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UASSP E-Magazine
JULY 2021

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Hopefully you took the opportunity for a much needed rest or vacation this summer. Maybe you had a moment of beautiful solitude like the canoers on the cover. Educators definitely earned some time away from Zoom/Google/Teams meetings, and LMSs, and mask debates for just a little while. Usually when I have a little time away to relax, I have moments of real clarity about the work I have left behind. In the first article, the new UASSP Executive Director, Rhonda Bromley, provides some examples of the things she has learned from other leaders with whom she has worked. Let her reflections on the leaders who inspired her provide you with a moment to be grateful for all the lessons and leaders that have helped you. We never get where we are without the help and support of other people, those who lead us and those who work beside us. After this year, we can be especially thankful for great colleagues that were with us on “the front lines” and “in the trenches” all year.

David Boren reminds us how important it is to be in sync with the people around us, because it makes the journey so much easier when we are really working together. Boren was generous enough to supply us with photos of the family canoe trip for the cover and in his article. This summer we have much to reflect on, and Michael Winslow encourages us to reflect with a purpose. Reflection without a purpose is just remembering, and many of us are trying to take the very best lessons we learned last year and use them to make positive changes that will be positive and lasting for students. As we prepare to begin the new year, it will be especially important to pace ourselves. We cannot accomplish everything with speed and swiftness, some work requires long term goals and small daily increments of improvement. Joseph Jensen and David Boren advise us to reexamine many aspects of leadership in order to make continuous strides without collapsing. Impactful leadership takes time and preparation, it’s not a quick sprint, it’s a demanding ultra marathon that takes endurance.

Next, we have a message on how to be a leader who is focused on how to make others feel good when they interact with us. Todd Dawson reminds us that it’s never about our own power, but how we use that power to lead others. Last, Charisse Hilton explains how impactful second chances can be for the people receiving it and and those offering it, in an article about their district’s new youth court system. Thanks for all the submissions, we plan to distribute a third issue that corresponds with the beginning the year, so start writing up your great ideas.

FROM the EDITOR

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Always More to Learn  
by Rhonda Bromley  
New Executive Director, UASSP

I have had the opportunity of working with some amazing administrators throughout my career. I learned different things from each of them. When I was a teacher, Principal Glen Clark taught me the importance of developing relationships with students and staff members. He literally knew the name of every student in the school! As an assistant principal, Principal Jim Starr taught me the difference and the value of having both a positive culture and climate at a school. As the PR Director of my district, Superintendent Vern Henshaw taught me to “stay the course” and to remain steady with our goals and direction. As a high school principal, my Supervisor, Jess Christen, taught me to have fun in my job. It is always helpful to find a reason to smile and laugh. As the Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent Sam Jarman taught me the importance of serving, not just in our schools and district, but in our entire community as well. Each of these administrators taught me so much more than what I have mentioned. I watched them as they led schools as well as entire districts. They each gave me responsibilities and pushed me to increase my leadership capacity and for that I will always be grateful.

I am the educator that I am today, not just because of these five administrators, but also because of hundreds of other administrators, both in the district I worked in, as well as from all over the state. I continue to learn from so many of you and I appreciate your examples. Our Utah Association of Secondary School Principals allows us to get to know administrators from all over the state. We can collaborate, learn from each other, and push each other to continue to improve.

I am excited to have the opportunity to serve as the new Executive Director of the Utah Association of Secondary School Principals. We have amazing secondary administrators in Utah. I would love to do anything I can to help with that wonderful, yet challenging job. I look forward to communicating the great things that are going on state-wide so that we can celebrate and learn from each other. I am excited to help organize effective and useful professional development and conferences and would love to think outside of the box about other ways that we can help meet the needs of secondary administrators in our changing profession. I am ready and willing to advocate and be a voice with our state educational leaders and legislators. I appreciate the leadership of our executive board and their willingness to serve. I look forward to learning with you, getting to know each of you, and would love to do other great year for our secondary schools in Utah!
Last summer my family went on a weeklong canoe trip in Yellowstone National Park. On the first morning we covered several miles and enjoyed tranquil paddling through smooth waters. It was scenic and pleasant, with conditions about as optimal as we could have hoped for. Later in the morning the winds picked up and we found ourselves furiously paddling against large waves and a powerful headwind. It was frustrating to realize that though our efforts had increased, our progress had decreased. While fighting to cross the turbulent waters of one particularly large bay, I noticed that the canoe manned by my dad and teenage daughter was making much faster progress than the others. They arrived on the other side of the bay about fifteen minutes before the other canoes. It didn’t make sense. They weren’t paddling any harder than we were. They weren’t any stronger. And they didn’t have less weight in their canoe. When, totally drained, we finally made it across the bay, we asked my dad and daughter their secret. The rest of our trip was blessed by their simple advice, especially since conditions only worsened throughout the week: “Get into a consistent rhythm and paddle together!”

