Making Time for Instructional Leadership

The Question:

"I know how important it is to be an instructional leader, but it is so easy to get caught up in myriad other things. How can I make time for instructional leadership?"

The Answer:

Here are five Tips for Success:

1. Be intentional about setting priorities
2. Fight the adrenaline rush of the urgent
3. Let go
4. Don't catch the ball every time it is thrown
5. Routinize what you can

1. BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT SETTING PRIORITIES

Use the mechanisms already in place to help set your priorities and let everyone know that this is how you will be spending your time. For example:

Developing and implementing the School Improvement Plan (SIP) is a necessary and important part of your role. A good SIP doesn't have a lot of goals. Choose your goals strategically and make these the focus of your work.

During your evaluation year as a principal, you will develop a Performance Plan that also has a small number of goals. Linking these goals to your SIP will not only make developing the Performance Plan simpler, but it will also sharpen the focus on these few goals.

Every year, you must develop an Annual Growth Plan to identify your professional learning needs and strategies. Use this plan to ensure that you are making time for the development you will need to carry out your SIP and your Performance Plan.

> "The ministry's…performance appraisal system is intended to create a type of structured relationship between you and your superintendent …. Such a relationship offers opportunities for your superintendent to become part of your school improvement planning activities, including having an influence on your timelines…."
>
> Leithwood, 2008, in Principal Connections

all day, the more problems they can find for you to solve. Refer to Tip #3 of letting go.

Suzette Lovely points out that a leader's obsession with urgency mirrors many of the same addictive patterns addressed in the 12 – step recovery programs. These include temporary escape from pain, worry or other troubles; false sense of self-worth, power, control, or accomplishment; and preoccupation with finding gratification via the substance (in this case solving urgent problems).

So fight the adrenaline rush, let others help and contribute as part of the team, and focus on the goals you have set for your day, week and year.

> "School leadership is not an emergency… a majority of school emergencies are nothing more than disruptive events that cause people to stray from their normal schedule or routines…it is important to let staff and parents know what constitutes a true emergency and what is nothing more than a hiccup on the day's radar screen."
>
> Lovely, 2006

3. LET GO

Most principals would agree that they have too much to do, yet they find it difficult to let go of some tasks that could in fact be done by others. There may be several reasons for this:

Everyone else seems too busy for you to give them something more to do

You don't have time to train someone to do the job you would like to delegate

You believing that no one can do the job as well as you can yourself.

One of the key findings about distributed leadership is that you, the principal, will still have lots to do, but the nature of what you spend time on will change – and that's what you want. This gives you more time for instructional leadership.

> *"Delegation is an ethical responsibility leaders owe to themselves, their employees, and their organization…delegating is about prompting others to get involved by capitalizing on a group's broad talents and experiences."*
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> *Lovely, 2006*

As the head leader in your school, you still likely are the best person to shape the vision and strategy for achieving it. *(Locke, (2003) in* Leithwood & Beatty (2008)).

But many other leadership functions can be done by others. You will need to build their capacity in order to distribute leadership and delegate. The starting point for building capacity is knowing your staff well. What are they good at, what are their interests and where might you provide some stretch opportunities?

Many principals are using walk-through visits and teacher performance appraisal observations together with follow-up conversations about teachers' Annual Learning nd deletheir ca Td[((20)(f wef.C ET℃S1 cs 1 0.878 0.804 scn53.22 512.7 267.16 15.6 refBBTP M︎CID 13 B︎DC60 g︎TT2 1 T