



Course check in: 1pm-3pm
Course begins: 4pm
Course concludes: 1pm on the final day
Schedule your travel appropriately.

LEADERSHIP TOOLS FOR INTERNATIONAL TEACHER LEADERS

Miami 22-26 June 2017

BRING

Norms your department/grade level team has established for working together.

An **agenda and set of minutes** from a recent team or department meeting. (The agenda and minutes should be for the same meeting).

A description of a **change initiative** that you think is needed at your current school or in your current team, to improve student learning. Describe what the change would include, why you think it is needed, and obstacles you think would affect the success of the initiative. You will be sharing this information with course participants. Be sure to remove names of both the school and faculty involved.

READ

In advance of your arrival, please read: [*Chapter Four: Adaptive Leadership in How to Thrive as a Teacher Leader*](#) by John G. Gabriel, ASCD, 2005.

You will find that the chapter in this book is written from US public school perspective. As you read, make the adjustments to your international school setting. We will do the same throughout the course.

Focus Questions:

1. What is one lesson you took away from the chapter?
2. How could its implementation improve your role as teacher leader? Be prepared to discuss.

REFLECT

During the course, each participant will be reflecting on many aspects of teacher leadership. In preparation, prior to your arrival:

If you are already a department head or grade level leader:

- Describe a recent success you've had with your dept. or grade level and reflect on why you were successful.
- Describe a leadership challenge that continues to frustrate you.

If you are not currently a department head or grade level leader:

- Talk with someone in your school and observe and discuss these two points listed above with him/her and record his/her reflections on these two situations.

When you attend department, grade level or staff meetings:

- For four different team, department, committee or staff meetings, log the time spent on what you would consider program management issues (e.g. scheduling, transportation) and issues related directly to student learning (e.g. sharing best practice, curriculum, instruction and assessment). List the agenda items for each category.



PREPARE

Complete the Google survey at this link: <https://goo.gl/forms/PhOdZGn82x8xCoWs2>

WATCH

... a [short video](#) to prepare for your course.

BRING A LAPTOP (REQUIRED)

Your course materials are digital. Hard copies of the materials will not be available on site. Bring a laptop computer with appropriate adapters and wireless internet capability. [Click here](#) for more information about iPads and tablets.

Chromebook users can use the free [Kami extension](#) to annotate.

- Download [Adobe Acrobat Reader DC](#) now in order to be able to access your materials properly.

JOIN [Schoology](#)

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- Have a Schoology account? [Click here](#).
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Use this access code to join your course group in Schoology.

Access Code: **JQG2Z-84GCH**

If you need help with this process, please contact us at registrations@theptc.org.

I look forward to seeing you this summer!

Sue Easton

How to Thrive as a Teacher Leader

by John G. Gabriel

Chapter 4. Adaptive Leadership: Navigating Challenges and Effecting Change

Even though teachers are natural leaders every day in their classrooms, they have never truly been viewed in that way, which may cause anxiety and apprehension for administrators. Some administrators—perhaps those who still adhere to the formal one-person, or classical, model of leadership—might not be comfortable with moving away from practices that they are familiar or comfortable with. If you face administrative resistance and reluctance, your chances of succeeding are greatly diminished. Administrators are under pressure, and the natural inclination of some might be to curtail leadership because they are directly responsible for improving achievement and reluctant to relinquish control. Therefore, you need to become your own best advocate for increased involvement.

Yet as a leader you might face significant teacher resistance as well. Teachers might perceive that the decision-making process is being manipulated and massaged by the administration or that your motives aren't true, causing them to further distrust chairs or to view them as obstructions. Some might feel envious and jealous that a colleague is in a position of leadership or influence, while others might be cynical and wary of a colleague with increased authority. Unfortunately, there is little you can do to assuage those who are resentful of your activity and your interest in safeguarding or enhancing the well-being of your school. But show your teachers that the best way to move forward is by equipping all with leadership skills and opportunities, and find ways to prevent them from feeling alienated, isolated, or fearful.

Working with Your Administrator

Those in leadership positions must understand their responsibilities and boundaries and be wary of overstepping them. Perhaps more than most professionals, teachers are extremely territorial. If they do step on someone else's toes, and it was in the best interest of a student, it is usually forgivable. But the teacher leader who intrudes on an administrator's turf is usually not easily forgiven.

Sometimes administrators will cut a teacher leader out of the loop because they see him as one more person they need to deal with. Ostensibly this makes sense for them, but it can foster the belief that the administration is autocratic or that it does not truly support its teachers. Ultimately, this will have an adverse effect on morale and climate, so you should find a way to let administrators involve you.

If you desire more responsibility and a greater voice, you need to earn your administrator's trust. You need to demonstrate that you are competent enough to take on certain tasks, and you need to show that you are willing to be challenged. Being a solid instructional leader, exhibiting a good track record, or just being reliable can help accomplish this. A strong work ethic can develop a rapport with your administrator to the point that she trusts you and is confident granting you autonomy. Administrators prefer working with someone who has a strong work ethic; if necessary, they can teach leadership skills.

Although most administrators were once teachers themselves, they put much stock in their authority and have the power to support it as well. A healthy dose of caution and respect is in order. It is possible to unintentionally and unknowingly harm yourself with your interactions with administrators, and doing so obviously carries far-reaching and more dangerous repercussions than if you were to do the same with your teachers. Whereas the information I have presented up to this point is mainly geared

toward working with your fellow teachers, the same can hold true for how you approach your administrator. But, as I illustrate below, there are a host of additional things to consider.

Pick Which Sword to Fall On

A principal once told me that I had the habit of being “dead right.” I was pleased to hear her say that because I had been toiling to raise scores and solve institutional problems, so I was glad that she had noticed. She let me bask in her comment before she elaborated; it was not the accolade I thought it was. She explained that at times I was like a car trying to pass a truck, which always carries a certain amount of risk. The truck begins to move into my lane without signaling, and I refuse to yield because I have the right of way. Holding my position, I am forced off the road and die. I was right, but it was an empty victory. As she described, I was dead right.