Similar to my family’s canoe trip, our journey as educators during the last year has taught us a lot about how effectively syncing can help us avoid sinking. We may have started the 2019-2020 school year smoothly canoeing under normal conditions, making progress, and enjoying the scenic journey. When the storms of COVID-19 blew in during early 2020, we all upped our efforts, hopeful that things would soon return to normal. The winds of this pandemic have only intensified, and many of us are drained, feeling like we’re not making much progress. While these challenging conditions have required intense effort from each educator at every school, for some reason, some schools seem to be making better progress than others. In times of calm, and especially in times of intense challenge, the advice to sync our efforts seems to be a common theme for every successful school.

In my work with many educators during the last year, I have observed that the schools that seem to be struggling the most are those that have not been able to sync their efforts. This lack of syncing is evident in comments such as:

- “We’ve been so busy keeping our heads above water, our collaborative teacher team just hasn’t been very consistent in meeting. We’re all just in survival mode.”

- “We were meeting regularly and making a lot of progress as a school intervention team, and then the pandemic hit. I know that students are falling through the cracks, but the stars just haven’t aligned for us to meet.”

- “My job as principal was already busy enough. Now I’ve been so swamped with social distancing, contact tracing, and other COVID stuff, I haven’t had time to consistently meet with my teacher leadership team. I don’t want to add anything else to their plates by...”
"Before the pandemic I consistently collaborated with other administrators. Most district-sponsored principal meetings have been cancelled, and when we do have meetings, they’re all about COVID, with little time to actually talk about leading learning."

Conversely, schools that seem to be making more progress through these challenging times are characterized by comments indicating a synced, rhythmic paddling:

"I would not be able to survive teaching during this pandemic without the consistent support of my team. Our teacher team has relied on each other more than ever."

"Though we’ve had to be creative with schedules and meeting formats, our school intervention team now meets more consistently than in the past. Our students are in more need than ever."

"The school leadership team has been indispensable! All of the challenges we have faced as a school are way beyond my own abilities as a principal or even the abilities of my small administrative team. I have been amazed at the innovative and courageous solutions that I never would have come up with on my own. Consistent collaboration with my teacher leadership team has been a lifesaver."

"While we definitely have had a lot of COVID training and meetings, the district has really helped us stay focused on learning. Our district has been so supportive throughout this pandemic by facilitating ongoing opportunities to problem solve and brainstorm with other administrators on how we can continue to lead learning."

When facing a crisis, working together in a synced rhythm has some amazing advantages. Facing challenging times with a cohesive team actually helps us see challenges as more manageable. "If you look at a hill while standing next to someone you consider to be a friend, the hill looks 10 to 20 percent less steep than if you were facing that hill alone" (Achor, 2018, p. 31). One Oxford study found that rowers could handle "elevated pain thresholds when people rowed together but less elevated ones when individuals rowed alone" (Pink 2018, p. 196). As educators we’ve been working for the last two decades to improve educator collaboration, and most of us have found tremendous value in this. Even though we know that “isolation is the enemy of improvement” (Elmore, 2004, p. 67), some of us have started retreating to old and ineffective habits of isolation.

The trip was much more pleasant when we learned how to sync our efforts.

We need each other during stormy times more than ever. Casey Reason highlights the benefits of paddling together as a school: “How much greater could your school be if you not only unlocked the great individual learning capacities of staff members but also harnessed the potential that’s available when those forces combine” (2014, p. 92)? “When facing changing, turbulent, or novel times—calling for novel solutions—multiple heads can be better than one” (Grenny et al., 2013, p. 203), and “a team can make better decisions, solve more complex problems, and do more to enhance creativity and build skills than individuals working alone” (Blanchard, 2007, p. 17). Surely paddling together in sync is the only way we can successfully navigate the stormy waters we face.

Here are a few ways we can more effectively sync our efforts as educators.

