

  o I understand.

  o I know where you are coming from.

  o I think you are right.

  o You make a lot of sense.

All these phrases begin to signal the parent that they are being listened to and their frustration is being heard.

- Effective communication is calm. Calming phrases include:

  o I know this must be frustrating, but let me offer a few ideas.

  o This type of news is extremely upsetting; let's put together a plan to avoid its ever happening again.

- Effective communication is positive. One way to make the conversation positive is to say something nice about the person or the person's family. For example, when an education leader calls to inform a parent about his or her child's discipline referral, it may help to mention the excellent work the student is doing in math or to discuss a new, positive friendship the student is forming. Keeping the conversation positive will help the leader ensure a constructive dialogue.

- Effective communication is mutually beneficial. The language of diplomacy sounds like this:

  o I think that can be arranged.

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- o We are in this together; let's do what works.

- o I can agree to that; can you meet me halfway?

An effective leader is able to model give and take and can give up some power for the good of the school community.

- Effective communication is constructive. If the leader realizes that the dialogue is destructive, he or she should say something like:

  - o Let's start over.

  - o I'm sorry, I missed something; would you please offer your perspective again?

  - o I apologize: I didn't realize this meant so much to you. Let's begin again and work through this together (p. 48-51).

A more formal and systematic way to communicate with both students and parents at the high school level involves a 9th Grade Portfolio Conference. This idea comes from Principal Chris Trotter at Smithson Valley High School in Texas. The conference is conducted by the principal, assistant principal, or counselor. The administrator, parents, and student cover many issues of importance during a face-to-face conference that takes between 45 minutes and one hour. Topics discussed during the portfolio conference include current grades, career interest inventory results, possible careers to research in the future, parental expectations for the student, graduation program requirements, career pathways, development of a four-year individual academic career plan, four-year timeline for important events during high school, university application process, scholarship process, and testing requirements. The student and parents have the opportunity to ask questions and give input into the high school experience. The response to this program has been very positive for both the parents and students because it opens up the lines of communication with a high school staff member and provides a contact that they can put

a name and a face with for future issues. Parents appreciate getting the information during the first year of high school, which allows them to play an active part in their child's future. Students like the conference because high school is such a different experience than previous years, and they want to do things right and not be embarrassed by having to ask a lot of questions or miss deadlines just because they were unaware of a due date. This communication tool underscores the old saying that "information is power," and now the school can proceed with a cooperative and collaborative relationship that benefits all parties involved.

McEwan (2003a) offers useful advice on communicating the value of learning to students. Being visible in different areas of the school and initiating positive interactions with students show that students are a priority for you. Your presence signals to students that they are important to you. When you invest your time and energy to get to know them, they begin to learn your values for learning and behavior and how that will someday translate into a successful future. Another way to connect with students is through informal conversations which help students develop a trust in the administrator. An administrator taking an interest in the students' music, technology, and culture, and being able to talk about it with them helps build rapport and an increased level of trust.

Interpersonal

In *10 Traits of Highly Effective Principals from Good to Great Performance*, McEwan (2003b) offers an extensive list of communication benchmarks. When one considers the following list, the opportunities for miscommunication in the workplace become clearer to the educational leader:

- Attend - gives your full attention ignoring distractions.

- Listen – signals comprehension with your eyes, ears, and your body language.

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- Empathize- understands one's situation and responds with a kind heart.

- Disclose themselves to others - shares one's personal experience for the benefit of the other person creating a meaningful bond.

- Get the whole story - takes time to listen to all the details before responding.

- Ask the right questions - employs questioning sparingly, unless the situation involves danger or an imminent crisis.

- Say what they mean and mean what they say - clear, simple, straight-forward directives.

- Can accept criticism - listens and learns without responding with anger.

- Can give correction - gives feedback which is respectful, clear, simple and direct.

- Communicate creatively - finds various ways to initiate communication with others.