Many teachers and teacher leaders fall prey to this kind of behavior. We're quick to criticize administrators for not taking the action that we believe to be the best, and we accuse them, directly or otherwise, of being weak, unsupportive leaders. In some cases, we know we are right. Consequently, we try to be ethical, have integrity, and uphold standards. However, there are times, whether we admit it or not, that we do not have an understanding of the bigger picture or the ramifications of what we want.

Regardless, you first need to remember the following: your administrator is your superior. You might not agree with her rationale for a decision, but you are required to respect it. Perhaps the most difficult thing for a teacher leader is to admit that he is wrong. As much as we like to think we know everything, our administrators generally have more experience. Moreover, a decision we disagree with might not even come from them. It could be a product of community, county, or school board pressure, and, as a result, administrators have to support it. Just as we teachers sometimes receive a mandate we don't necessarily agree with but must respect, the same holds true for administrators. The difference is that they might not have the luxury to express their disagreement or even to acknowledge the source of a directive.

So as a teacher leader, you need to carefully determine if you are willing to die for your cause. There are several swords in your building, some hidden and some not, but all dangerously, and perhaps fatally, sharp. Which one are you willing to fall on? Sometimes we don't see the blood or realize that we have already fallen on a sword until it's too late. It's good to fight for what you believe in or for what you know is right, but if you do so every time, you will quickly die on the battlefield and be of no help to anyone. Before deciding to move ahead with an issue with your supervisor, it is always wise to consider the following:

- How important is this issue to my teacher or to me?
- What is the root cause of this issue or where did it originate?
- How might this affect my teacher or me in the long run?
- How might this affect my/our relationship with the administrator?
- Am I prepared to face the consequences of being right?
- Am I doing this for the right reasons?
- Will my involvement complicate or help matters?
- If I choose not to push the issue, will my teachers understand and still respect me? Will I be able to live with myself as a professional, as a leader?

Let Others Discover That the Stove Is Hot

I made a crucial mistake when I told an assistant principal on his second day of work, "There are some problem areas that you should be aware of, so can we touch base right now about them?" Timing aside, I did not give him a chance to feel out the situation for himself. I was basically telling him, before I even knew him, that I did not trust him to figure out things on his own.

Instead, I should have said, "There are some problem areas that you should be aware of, so after you get acclimated, let's sit down and compare notes." The second statement affords him respect and dignity while informing him that issues need to be addressed. Just as you wouldn't want to bias a new teacher with information about her incoming students, you should give your administrator a chance to form his own opinions.

Don't Blindsайд Your Supervisor

This might appear to contradict the above advice, but the reality is that working with administrators can be precarious. When are you giving them too little information? Too much information? What information do you keep to yourself? Which situations do you handle yourself? When do you involve them in a problem? Unfortunately, there is no easy answer because many times the situation dictates the solution. But a good general rule of thumb is never let your administrator be blindsided.

As an administrator once told me, he would rather hear about a situation or a problem from me than from a parent. Or worse yet, from his supervisor. Again, as with dealing with your students' parents, don't delay in making your administrator aware of things. You don't necessarily need to meet over every single issue, but it is a good idea to copy him on an e-mail regarding a situation that could potentially pose problems, or to touch base with him about a brewing situation that could boil over. A deluge of e-mails may frustrate him because of the time involved in sifting through them, but it is better to cover yourself (which is often the name of the game) than to be left exposed to future questioning.

Ask for Help

We frequently receive unreasonable goals or mandates. We stress over them and beat our brains to find a way to make things happen, even when we feel that we are being asked the impossible. Instead of inflicting this kind of silent torture on yourself when an administrator hands down a request, ask him how he would approach it. We are rarely able to question mandates because they often come from outside the building, so don't ignore the opportunity to talk with the person making the difficult request.

If you ask for help, administrators will appreciate it: they want to feel needed. We are quick to assume that a teacher became an administrator because he hated the classroom or couldn't cut it as a teacher. This is not usually the case, and administrators should be respected as leaders. Involve them. They may ask how you would handle it, but bring it back to them to see what they would suggest. Try to have them share ownership of a request that you believe you are unable to deliver on. If they have no help to offer, that in and of itself might be telling. Don't let it end there. Schedule an appointment to meet again to brainstorm solutions.

Evolve

If a new administrator enters the building, you might not be able to function exactly as you did with your previous administrator. You must demonstrate adaptive leadership. If you plan to remain in your leadership position, you need to determine your administrator's goals and vision and find a way to have yours match his. Determine his philosophy and leadership style. What kind of leader is he? Does

your style of leadership mesh with his? If not, how can you alter your philosophy and style so that you are still true to what you believe but at the same time are able to work effectively with him? If you don't consider these things and find solutions, you will render yourself obsolete.

Be the Good Cop

No one likes to be the bad guy. Children understand this, which is why they go to one parent for something when they already know or sense that the other won't grant it. Similarly, as a colleague once explained to me, when it comes to working with your administrator, you need to have a relationship like those on police dramas: good cop, bad cop. Teacher leaders have authority, but we do not have power. Our positions can create authority, but ultimately it is respect that motivates our teachers to work with us. There is very little we can do to get our teachers to act how we want or how they should. That is the job of an administrator. It is his role to bring the hammer down when necessary, not yours.

Playing the part of bad cop will be more damaging to you than your administrator because you work so closely with your teachers. So that leaves you with the role of good cop. If your administrator is uncomfortable with being the bad cop, keep playing good cop but keep bringing her information. Make her aware of a situation—so that you cannot be held responsible for it—and eventually it will reach the point where she won't be able to ignore it.

Show the Barometer

Sometimes administrators are so inundated with the demands, threats, and needs of students and parents that they do not have the time to remember what it was like in the classroom. Understandably, they can forget the most essential element to achievement: the well-being of the teacher. In the current frenzy of high-stakes testing and accountability, teachers are stressed, overworked, and underappreciated. And an administrator who has been out of the classroom for many years might not fully realize how much more challenging it has become to be a successful teacher. Help him understand what it is like to be in the classroom in the climate of high-stakes testing, in the culture of the instant gratification generation, in the age of the absolution of responsibility. Let him know when morale is down and why. For example, you might need to tell him that someone needs a thank-you or a supportive voice because her plate is overloaded.