1. **Focus on Learning as a Compelling Shared Destination**

In the midst of our frantic paddling, it can be helpful to be reminded of our compelling destination of student and teacher learning. Recently, many of the traditional and tangible measures of learning (academic achievement, attendance, graduation rates, etc.) have been somewhat compromised. Rather than feel frustrated, we could seize this unique opportunity to reimagine our goals, processes, and systems to focus on some less tangible, and possibly even more compelling learning destinations. Rather than making survival until the pandemic is over our primary destination
only to return to the old normal, perhaps our revised destination ought to focus on helping students and teachers develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will help them successfully navigate the storms in their lives as well as help others along the way. That is a compelling cause we can all get behind, and probably why most of us became educators. Truly we as “humans are wired to seek meaning in everything we do, whether we’re sitting in an office, hiking in the mountains, or eating dinner with the family. Passion for a cause fuels energy, intelligence, and creativity” (McKee, 2017, p. 7). Have we taken time amidst our frantic paddling to be reminded of our compelling why, rekindle our passion, and ensure we’re paddling in the same direction? Patterson et al. advise, “If you interrupt your impulses by connecting with your goals during crucial moments, you can greatly improve your chances of success” (Patterson, et al., 2012, p. 16). As we seize upon this unique opportunity to intentionally design the compelling destinations of our new normal, we will all feel a renewed sense of passion and purpose that will provide needed motivation to keep paddling together through the winds and waves.

2. Clear Signaling & Swing

Once we get clear on our destination, we need to synchronize everyone’s collective efforts to a common “cadence of accountability” (McChesney et al., 2012). With winds howling and waves crashing, the only way to synchronize our efforts is for there to be a clear signal sent, and initially, that clear signal must come from the leader. In Yellowstone, my dad sent clear signals to my daughter in the form of a peppy sea shanty. She soon joined her voice and paddling efforts with his and they experienced what is referred to as “rower’s high” or “swing.” In his award-winning novel, Boys in the Boat, author Daniel Brown describes swing: “There is a thing that sometimes happens in rowing that is hard to achieve and hard to define… it’s called ‘swing.’ It only happens when all eight oarsmen are rowing in such perfect unison that no single action by any one is out of sync with those of all the others… Only then will the boat continue to run, unchecked, fluidly and gracefully between pulls of the oars. Only then does pain entirely give way to exultation” (2014, p. 161). Swing is not possible without clear signals being sent by the leaders of the boat, especially since “groups generally attune to the pacing preference of their highest-status members” (Pink, 2018, p. 184). Our teachers, students, and communities need our clear signaling and communication now more than ever. Are we consistently checking in with teachers and teams to provide this cadence of support and accountability? Are we a visible presence with students, parents, and the community? What signals are we providing to help everyone work together synchronously? Are we being heard over the wind and the waves?

3. Safe Cultures of Collaboration

For any team to function at a high level, each member needs to feel safe to contribute fully. A few years ago Google set out to better understand how such cultures of collaboration were fostered on a team. Surprisingly, they found that the ethnicity, age, religion, experience, and background of individual team members was not really important to team culture and effectiveness. They found the following three things to be present in every effective team they studied:

Equality of Conversational Turn Taking – Each team member took about the same amount of air time during meetings. No one person dominated and no team members held back.

Ostentatious Listening – Each team member attended fully during meetings. They truly listened to others, were fully present, and were clearly engaged.

Psychological Safety – Each team member felt safe taking risks, admitting mistakes, and making themselves vulnerable to others on the team (see Wooley et al., 2010).
On our canoe trip, a safe culture of collaboration was absolutely critical. Each person in our boat provided constant, quick, helpful, succinct and needed feedback to the others on the boat: “Switch sides; all paddle left; getting too far from shore, etc.” We did not act petty or take offense at this feedback, but welcomed it, knowing that it was critical for our safety and progress. With all of the distractions coming in the form of big waves and gusts of wind, we each had to really listen hard and stay focused in order to hear and respond to that feedback. Do team members each contribute in their own way? Can we openly and safely share feedback? Do we stay focused and truly listen to each other? Do those on our teams feel safe to fully contribute in paddling our team’s canoe?

Conclusion

Our collective, coordinated efforts are always needed, but even more so when challenging conditions arise unexpectedly. An unanticipated crisis can reveal our true colors and what we value. As C.S. Lewis taught, “surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of a man he is” (1952, p. 192). Sadly, the schools that are struggling most are those who prior to the pandemic had not clarified a compelling purpose, sent mixed or unclear signals, and paddled haphazardly through PLC-lite and unhealthy cultures. The schools that are thriving are those who prior to the pandemic had clarified a compelling purpose, sent clear signals, and sought to consistently paddle together as a true professional learning community. Truly, “crisis moments are revealing. They strip away carefully cultivated responses and force us to see ourselves for what we are” (Herald, as cited in Maxwell, 1974, p. 41).

A pandemic is not the right time to be the all-powerful, individual hero, trying to muscle through the wind and waves on our own. Believe me, it doesn’t work. I tried it in Yellowstone and I wore myself out and made little progress. It was only when we paddled in sync that our canoes began progressing through the rough waters. “Please don’t try to do it alone. Relentlessly search for or build community.” (Saenz, 2012, p. 88).

