Leadership in Times of Austerity

To improve teacher performance today, leaders must focus on intangible rewards.

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One of the most perplexing problems facing educational leaders in a period of austerity is how to maintain the cooperation and performance of a group of demoralized professionals. How does one compensate professionals for inadequate books and supplies, large classes, disruptive students, public criticism, limited assistance, increased duties, and the lowest salaries paid to highly educated personnel in the nation? How does one lead a group in which morale is so low that over 40 percent of survey respondents would not again select teaching as a profession and 57 percent are definitely planning to leave, will leave if something better comes along, or are undecided about staying.[1]

In times of affluence, tangible rewards—salary, benefits, books, supplies, trips—may be used rather freely. During times of austerity, leaders are forced to reduce the tangible monetary rewards and focus their teachers' attention on such intangibles as recognition; opportunities for achievement, increased responsibility, and growth; warmth; friendship; and consideration.[2] Such intangibles may serve as temporary substitutes for the tangible rewards; however, deprivation of an adequate living standard coupled with an unsatisfactory work environment over an extended period can only result in in-creased teacher dissatisfaction and more intensive militant activities.

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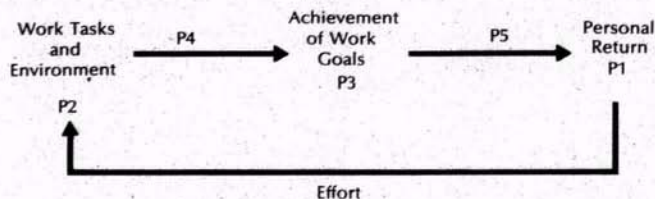### Psychological Basis for Leadership Principles

The leadership role that I propose for eras of austerity is firmly grounded in motivational psychology[3] and rests on five assumptions about professionals and how they relate to their work.

First, all people want certain things from life. Among these are (1) to feel good about oneself, (2) to live relatively free from economic worry, (3) to live and work in an environment free from hazards to physical and mental health, (4) to be free to create and exhibit one's creations, and (5) to have opportunities to love and be loved.

Second, most of what people desire from life is achieved through work, either directly or indirectly. About a third of every day, Monday through Friday, is spent at places of work, and tasks not completed during normal working hours are often taken home. For most people, work is the most important part of their lives.

Third, how hard one works to complete work tasks and achieve work goals depends, in part, on how that person feels about both. If they feel positive about the tasks and goals, they work harder to do the job well; if they feel negative about them, they "hang back" and tend to do the minimally acceptable level.

Figure 1. Diagram of Relationships Among the Leadership Principles.

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Work Tasks          P4      Achievement    P5      Personal
and          ──────────▶    of Work   ──────────▶  Return
Environment                   Goals                   P1
                               P3
  P2
  │◀──────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                    Effort
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Fourth, work tasks must be closely related to the achievement of important goals. When this is the case, people feel better about their work; it has meaning and purpose.

Fifth, the achievement of work goals must be closely related to the fulfillment of personal wants. Those who produce more should receive a greater share of the rewards than those who produce less. An equal distribution of rewards among people performing at different levels does nothing to encourage the high producers to maintain their levels of effort or the low producers to bring their levels more in line with what is expected.

The Leadership Principles

These assumptions permit the derivation of specific leadership principles designed to maintain or increase the performance of people in times of austerity. Specifically, these principles are:

1. Make intangible personal return more visible (P1)

2. Make work tasks and work environment more attractive (P2)

3. Make work goals and their achievement more attractive (P3)

4. Relate work tasks to achievement of work goals (P4)

5. Relate achievement of work goals to personal return (P5).[4]

The relationships among these five principles are illustrated in Figure 1. This diagram shows that personal return is the expected end result of all work activity. If personal return is expected and received from work effort and achievement of work goals, people will continue to expend high levels of energy (effort) to perform the tasks. If there is a breakdown in the application of any one principle, the level of performance can be expected to decline.

Some suggestions for applying these principles follow. However, creative leaders (not quite a redundancy) should carefully consider the conditions under which they operate and develop specific strategies appropriate to those conditions.