Foster an Honest Relationship

An administrator may not be able to discuss legal issues with you or everything that crosses his desk, but if you are bringing him news, issues, and information, you need, and should expect, him to behave in a similar fashion. Find a way to get him to treat you with the same respect that you afford him by being a forthright and trusting leader. Demonstrate through your actions that you can be trusted. Keep confidential information to yourself. Know when to pry or push and know when to let sleeping dogs lie.

Above all, be direct. We want our teachers and students to be direct with us, and we should be equally straightforward with our administrator. Let him know how you feel if you are cut out of the loop. Direct questions have a way of unnerving people, but if you ask them in a respectful, professional manner, and in the best interest of your teachers and students, a good administrator should be willing to discuss his reasons for including or excluding you. If he still isn't forthcoming with information, analyze each situation and present the reasons why you should be included. Explain to him how your being in the loop will benefit him and make his job easier.

Sometimes it is not even about being included; it can simply be about being informed. At an Instructional Council meeting, several department chairs expressed their concerns about overcrowded classes and a lack of desks to accommodate the increase in students. Before an administrator could respond, one chair proclaimed that we as chairs did not need to know about everything that was going on in the school, that it was not our place to know. On the surface, her comment has a shade of truth to it, but such a mentality fosters distrust. I replied that if we aren't informed well enough to respond to teacher concerns, as in this case regarding class sizes, gossip then rules the school. Teachers are quick to spread their own theories or to jump on the smallest bit of information that someone might provide and trumpet it as fact. This adversely affects morale and climate.

Open and honest communication is the remedy; it makes us stronger and more effective. The administrator was surprised because he thought that we already knew the reasons and had passed them on to our teachers, and I believe he recognized through the ensuing discussion the importance of cultivating communication and granting access to information. Likewise, it is essential that you are open and honest with your administrator. Don't cover up mistakes, don't keep information from him, and don't lie to him. Your administrator will eventually find out whatever it is you're being deceptive about, so be as upfront and honest as possible.

Make Your Supervisor Look Good

One of your myriad responsibilities as a leader is to make your supervisor look good. Although it sounds unfair, that is the name of the game. We see this in the business world where the common worker toils so his company can increase its profit margin, and, when it does, the executive is rewarded with a large year-end bonus. We see this in school systems where administrators and central office personnel are rewarded for improving test scores. Your administrator may even end up receiving all the credit initially for the good things you have done with your department, team, or program. So be it. Continue to do what you have done; eventually you will receive the recognition you deserve. You must remember that when your administrator looks good, you look good. After all, you want your team to make you look good, and you should set the example by your interactions with those above you.

In addition, you should be a watchdog for your administrator. Be his backstop and catch his mistakes. Never show him up or publicly criticize or disagree with him. It's not your job to convince him that you are right; your first responsibility is to find a way to support him. In some cases, you might need to work a conversation so that by the end of it, he believes that he came up with the solution, idea, or proposal.

Leading When Some Don't Want to Follow

Every committee, grade level, team, department, and school has someone who will vigorously resist any kind of change. It may be the teacher who feels that "this proposal is just another fad" or that "this too shall pass." Education reform is often cyclical, or at least borrows heavily from the past, so many teachers are skeptical about the efficacy of a "new" idea. They are resistant because they believe that they have seen it before, that "it didn't work then and it won't work now." Or, like most people, they fear change, and they panic over having to move outside their comfort zone.

Others will resist change simply because it comes from you. If you were promoted from within, some teachers may resent you for advancing in a career that offers very little advancement. They may feel that they deserve the position, even if they didn't inquire about it or apply for it. They may have been your friends at some point but now see you as a traitor or a sellout, closely aligned with the

administration because you are in a position of leadership. It will be difficult to convince them otherwise, so just continue treating them fairly and standing up for what you believe in.

If you were brought in from out of house—from a different school or school system—you will surely face some resistance. You'll be seen as an intruder who has entered a close-knit family, especially if the teachers had no voice in the matter. “But she does not know anything about our kids,” “Our school is unique,” or “It's going to take us time to train him” are comments people frequently make when they fear that someone is poised to initiate change or disrupt their comfortable quiet. Probably the most familiar line is “I was here before her and I'll be here after her.” People who believe this are prepared to survive the meltdown. And in worse cases, they will initiate one. They will hunker down and use all the resources of the informal power structure to ensure their survival while plotting your demise.

Leading during a period of success is relatively easy. It is how we deal with adversity, challenges, and change that shows our mettle—or if there is inconsistency between what we preach and what we practice. In the face of resistance and obstacles, we discover that we are leaders or that we need to learn how to become leaders. The question is how best to approach challenging situations. Do you need to convert those who oppose you? How do you find a way to work with these people? How do you move ahead with change?

Don't Tip Your Hand

Before I was introduced to my department in May, my administrator warned me about a teacher who had declared that she was going to “see how much he knows.” He told me that he wanted to be present at this meeting in case her cross-examination of me became too belligerent. Sure enough, as soon as I had finished introducing myself and my credentials, this teacher, with folded arms, coldly asked, “What are your goals for the department?” Instead of rattling off a list of things that I thought should be changed, I politely replied, “Well, what do you think the goals should be?” She seemed shocked by my question, and nearly a minute elapsed while she tried to stammer out an answer. I didn't leave her on the hook too long and reclaimed the floor, stating that test scores were the obvious concern of the administration and county, so we needed to examine those.

This strategy at my first meeting was crucial: I didn't lay my cards on the table. Although my main purpose in turning the question back on her was to send the implicit message that I was not going to be bullied, it also served to show others that I was interested in hearing what they had to say. My general answer prevented me from painting myself into a corner with a statement that could be held against me later. Because I did not immediately present changes or proposals, the meeting did not have a chance to get acrimonious, and I avoided setting myself up for a barrage of questions, challenges, and complaints. Moreover, I did not say anything about imminent changes that would have sparked anxiety in the room.

