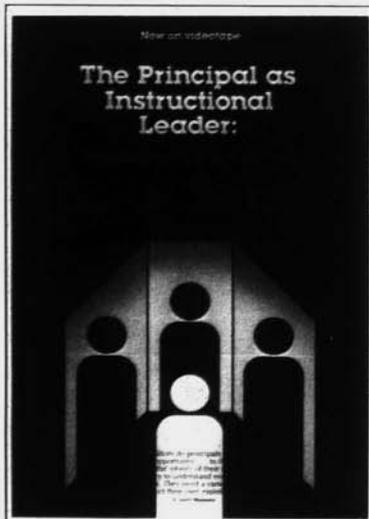


LEWIS A. RHODES

In Search of Leadership: The Making of a Videotape



Supplementing nearly every hit Hollywood movie is a TV special called "The Making of . . ." (*Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and so on), designed to share the problems and experiences of the movie's producers. ASCD's new videotape, *The Principal as Instructional Leader: Reflections on Effectiveness*, provided a similar opportunity—the unique chance to explore the problems of both understanding and communicating the concept of "leadership."

The tape's basic purpose was to synthesize what we know about effective principals in a format that might facilitate the translation of that research into practice. Doing so presented three problems:

1. How do you visually *show* "leadership" when research suggests that the daily work structure of both effective and average principals is characterized by a continuing variety of largely unplanned, fragmented, reactive interactions? Moreover, principals (like students and teachers) vary greatly in skills, knowledge, and experience.

2. How do you convey research facts and insights via a nonlinear medium that does not communicate facts well?

3. How do you organize and present the information in a way that might tap a principal's intrinsic desire to be more effective?

With the help of an informal advisory committee¹ the following strategy evolved.

Although principals respond daily to the same types of school management concerns, there was something

different about the nature of the effective principal's responses. Although each researcher's terminology differs slightly, we were able to group the characteristics of effective leaders into five general *patterns of response*:

1. *Visionary*—responds to the need for staff, students, and parents to have a positive direction to work toward.

2. *Resourceful*—responds creatively to the ever-present need for more resources than those allocated by the district.

3. *Participative*—recognizes that staff members are the key to effective student learning and responds to their needs for meaningful involvement and collaboration in their own work situations.

4. *Supportive*—recognizes the isolation within which most teachers work and responds to their needs for specific instructional support.

5. *Monitoring*—responds to everyone's need for diagnostic information on progress and problems, and for new ideas for dealing with them.

To concisely communicate these five behavior patterns via television, we looked at how leadership is learned in the first place. As with teaching, parenting, management, and other forms of interactive behavior, we tend to "do as we were done to." That is, we learn from the perspective of the person at the receiving end of the relationship. This explains why instruction in new techniques is usually more effective when it allows the student to "experience" its effects and consequences rather than to "understand" them via cognitive input alone.

This knowledge, along with the awareness that television is a superb medium for conveying human experience and feeling, led us to propose not only to describe effective principal behaviors but to present the impact of

Lewis A. Rhodes is Assistant Director for Technology, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia.

those behaviors as experienced by school staff members. Our hypothesis: enable the viewer to experience vicariously the values and consequences of the behavior being described. Viewers could then use these experiences as criteria to evaluate their own present or future actions.

Learnings

We learned much about effective school leadership from our interviews with principals and staff members, and even more as we analyzed and synthesized what they said. Many of these learnings are incorporated in the final tape; others, because of space limitations, will have to wait for another opportunity.

Did we learn anything about communicating concepts such as leadership? Viewer feedback will help determine the answer. We did, however, come away with a better sense of the fundamental constraint on understanding and communicating about effective instructional techniques.

The Missing Metaphor

Paralleling the research on effective principals have been similar studies of leadership in other areas of society. Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*² is a well-known example. Regardless of the nature of the institution, when an organization is perceived as the *people* in it, good management is the same. The critical barrier to good management (or the support of it), however, is that organizations are *not* typically perceived as their staffs. This is an issue of fundamental belief or perception—and it is not a minor one—since one's belief about "the way things are" ultimately serves as the reference point for designing organizational relationships and structures as well as the continu-

ing criterion for intuitive judgments. Peters and Waterman call this barrier to understanding "the missing perspective"—the "lack of any feeling for the whole." William Spady of the Far West Lab calls the needed change in perception a "paradigm shift."

The ultimate importance of fundamental beliefs is best illustrated by two examples—one from history and one from the present. Before Copernicus, when people believed the earth was the center of the universe, reality had to be forced to fit that structure. Some things did fit, but others, such as the apparent looping paths of planets, had to be twisted to suit the theory. Once people accepted the sun as the reference point for our universe, they were able to perceive and understand relationships that had always been there and, more importantly, to see new possibilities. In the recent past, the overwhelming effects of a similar shift in perception can be seen in the development of the so-called Japanese system of management. W. Edward Deming, believed by many to be the "father of people-oriented management," was questioned on this topic:

Q: What do you think it is that blocks an attitude of looking toward people as a resource . . . to this people approach?

Deming: A lot of nonsense. People approach? I don't know what the hell you mean.

Q: I mean that everybody has to be involved. Feel they have a stake.

Deming: The workers have *always* been involved. The only ones that *have* been involved. That's the problem.³

The Japanese clearly accepted Deming's fundamental belief that the person who directly contacts the product is the one who can most affect quality, and their systems of management evolved from it. Americans, by and large, have tried to copy Deming's strategies, but without accepting his underlying belief.

The relationship to education is obvious. Education reformers who view the daily reality of schools from the reference point of learner-outcomes have great difficulty communicating the value of their ideas. Learner-centered approaches don't seem to "fit" into our mental pictures of the way that schools are organized and managed. As in industry, a common perspective is missing from which all can see how the people in the organization relate to its purposes. Today, when many proposed strategies for increasing school effectiveness do *not* require major and costly changes, the need for this perspective is vital. Once one *accepts*, like Deming, that teachers (the "workers" who touch directly the lives of children) are the *only* ones who can make the final decisions that affect quality outcomes, then many of the proposed organizational changes become natural outgrowths.

Someone once said that "change comes when the contained become aware of the shape of the container." The challenge ASCD faces in developing new videotapes and publications on effective schooling is to find the metaphors that will help viewers to question their assumptions and beliefs about the way things fit in schools. ASCD's new videotape, *The Principal as Instructional Leader: Reflections on Effectiveness*, is an attempt, but we still have a long way to go. □

¹Roland Barth, Robert E. Blum, Michael Cohen, Gene Hall, Lawrence Lezotte, James Lipham, and A. Lorri Manasse.

²"If Americans Don't Want to Listen to Me, It's Their Funeral," *Washington Post*, January 15, 1984, p. D3.

³Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*. New York: Harper and Row, 1982.

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