Principle 1: Make intangible personal return more visible. One of the enduring qualities of the American teacher appears to be the willingness to substitute intangible personal rewards for the more material rewards of the society. During periods of austerity, the leader needs to capitalize on this quality by emphasizing such intangible rewards as the feelings of satisfaction that accrue from participation in an important social function, the freedom to pursue interests during the lengthy nonwork periods available to many educators, the good feelings that come from their students' achievements, the self-esteem they feel from doing their work well, the freedom they have to create new and better ways of doing their work, and the opportunity to work with others who hold similar values.[5] These rewards can be made more visible by conducting teacher and student award ceremonies within the school and community, holding teacher and student recognition days, publicizing outstanding teacher and student activities, and informing the education and lay communities about the accomplishments of the American educational system. As the leader makes these rewards more visible and attaches greater value to them, they become more powerful sources of motivation for teachers.

Principle 2: Make work tasks and work environment more attractive. Teaching tasks may be partitioned into instructional tasks and coinstructional tasks. Instructional tasks are those activities the teacher performs to achieve instructional goals, including planning,

organizing, directing, and appraising an instructional program. Coinstructional tasks are those duties and responsibilities necessary for the smooth operation of the school. They include, among others, attendance at PTA meetings; completion of reports (skills arrays, attendance, progress, lunch, parent-teacher conference, and so on); meetings with parents; special duties (lunch, hall, bus); and committee activities of various kinds.

These instructional and coinstructional tasks are performed in an environment determined by the leader; the facility; local, state, and federal regulations; and public demands and expectations. The most important factor in this environment can be the leader. The leader can make the school either a pleasant, attractive place in which to work or only a place in which time is exchanged for income.

In times of austerity, the leader must enhance the attractiveness of the work itself and the environment in which the work is completed to increase teachers' intrinsic, self-rewarding satisfactions. Among the things the leader might do are (1) treat teachers as professionals by respecting their competence in planning and implementing appropriate instructional strategies and avoiding "for the record" classroom observations that do nothing but justify the leader's existence; (2) reorganize classes, to the extent possible, to permit teachers to teach those subjects and students they prefer; (3) provide aides and clerical assistance by increasing the volunteer program; (4) reduce interruptions by dealing more effectively with disruptive children and routinizing between-teacher conferencing and records distribution and collection[6]; (5) provide an attractive place for breaks; (6) reduce paperwork to the absolute minimum; (7) reward teachers for taking extra and often unpleasant chores; and (8) increase teachers' psychological identification with the school by seeking their opinions and advice on the operation of the school.

Principle 3: Make work goals and their achievement more attractive. To a large extent, educational goals are specified, directly or indirectly, by standardized tests, textbooks, and rules promulgated by state legislatures, state boards of education, and courts. Teachers and administrators have little to say about the goals toward which they work; consequently, they have difficulty in identifying with many of them and committing themselves to their achievement.

Leaders can do much to help teachers understand the goals and goalsetting process in education by passing on to teachers the information they receive through their associations, the school district office, and state agencies. Unless the leader passes this information along, teachers must wait until they receive it through their own associations or through the mass media, if they receive it at all.

Leaders should encourage their state and national associations to work cooperatively with teacher groups to change laws and rules to include teachers in deciding what schools should teach.

The leader should keep educational goals before teachers and help them develop methods of assessing whether they are achieving these goals. Further, the leader should work with teachers to use the limited discretionary classroom time for achieving those goals teachers believe to be important in the education of children.

Principle 4: Relate work tasks to achievement of work goals. Knowing that completion of work tasks will result in achievement of goals is essential to the motivation of all professionals. Required work tasks that do not have a close and visible relationship to goal achievement are only halfheartedly completed and usually ridiculed. Teachers, to be motivated, must see a close relationship between their instructional and coinstructional tasks and the goals they are expected to achieve.