After the meeting ended, I spoke with individuals in hopes of gauging how they felt about some of the things that I knew needed to be changed. Much to my surprise, I discovered they were pleased that I had “turned the tables” on this teacher, because she had a reputation for bullying others and anointing herself the intellectual superior of the department. Her visible loss for words dimmed the aura of power she had created for herself. Others were pleased by my response because they saw it as a sign that I was a leader who would seek and encourage input.

Sit on Your Hands

One mistake that new leaders make is to rush in and try to accomplish too much too quickly. Teachers return from their summer and discover that change has begun without them. Many leaders,

administrators included, don't realize the danger associated with this approach because they are so focused on achieving their goals. When they do finally realize the danger, it is often too late. Even if no one publicly protests something you have implemented, the topic of conversation has already been set in the teachers' lunchroom: you will be perceived as an autocrat who has no intention of seeking their input, of treating them as professionals and equals.

For example, I know a leader who tried to separate the freshman class from the rest of the high school, in addition to sponsoring a weeklong activities fair that would encroach on classroom time. Although she had support from the administration, she did not have teacher support because she did not seek teacher input and rushed to make changes too soon. The results were disastrous: teachers had no buy-in, so they refused to support the proposals. Her credibility and reputation suffered, and the proposals soon died. So hold off on initiating or making major changes. If you're facing a dire situation, then some change can't be avoided, but refrain from making any moves that will be perceived as a complete program overhaul.

Invite Teachers to Participate in Change

One of the first things that needed to be addressed when I was hired as chair was the curriculum. Jumping right into curriculum mapping would have been too much change too soon, so I decided to focus on the informal department policy of not having midterm examinations. Even though this would still mean implementing some modicum of change, it needed attention before the year started because midterms could be a valuable means of addressing lagging SOL scores.

The best way to ensure the success of this change, I believed, would be to learn how my teachers felt about the situation, how they thought we should go about implementing exams, and how they believed the assessments should look. Most important, I wanted them to construct the exams so that they would buy into them. I sent my future teachers an e-mail and a letter briefly explaining the need for midterms (that they can be more useful than final exams, which the department did have, because they yield information about areas needing remediation and can be used as teaching tools). A few teachers immediately responded positively, admitting that they had always thought the existing standard (or lack of one) was odd. They had never spoken up before because that was part of the culture and they didn't want to be seen as rocking the boat.

By inviting them in this manner rather than by "stating goals," as the teacher from the earlier scenario requested of me, I greatly reduced the possibility of being attacked for change. I secured curriculum pay for my teachers, and they came in over the summer to work on creating sample exams for each grade/subject level. Slightly more than half of the department chose to participate. The handful of summer meetings we had were extremely productive and a great team-building experience.

When everyone returned for inservice training at the beginning of the school year, the sample midterms were presented. Each person had the opportunity to refine the model exams at grade level team meetings. These teams were able to decide how they wanted to use the exams—as test banks, common assessments, or as indicators of the essential skills and knowledge that needed to be covered.

Afterward, the entire department reconvened to bring closure to our work. At that time, two or three teachers voiced their distress, claiming they had been deprived of the chance to give input during the creation of the exams. There was no need to defend myself. Those who had been present at the exams' conception—because they had devoted some of their summer and were now invested in this idea—quickly pointed out that everyone had been given the opportunity to participate in the project.

And with that, we were able to move ahead, and four months later the entire department administered midterm exams.

The following summer, we worked on curriculum maps, and most teachers chose to participate in creating them. I then set aside three different dates and targeted those who chose not to participate to come in and meet with me to discuss the mapping, to review the maps, or to voice their concerns. A couple of teachers took advantage of this, which greatly reduced the amount of resistance toward the maps at our next inservice meeting.

Sell the Benefits, Not the Proposal

I steered away from promoting the actual midterms and curriculum maps and instead focused on the benefits of having them. People are quick to buck against a program or an idea because they fear change; it is much harder to protest the benefits of something when they are clearly stated. The easiest way to sell the benefits of change is to explain that “this will help kids because . . .” or “this is good for students because . . .” Asking “Why do you think this is not good for students?” or “How will this not help kids?” or “How will this hurt students?” will help neutralize detractors. You will encounter teachers whose true motivation against a change is because it is not good for them, not because it's bad for students (and those who insist a change isn't good for students sometimes use that line of reasoning to hide their real motives). And some teachers tend to focus on personalities instead of programs, people instead of policies, which can immediately bias them against anything, so always try to bring the discussion back to how something will help students.

However, if you have a teacher who truly believes that the change does not best meet the needs of students, don't dismiss his point of view, especially in a group setting. If you do so, you will be seen as simply pulling rank. Think about how you would feel if an administrator said, “Because I said so,” “Because I'm the principal,” or “I have made an executive decision and it's not open to discussion.” Exercising authority might make us feel good, but no one wants to follow a leader for those reasons.

Instead, it is necessary to encourage discussion with those who oppose change, although it might be time-consuming to do so. If they remain intransigent, approach them in a professional manner and ask them to show what they are basing their opposition on. Even if they have nothing, don't let that be the end of the matter. You can still move ahead—especially because you do not need to have everyone behind an idea in order to move forward—but invite the opposition to continue looking for evidence in the meantime.

For example, one teacher vociferously expressed her objections, publicly and privately, about Sustained Silent Reading (SSR). She claimed that it didn't help students improve their reading comprehension. Most data indicate that reading scores improve when the program is implemented, but some researchers have charged that results are inconclusive. As much as I asked her to bring evidence for the department to review that demonstrated that SSR was harmful to students, she never did. If she had read something and had data to support her position, it would have become a valuable learning experience for both of us because a discussion could have sparked action research.

Another alternative is to allow the teacher who continuously objects to serve as a control group. Data can then be analyzed and compared at the end of the year. Ultimately, the opposition will serve a purpose in the breach and will end up supporting the program.

