

John Liu, Department Head- Participant of PTC Leadership and Team Dynamics 2019



“The fanciest set of pearls I've ever had. Oh, thank you. Good morning everyone. My name is John Leo. So I'm from challenge international schools, Shanghai. And I have a Pearl to share with everyone. It's not a deep Pearl that you've never heard of before, but probably a Pearl that you know of and it may have gotten dusty over time. And so the reason I why I wanted to share this pearl is because this year I had a new role. So my role is I'm the regional coordinator for university college guidance. What does that mean? So in our school system we have multiple secondary schools, actually 13 secondary schools. So part of my responsibility this year was the goal through all the secondary schools and really lead and build the university guidance teams of all of those schools. And then doing that I had to meet with the principals of all the different schools.

And so I just wanted something really quick to share with you about as I went to different places, something very simple that sometimes we forget about, which is communication. And I'm not talking about verbal communication, but time, boundary and purpose of communication. So I'll give you some examples. So for some schools I've visited, I would email the principal to set up a meeting, very rare, like two weeks beforehand and I just wouldn't give it back. Um, or I would go to some of the schools and I would go there and there was no one for me to speak to, no one for me to be welcome by. And also even sometimes nowhere for me to sit. Um, in some of the schools I've gone to, the principals would be behind a door and even though you have a set meeting for that time, you may go to that door at that time and you're just waiting outside, and you're just kind of unsure, not really knowing, you know, when am I going to meet this person?

So in those kinds of situations, I already felt even before the principal said one word to me how much they really cared about my effort and my time. Now, one thing I've definitely learned going through all the different schools, principals have so many challenges. And so many difficulties and that's understandable, but those little things of scheduling a meeting, following the time boundaries of the meetings and having a protocol for the meetings are really, really, really important. It communicates so much before you even say hello or shake a person's hand. In addition to that, when the meeting is done, are you clear about what are the next steps for the meetings?



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Are you going to write up a follow up of what we did or do you expect the person that's coming visited you like myself to write up a follow up?

It'd be very helpful, I think for all the people that you meet with, like you were clear with your communication and your intentions because it gets the people that come into your office a good sense of what are our next steps. So I want to take that context above the, beyond the teachers that are in your school. Think about the parents that in your school, think about the students that come and speak to you, so really permeate across the community. I also wanted to share one Pearl for some of the teachers here that are aspiring to be principals at school. You're meeting with your principals. Sometimes it's very easy for us to blame the principals for anything of our head of school, right? I mean it could be anything. And of course that is the role. However, one thing I've learned through traveling through all the different schools that are diverse challenges that every head of schools face something that they can share with you and some things they cannot share with you. And I have met with, although I have had principals that had different communication style, some effective, some not effective, however all the principals care. So I think it's important that when we go sit in those meetings with our principals, we are actively listening. We are trying to also build empathy for the principals and see how can we add value to that. So those are my two pearls.