A number of concepts from the research and practice of business management over the past quarter century offer guidance to the educational leader in clarifying task-goal relationships. Job enrichment,[7] participative management,[8] and quality control committees[9] are all concerned with involving followers in determining what is to be accomplished, how it is to be accomplished, and whether what was intended actually occurred. Such involvement commits participants to both the goals and work tasks; ensures that results, tasks, and constraints are known by participants; and provides an incentive for participants to seek more efficient and effective means of accomplishing goals.

Leaders in education can increase teacher involvement by establishing elected school quality control committees with responsibility for developing and reviewing school goals, evaluating the materials and procedures for accomplishing goals, assessing achievement of goals, studying means of reducing class-

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room interruptions and other deterrents to effective teaching and learning, and making recommendations to the entire staff for improvement in any areas found deficient. The leader should then organize the staff to take action on the recommendations, garner resources, monitor implementation, and assist in the evaluation of results.

Principle 5: Relate achievement of work goals to personal return. Rewarded behavior tends to be repeated. Too often in education when goals are achieved, the teacher is ignored or inappropriately rewarded. If we want goal-oriented behavior to continue, we must reward it properly.

Educators, both teachers and administrators, have for too long avoided differential reward systems. The principle of equal treatment of unequals has discouraged excellence and rewarded mediocrity; it is a prime contributor to the decreasing status of public education and educators in our society.

Since systems of merit pay appear unrealistic in the present political climate of education, other means of differentially rewarding excellence in achieving goals must be applied. Among the possibilities are (1) improving the evaluation system so that teachers who achieve results are provided with supportive feedback and teachers who consistently fall short are eliminated from the schools (after appropriate attempts at remediation and the provision of due process); (2) reserving public recognition for teachers who achieve results and seeking this recognition for them; (3) providing teachers who achieve results with opportunities for

further development of professional skills; and (4) working with teachers to develop a system of promotion within the teaching ranks based on achievement of results with children.

Until we stop rewarding teachers for getting one more degree and living one more year and start rewarding the achievement of results, teachers have no reason to improve their effectiveness. Leaders must be prepared to reward teachers on the basis of results achieved.

Educators will live in a time of austerity for the foreseeable future; consequently, leaders in education must adjust their methods of rewarding teachers. Because tangible rewards are no longer as available as they once were, educational leaders must begin to emphasize intangible rewards.

[1]See "Teachers' Salaries Fall Further Behind," *Virginia Journal of Education* 24 (January 1981): 16; and National Education Association, *National Teacher Opinion Poll—1980*, (Washington: National Education Association, 1980), pp. 13–14.

[2]See David E. Terpstra, "Theories of Motivation—Borrowing the Best," *Personnel Journal* 58 (June 1978): 377, citing F. Herzberg, B. Mausner, and B. Snyderman, *The Motivation to Work* (New York: Wiley, 1959).

[3]See Clayton W. Alderfer, *Existence, Relatedness, and Growth* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), pp. 6–21; Frederick Herzberg, *The Managerial Choice: To Be Efficient and To Be Human* (Homewood, Ill.: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1976), pp. 53–60; Robert J. House, "Path-Goal Theory of Leadership," *Journal of Contemporary Business* 3 (Autumn 1974): 81–97; Abraham H. Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (New York: Van Nostrand, 1968), pp. 21–42; and Victor H. Vroom, *Work and Motivation* (New York: Wiley, 1964).

[4]These goals are based on expectancy theory of motivation and path-goal leadership theory. The reader is referred to the works of Victor Vroom and Robert House previously cited.

[5]For an excellent discussion of incentives, see Chester I. Barnard, *The Functions of the Executive* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), pp. 139–160.

[6]Cynthia Porter-Gehrie and Patricia Brieschke, "Understanding Classroom Intrusions in a Complex School Organization," *The Elementary School Journal* 81 (March 1981): 240.

[7]Herzberg, pp. 103–190.

[8]Philip A. Davis, "Building a Workable Participative Management System," *Management Review* 70 (March 1981): 26–27, 37–39.

[9]C. Phillip Alexander, "Learning from the Japanese," *Personnel Journal* 60 (August 1981): 616–619.