Expect Disagreement (and Learn to Welcome It)

At times some of your teachers will be openly hostile toward you, and you may never come to understand why. If they publicly challenge you at a meeting, or use a meeting as a showcase to “speak

daggers” to you, you should address the issues but not attack the people. You need to refrain from engaging in a quarrel.

One teacher spent most of a meeting muttering loudly enough that one side of the room could hear her say, “This is a waste of time. Why are we here?” and “What is his problem?” Teachers were so shocked by how brazen she was that they did not know how to react. Several people approached me after the meeting to express their displeasure with this teacher and their concerns about how this might affect the department’s climate. Because other members had noticed this behavior, it was necessary for me to address it. I did so—but privately. After the next meeting, the same teachers commented that although her facial expressions showed her disdain, she kept her opinions to herself. They were pleased that a professional climate had been restored.

Because I had ignored her running commentary, I was perceived, as the cliché goes, as the bigger person. In fact, her behavior and my lack of response during the meeting galvanized support for me; if I had responded, I would have lost face for scolding a colleague or for demeaning her in front of peers. Sometimes this is a goal of recalcitrant teachers because it diminishes leadership. In such cases, the best defense is not to engage, which can annoy the detractors even more, especially the nicer you are.

Yet very few teachers are ill willed. When people base their opposition on the issues, that can be one of the best things for change. When people are critical about an idea, it causes us to examine it from different angles and dissect our position. They unknowingly help us build a stronger case by bringing to light other benefits or points of view of a proposal that we hadn’t considered. And when you have gotten to know your teachers well, you will be able to anticipate and eliminate: you will be able to know what they will balk at or what and how they will argue, which will help you to better prepare how to sell or defend something. But you should also be flexible: it’s OK if your idea is not exactly similar to what you originally proposed.

Defuse Threats

We are all guilty of grumbling or making idle threats and saying things such as “this job isn’t worth it” or “they can fire me now—just let them try to find someone to replace me.” These comments help us vent our frustration with the bureaucracy that pervades the profession. They provide us some solace when we are forced outside of our comfort zone and help us cope when faced with our daily Herculean tasks. Of course, there will be those parent meetings that provoke such a visceral response. We may mean what we say at that moment; we may even have to bite back the tears. A week later the episode may still push us to the edge, but we realize that any decision made while our emotions are still raw would be a poor one: we are lucid enough to see that quitting would be disastrous.

But how do you handle these situations when you become a school leader, especially if you have teachers who really mean such threats? For example, you might have the kind of teacher who is married to a particular course till death do they part. When he learns that he will be teaching another class, he might respond with something along the lines of “I’ll quit before I ever teach that course,” “I paid my dues and I’m not working with those kids again—I’ll put in for a transfer,” or “but this course is my baby!” Such teachers might make threats—“Well, you can tell them that I’m going to resign” or “Make sure they know that there will be hell to pay”—with the expectation that you will pass them on to the administration because they are too afraid to do it themselves.

Never bring a threat—yours or someone else’s—to the administration because you will never win (and even if it does work once for you, that will be the only time and you unknowingly may have done yourself more damage than good). Most administrators subscribe to the philosophy of “If they’re not

happy here, then they need to move on.” It’s that straightforward. Yet it sounds unfair. We are constantly reminded of the scarcity of quality teachers, so why would an administrator willingly let someone leave?

When I first encountered this attitude, I was taken aback: “She is one of my better teachers; how can we just let her go? I don’t want to have to replace her!” But I soon discovered that I didn’t enjoy being held hostage by the master schedule either, so I refused to succumb to threats. Quite simply, an administrator would rather take his chances with the applicant pool than continue working with someone who will make threats or become increasingly temperamental, recalcitrant, or intransigent no matter how talented she might be.

When teachers are so upset that they begin to “threaten with the threat,” I tell them I don’t feel comfortable bringing their position to the administration. I explain that although one of my roles as a leader is to support my team, it is suicide to go into a situation where the outcome is predetermined. However, I am quick to find some other way to show them that I support them. Sometimes it is as easy as merely recognizing that they feel strongly about something, not necessarily agreeing with them.

At one of my first department meetings, I was confronted with such a challenge. My teacher was dissatisfied with a teaming situation and I advised him against inappropriately vocalizing his frustrations. Making a threat is like drawing a gun: don’t do it unless you’re absolutely willing to squeeze the trigger. Even if you are ready and win the shootout, there are always consequences. I explained to my staff that we are all disposable, easily replaceable—including myself—so threats almost always backfire. This kind of talk endangered some people’s egos and self-worth because in every building there are those who believe that the school would cease to exist if they were no longer around. The reality of teaching in a climate driven by high-stakes testing is that no one has the time or interest to coddle someone prone to histrionic fits.

One teacher was so offended by my response that he regularly brought it up during the next two years. When he discovered that he would not be teaching a class he had grown accustomed to teaching over the last five years, he was irate. Changing his schedule was not a ploy to edge him out; I didn’t want him to leave, but the change was inevitable. He threatened to transfer, and the administration was not fazed. He believed that threatening to transfer was his trump card and that it would win the hand for him, but all it did was force the administration to walk away from the table. His plan backfired.

Of course, he could have stayed and taught his new schedule, but perhaps his pride had been wounded when he had overestimated his worth by believing he was going to get what he wanted. Or maybe he really did want to transfer. His decision forced me to spend an oppressive amount of time reviewing résumés and interviewing nearly everyone who applied to replace him. I wanted desperately to find an equally talented teacher and I did.

It is human nature to cling to the idea that the grass is always greener on the other side, which is why threats to transfer are so common. Think about how often you’ve heard teachers talk about a very supportive principal elsewhere they “just know” would be better, or about an administration that “actually listens” to its teachers, or a school where the parents are more involved. Yet as many teachers discover, schools are schools, and students are students. Even if some things are better elsewhere, there are still problems that irk the faculty. No matter how strong the leadership or morale or test scores, there is no perfect school. Be quick to remind teachers of this when they’re on the verge of threatening to leave if they don’t get what they want.