- Disagree agreeably - responds in a courteous and respectful manner, giving sound reasons why the situation is unacceptable.

- Pay attention to parents - responds in a timely manner to parent's needs, maintaining safety, integrity, and respect.

- Connect emotionally and professionally with staff - knows the importance of both personal and professional conversations with staff.

- Communicate with students - knows how to interact with students to effect or reinforce a desirable response.

- Can talk to the boss - relates well with those above as well as below.

- Connect - in productive, helpful, and healing ways.

- Care enough to send the very best - never misses an opportunity to praise others for a job well done.

- Know how to schmooze - balances conversations with both personal and professional.

- Write, speak, and read.

Listening is the foundation for all communication, and the skilled educational leader will greatly benefit from understanding the intricacy of listening "for a person's values, goals and feelings. This listening strategy helps the leader to not just focus on the emotional content of the message" (Lennick & Kiel, 2005, p. 131). Listen for the message, and resist only responding to the emotion. Listening is an effective way to show respect for one another (Hoerr, 2005). Something as simple as paying attention to what someone is saying communicates volumes about what the educational leader values. Moxley (2000) offers the following approach to listening:

> Deep listening requires a leader to unlearn old habits first. We must first stop trying to do
>
> two things at once. The first step to listening is being 'present.' Once present, we are
>
> able to 'pay attention.' This last bad habit to break is to 'not interrupt.' The tendency for
>
> the leader is to jump into problem-solving mode without actually knowing the details of
>
> the problem or what the person wants (p. 160).

Moxley offers good advice, which can positively impact conversations by promoting respect and confidence in the speaker as well as making the best use of the leader's time. This helps both the speaker and leader to avoid having to ask a lot of needless questions for clarification or missing the point all together. Marazza (2003) reminds us "how we speak, the tones and nonverbal messages, is received by the listener as a more legitimate communication than what we say" (p. 24). If you turn the volume down on the TV, the viewer can begin to identify the message without hearing a word. Turn the volume up a little, and the listener begins to match the tone with the nonverbal: eye contact, facial expressions, body language, etc. By the

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time you turn the volume up so that all the words are audible, the listener has already formed an

opinion of what the speaker is truly communicating.

Finally is a word of warning from McCall (1997) to the educational leader about being

distracted by the speaker's mannerisms or qualities of speech rather than paying attention to the

substance of the message. The following are some common mistakes which interfere with

communication:

- Appearing to pay attention but allowing the mind to wander.

- Allowing all kinds of distractions to divert our attention.

- Over-reacting to certain words or phrases, thus losing the forest for the trees.

- Allowing an initial lack of interest in the subject to prevent one from paying close
  attention.

- Allowing our own prejudices against the sender to interfere with our reception of the
  message (p. 163).

Conclusion

Educational administrators, who lead with soul and conviction, exhibit courage, maintain

impartiality, demonstrate empathy, judge ethically, and remain humble (Glanz, 2006). Add to

these qualities the skill of effective communication, which requires the educational leader to be

cognizant at all times of the complexities of two-way communication, and you have the makings

of an effective leader. Educational leaders will be well-served to continually seek to improve

their own communication skills for the good of their organizations. Many effective strategies are

well-documented in both scripture and the secular literature; these can serve a framework to

improve communication on many different levels within the organization. The educational leader

must know how to articulate a shared vision for the organization. This is best accomplished by

the leader knowing his or her own values and calling forth similar values in others. Through authentic dialogue, the group will begin to identify and communicate the areas most in need of change. By being a part of the process, individuals will be empowered to speak up and begin to act to mobilize the wheels of change. This group includes students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community members. Along the way the educational leader must encourage the heart by recognizing and communicating all the positives within the individuals and the organization. The bottom-line is that effective communication, a strong faith, and the ability to dream great dreams go hand-in-hand, for "In the life of a believer, nothing happens by chance, fate, or fortune" (Falwell, 1997, p. 428).

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