Defusing a threat or limiting the number of meetings the administration has with your teachers is crucial: if you don't limit the amount of static that makes its way to the main office, it will reflect on your department—and on your leadership. It's understandable that situations will need to be brought to an administrator from time to time. However, administrators can be quick to label teachers as high maintenance or as *prima donnas*, especially if their interaction with them centers on dealing with a crisis (or, more accurately, a perceived crisis). Administrators will begin to tune out all their concerns, even if you are present, and even if it is important. These teachers will be viewed as a time-consuming drain on resources. As a result, administrators may no longer hold that teacher in the same regard that you do, which could cause them to lose confidence in your judgment.

To avoid such problems, it is essential to learn early on what issues are most significant to your teachers. When you first assume your leadership position, ask teachers during inservice week what their greatest concerns are about the school, their greatest peeves about the system. This will help you to better read crises as the year develops, enabling you to determine which situations are a "must handle."

Don't Let the Same Dog Bite You Twice

When I was five years old, my friend's dog bit my cousin on the wrist without provocation. At that young age, my cousin learned to negotiate an uneasy truce with the dog. We can learn from the wisdom of children. If a staff member "bites" you, then don't let it happen a second time.

Sometimes we need to have these situations pointed out to us. After complaining to an administrator about a recurring situation with a teacher, he responded, "What do you expect when you keep handing him the knife?" In other situations, it can be a case of knowing when to walk away. It's human nature to fight back, to survive, to protect oneself, but sometimes the best thing to do is learn how to avoid a bad situation in the first place. Just as the young boy above learned to avoid the dog, you too need to develop some kind of truce so that you are not constantly fighting the same battles and expending your energy by chasing your tail. To gain better footing, determine what the person is really after, what he really values, and what his true intentions are.

Build Support by Identifying Your Supporters

The politics of change require that you politick for change. For change or your leadership to be successful, it is necessary to devote a good deal of time to working the network of teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents. Bounce ideas off your teachers during lunch or after school to see how they feel. Before initiating, announcing, or supporting a change, talk to your teachers informally and let them do PR work for you by selling the benefits to other teachers. In order to achieve change, coalition building is often necessary. But this is a dangerous area because you don't want to be perceived as biasing people or as creating factions or a rift in your team.

Let Someone Else Propose the Change

Because of data on Sustained Silent Reading, I strongly believed that implementing an SSR program department-wide would be one of the keys to improving our reading scores. However, I was aware that too much change might make teachers uncomfortable and that some would oppose what I was suggesting simply because it came from me. Early in the school year, I discovered that my reading teacher was a proponent of SSR. I explained to her that I would be presenting some reading strategies at a department meeting, and I asked if she would be willing to speak on SSR.

She agreed, and her enthusiasm during the presentation was contagious. By the end of the meeting, in addition to wanting more reading strategies, teachers wanted more information about the program

from her. At the following month's meeting, teachers were saying that "we really should be doing this in our school" and "the kids would really go for this." A groundswell had taken shape, and by the next meeting, the department was nearly unanimous in thinking that we should start an SSR program.

The program was (and still is) a success. The irony is that this might not have been the outcome if I had proposed it. Because it was a teacher—not I—who recommended the idea (which began as staff development), and because we carefully examined the suggestion rather than rushing into anything, the department didn't feel forced into the program. Some leaders make the mistake of wanting to get the credit for a successful idea. Abandon this mentality. You'll earn far more credit and credibility from your teachers for being hands-off while facilitating change (besides, if test scores do improve, you'll ultimately get some credit for that anyway).

Be Involved, Not Hands-On

Being hands-on connotes control and meddling, whereas being involved implies knowing what is going on but not always taking over or taking control. An involved leader is comfortable with delegating responsibility, but a hands-on leader would never consider that. An involved leader is aware of his teachers' important dates and deadlines. He does not necessarily rush in to take over a situation but makes sure that he is available when needed as a resource.

Instead of being overly controlling, focus on building your teachers' respect for you by being available and accessible. Weaker teachers might need you more, but don't ignore your all-stars because you assume that they and their kids will be all right. If you overlook them, they might become hostile to your leadership. Although it's natural to want others to see you as being in charge, if you present yourself as a hands-on leader, you will have a tough time convincing them to follow your leadership and respect your authority.

Come to Consensus

Derived from "consent," which means to give permission or to agree, consensus is often viewed as an attractive alternative to voting. Much educational literature emphasizes achieving consensus, but what some advocates seem to ignore is that gaining consensus is not always easy nor is it a neat process. Trying to delve beneath people's positions to reveal their motives behind roadblocking can be tedious. You may never discover their true reasons, and these people may never be persuaded that what is on the floor is the best solution.

Even though consensus building can be ripe with conflict, a straight vote can create a more adversarial atmosphere. What consensus building allows for is dialogue and negotiation in an attempt to move forward. As I mentioned earlier, by using the fist-five technique in drafting a departmental mission statement, everyone had some kind of input in its adoption, and we were able to create a statement that everyone could live with. Although that does not sound especially noble, sometimes the best you can hope for is to come up with something that everyone is willing to live with or adhere to.

It bears repeating that one of the problems with consensus building is the recent wave of "valuing the contributions" of all people. It sounds warm and fuzzy on the surface, and although there is nothing inherently wrong with this philosophy, it creates value relativism —no matter what one says, it is deemed important because it came from a professional. But what if people offer trite or worthless suggestions? What if someone is blatantly incorrect? True, we need to learn how to work with one another and come to agreement, but worrying more about an adult's self-esteem is ultimately damaging to children. Keep in mind that you can value someone's contribution simply by seeking feedback, but you don't have to incorporate it just because it was made. Finally, there is a time and

place for consensus. As much as people want to be involved in decision making, not all decisions can or should be arrived at through this process.

Don't Blame Someone Else

Your teachers need to know that your motives are honest. If they suspect that you are conducting research, they will be unwilling to try (or they will derail) new ideas. Similarly, if you are going to implement something new, don't blame someone else for the idea. A leader I knew would publicly blame her administrators for any new proposal, whether it came from them or not. Depending on the situation, this either riles people against the administration or causes them to doubt their leader. It is critical to avoid this culture of blame. Your teachers will never have buy-in when you are passing the buck.

Additionally, they may take you at your word and confront the administration over what you told them. If you announce your displeasure with the administration's decision by publicly stating at a meeting that "this too shall pass," you will be telling your team that you are not taking a decision seriously, and neither should they. Worst of all, if one of your teachers is then accused of sabotaging an administrative decision, in the end the teacher will blame you. When it gets too hot in the kitchen, people do not always automatically look for the exit—sometimes they first find someone else to throw into the fire.

Know Where the Emergency Exits Are

Before entering into any kind of meeting with a teacher (or a group of teachers) that you believe could be problematic, you need to have both an entry and an exit strategy. How will you open the discussion—will you state your opinion first or listen to the teacher's viewpoint first? Weigh the gravity of the situation and set a time limit on your discussion (and let your teacher know what it will be, which will help you stay focused on the issue and avoid covering old ground).

If the end of the meeting or conference is quickly approaching, don't succumb to the pressure of making a decision. It is acceptable to end a meeting without a (re)solution as long as it is clear to all parties that you will resume the discussion at some point in the near future and that the lack of an outcome does not signify that you have acquiesced or approved something. Some leaders have a tendency to think, especially when working with a larger group, that they must always find a resolution because that is what leaders do: they make decisions or facilitate decision making. Instead, use the interim to continue brainstorming or researching the issue. Although a defining characteristic of good leadership and teaching is decisiveness, if someone pushes and presses you for a decision, then he may be trying to take advantage of the situation.

Sometimes withholding a solution can be another valuable exit strategy. Allow everyone to brainstorm and discuss solutions, and when it seems that the team is weary or frustrated by the process, and eager to have closure, then present a solution. Your team will be more open to your solution if they have exhausted all other avenues, and by presenting it at the end of a meeting, they will not feel that you steamrolled the decision-making process. Also, in terms of an exit strategy, have a trump card ready, something that you are confident will tip the balance in your favor (but make sure it is professional).

Focus on Containing, Not on Winning

A parent sometimes gives her children something to do while she prepares dinner so that she can get done what she needs to get done. One colleague espouses handling obstacles on a team the same way. Because it is very difficult to win over or overcome those who oppose you, instead focus on

containing them. For example, with the SSR situation, I knew that the teacher who objected to the program was not going to acquiesce or transfer to another school. If she had taken my advice and researched articles to support her view, she might have become preoccupied with the endeavor, leaving her little time to challenge other issues. The busier people are, the less likely that they will find the time to oppose you.

Pull the Train out of the Station

In both our professional and social lives, we commonly use a train as a metaphor to express how we feel about something or to relay how something went. We say things such as “he derailed the entire meeting,” “we really need to get back on track,” or “what a train wreck that idea was.” Similarly, when implementing change, consider another train metaphor. Again, you will rarely have complete agreement, but when you get a strong majority of people behind you, it’s time to pull the train out of the station. You’ve done all you can do to persuade them about the benefits of a proposal and about the need for a program, and they’ve heard the train starting up. To board or not to board is their choice. They can stamp their feet on the platform in disagreement with which direction the train is heading but that will not prevent it from leaving the station nor will it bring it back. The best they can hope for is catching up with the train at the next stop. And if most everyone else is on board, they probably don’t want to be the only ones still standing at the station.

Ostensibly, it sounds harsh to ostracize someone, but sometimes the best way to motivate someone is to move him, or push him, outside of his comfort zone. Most people want to be a part of the pack. They desire to be accepted and will go along with the program because that can lead to acceptance. If they choose not to join up, isolation is not necessarily a bad thing; it can work to your advantage because it can neutralize people, even if only temporarily. Turnover is not merely acceptable when it comes to change, it is sometimes desirable as well as unavoidable. If the person chooses to stay, he may grudgingly board the train, but he might attempt to derail it (or even hijack it) in the future. At that point, however, you should already have momentum on your side.

Although it takes several people for a train to run smoothly, there can ultimately be just one engineer, one person who drives the train. As the leader, you are that person: you have the right to pull the train out of the station. Who better than you knows when people are onboard and ready to depart? As the engineer, you have the best view of the tracks ahead and the best knowledge of how fast you should be moving. This also goes for working with your administrators. They may have more experience or a better understanding of the big picture, but you know your teachers best and you know best what is needed to improve your program. Even so, don’t ignore the warning signs and signals that may pop up along the way that indicate you need to slow down or refuel.

Mediating Conflicts

As I have outlined, one of your responsibilities as a teacher leader is conflict resolution, handling and overcoming problematic situations that arise in your department. There are, however, other yet similar scenarios that will demand your involvement if you wish to maintain a healthy, productive environment. The difficulty is that these situations extend outside of your department: they include other teachers.

With an apparent increase in the number of teamed classes in master schedules across the United States, the likelihood increases that you will need to serve as mediator between one of your teachers and a teacher from another department. For example, one of your teachers might be teamed with a special education teacher when there are a certain number of students with learning disabilities in the class. Such teamed classes can be challenging because the special education teacher is not directly

under your leadership even though she works closely with your teachers. You need to be perceived as supportive of your teacher yet simultaneously neutral if there is a dispute.

A teamed situation is like a marriage: there will be personality conflicts, philosophical disagreements, and clashes over how to best rear the children. Divorce is rarely an option, so a poor teaming environment left unattended can be catastrophic. A weak teaming situation breeds mistrust and miscommunication, turns professionals petty, makes teachers resent their jobs and their students, and eventually causes teachers to leave the school. With shared teaching, planning, grading, federal mandates, and student success at stake, teaming can indeed be a volatile situation.

Too often, teamed teachers put off discussing problems with their counterparts because they fear that dialogue will be perceived as confrontation, suggestions as attacks. Teachers need to understand that a discussion about the state of their classroom with their partner—and partner is an important word here because both should have equal ownership of the classroom—might become confrontational, but such a conversation is a professional responsibility.

Sometimes teachers believe the situation will improve on its own, so perhaps it is best to ignore it. As in personal relationships, situations rarely resolve themselves when ignored. Like the husband and wife who delay counseling until the final stages of their marriage, a teacher who brings issues to you midway through the year diminishes the chances of reconciliation. Stress to your teachers that they need to be open with their team teachers and not procrastinate when they believe a discussion about their class is necessary. Encourage teachers to immediately bring to your attention any problems, no matter how small, to prevent them from escalating and to increase the chance of resolution. This allows you to give advice and prevents you from being blindsided down the road. You won't be able to fix every problem or mend every relationship, but perhaps you will at least be able to make a teamed class bearable for the parties involved, which will ultimately help the students and have a positive effect on both the core and the special education departments.

Just Listen

Even if you have an idea of who is in the right and who is in the wrong, the worst thing you can do is to immediately cast judgment. As a marriage counselor will do early on in a session, just listen. Don't judge right off the bat. Sometimes the teachers might simply need someone to hear them vent. Observe how they interact, which can give you an idea of what is really the problem. Does one cut the other off? Is one more aggressive than the other? Listen to what each of them believes to be the problem. Is it a question of content knowledge? Does one believe that he is always the "bad guy" in the classroom? Is someone not making himself available to plan? Are individualized education programs not being followed? Gather as much information as you can before actively involving yourself in the conference. In addition, make the environment conducive to dialogue. Meet in neutral territory (not one of their rooms), set up chairs so that the teachers can face each other, and make sure that there are no desks or tables, which can be seen as barriers, in between them.

"Let Me Make an Observation."

Once you do become actively involved in the meeting, you should behave like a mediator, not an arbiter. It would be disastrous if you were perceived as favoring one teacher over the other. You are not there to take sides, to point out who is wrong and who is right, nor to punish anyone. Leave that for the administrators. Instead, your role is to facilitate the dialogue, to enhance growth. Ask penetrating questions. Clarify and summarize what has been stated. Paraphrase what one has said so that the other is clear about the issue at hand.

When you do feel it is necessary to make some kind of judgment, couch your views in the following terms: “If I can make an observation here . . .,” “What I am observing is . . .,” “From what has been said, it seems that . . .” Never allow yourself to be perceived as stating an absolute. Avoid at all costs conclusive and definitive phrases and make sure that everything you are saying is an observation or a perception—an observation is open to debate because you're not claiming to be the authority or expert. “You are negative,” “You aren't pulling your weight,” or “You just don't know your content matter” are phrases that will put a teacher on the defensive and cause her to challenge you. Tread carefully because, as in all cases, the language that you choose is critical and will have a direct bearing on how the rest of the meeting progresses and on its outcome.

To better cover yourself, be sure to have the other department chair present. Because you don't want to be perceived as taking sides, having the other chair present will show that the two of you are seeking answers and trying to help your teachers come up with answers.

Clarify Roles, Set Goals

When mediating between a special education teacher and a core teacher, you will discover that one of the main impediments to success is that the teachers are unclear of their roles and often uncomfortable expressing this. If a teacher has never teamed before, he might be uncomfortable with someone sharing his room and unsure of how much control of his class he needs to relinquish. Or perhaps, because teachers can be territorial, he is uncomfortable sharing space with someone new. In other cases, a core teacher who has teamed with someone for years now finds himself having to team with someone new. This can be unsettling and can result in a tumultuous situation if he clings to the same expectations he had with his previous team teacher.

Similarly, a team teacher might have difficulty understanding how she fits in with a new routine. She might feel slighted as a professional because she is not being given enough responsibility, believing her role has been reduced to that of an aide. Or she might feel overwhelmed because she thinks too much is being asked of her. In a more extreme scenario, one teacher—or both—might believe the team is being hindered by incompetence.

There are no easy solutions to such obstacles, but a good starting point is to help the teachers define their roles. Ask both teachers to state or write down (prior to or during the meeting) what they believe their partner's role should be (Resource 17). This technique will yield useful information about the state of the team and can facilitate setting boundaries and expectations. By the end of the meeting, try to have the team teachers come to some kind of understanding or agreement about their roles and responsibilities, about how much or how little each expects of the other. Set goals, document them, and follow up in a month to check on progress and to see what, if any, tweaking is needed (Resource 18).

“Are You Comfortable with That?”

When setting goals and determining how to improve a teamed situation, don't ask the teachers if they agree with a proposal. This closes the door on the proposal because it leaves little room for further discussion. You won't always be able to get each teacher to agree on something, so what you might be looking for is a compromise. By asking teachers if they are comfortable with what is on the table, you are allowing for a negotiation and potentially avoiding someone shutting down. And by using such a statement, you're not asking if they agree with something—you're asking to what level or extent they can live with it, which might be the best that you can hope for.

Match People Up

Many teaming problems can be avoided by ensuring that teachers are teamed with their best possible match. These matches can be based on the totality of personality, philosophy, and work ethic, or on just one of these elements. Or in the same way you might pair up a shy student and a gregarious student or a weak student and a strong student, consider what makes the best team.

Knowing your teachers can help you match them up, but you should consider other means as well. A few weeks prior to master scheduling, the special education chair in my school organized what I like to call a “speed dating session.” During a lunch hour where pizza was provided (to help ensure attendance), teachers had 30 minutes to meet, talk, and eat with potential team teachers so they could get a better idea of whom they thought they best matched up with. And when master scheduling was slated for discussion at a department meeting, I would distribute “wish lists” to my teachers to determine who was open to teaming and who wanted to team with whom.

Develop a Rapport with the LD Chair

Of all the people you need to develop a professional relationship with, the chair of the special education department can be one of the most important because of the scenarios presented at the beginning of this section. Develop a relationship with this person based on trust so that you can bring information about a teamed class to her without your teachers feeling as if they have been sold out. This team leader or department chair is a vital resource and she will be able to help you brainstorm solutions and assist when mediation is necessary. Such a partnership will benefit your students and your instructional program.

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