If any of our schools or districts are not currently paddling together in sync, let’s make the needed changes, and we will see the benefit. Once those in my canoe focused on our compelling destination, started sending clear signals to each other, and began paddling in sync, we found our swing, and it truly was a beautiful thing. Peter Senge describes it this way: “When you ask people about what it is like being part of a great team, what is most striking is the meaningfulness of the experience. People talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative. It becomes quite clear that, for many, their experiences as part of truly great teams stand out as singular periods of life lived to the fullest. Some spend the rest of their lives looking for ways to recapture that spirit” (2013, p. 12). While finding our swing as a canoe did not spare us from exerting immense effort, what could have been a truly miserable, draining, and dangerous journey, turned out to be a marvelous, enjoyable trip, both during calm and stormy conditions. Conditions in schools are certainly stormy and challenging, and who knows if and when they will calm. How can your school and district better sync efforts and find your swing? We’d all better sync or we just may sink!

My dad and oldest daughter mastered their ability to sync. They enjoyed the trip, regardless of conditions.

References


David Boren is the director of Brigham Young University’s School Leadership Program, and most recently worked as a principal in Alpine School District.
Purpose Driven Reflection

by Michael Winslow
Asst. Principal, Crimson Cliffs High School

“Reflection is a key component of the Utah Teaching Observation Tool (UTOT) and is found in many other education evaluation frameworks.”

One of the most interesting and, at times, the most controversial aspects of professional sports is the after-game commentary. Sportscasters can spend hours and sometimes even days talking about what happened, what should have happened, how it could have happened, and whose fault it is that something did or didn’t happen. These sportscasters have made a career out of publicly reflecting on the game that took place. However there is a disconnect between the sportscaster and the participants. The disconnect comes because most of the sportscasters weren’t there. I think it is safe to say that the coaches and players rarely, if ever, take the time to listen to the hours of commentary about what they did wrong and how they should improve. Nothing is more frustrating than listening to someone who wasn’t there and doesn’t know your team talk about what you are doing wrong. But I do know that coaches and players spend a lot of time watching game film, pinpointing mistakes, asking questions and creating strategies to improve and focus discussions on their main purpose in the world of professional sports: winning.

This school year has been unlike any other. The challenges, the stress, and the uncertainty have weighed on teachers, administrators, and students. Social media, politicians, and even media outlets have become the sportscasters of education, talking about what schools are doing wrong and what they should be doing better. However, those of us in the school buildings know best what happened, how it went, and what we want to see moving forward. Teachers, administrators, and support staff have been heroic this past year making sure students are safe and are learning at high levels. It has always been about the students and this year was no different, despite the additional challenges of a pandemic. All that being said, the best way we can improve the educational practices in our buildings is to intentionally reflect. The practice of reflecting is useful at any time, but can be especially powerful now as we have all had to learn new things and teach in an environment never experienced before.

Reflection is a key component of the Utah Teaching Observation Tool (UTOT) and is found in many other education evaluation frameworks. Charlotte Danielson, who developed one of the more well-known professional frameworks wrote “...the ability to reflect...is the mark of a true professional.” She also wrote, “...although reflection on practice is a natural activity for professionals, doing it well is a learned skill.” So how can we help ourselves and the educators in our buildings reflect effectively? I would offer two strategies: asking the right questions, and having the right mindset.

First - asking the right questions. Reflection is only effective when it leads to a change in behavior or practice. Asking thoughtful, pertinent, evidence-based questions will lead to the desired outcome. As you meet as a leadership team to reflect, ask open-ended questions that require thought about what really happened. Use real data/evidence to support the answers to the questions. This evidence could include feedback from faculty, staff, and other stakeholders. It could also be information...
gathered from classroom observations, assessments, or standardized testing. With this data in hand, you can then start asking the right questions relating to any goals or standards that may have been set. One other way to help with asking the right questions is to frame them through the lens of the school mission, vision, and commitment statements. Effective reflective questions could include “How did we achieve our commitments this year?” or “Which commitment did we fall short on and why?” By framing the questions through your guiding statements and using data to inform your discussion, your reflection will move you towards improved practice in your building.

Second - having the right mindset. The entire practice of reflection is designed to identify things that need improvement and then identify steps to move towards that improvement. If you don’t believe that things can or should improve, then they won’t. Having a growth mindset is essential for effective reflection. Carol Dweck writes that having a growth mindset means believing “...everyone can change and grow through application and experience.”

It can be very easy to get into slumps and become discouraged. All too familiar is the day that starts with good intentions of being a learning leader (getting into classrooms, leading amazing discussions, etc.) but ends with the reality of being a manager, referee, and being stuck at your desk as emails pile up. Those days can lead to a fixed mindset, where it can feel like nothing can change. However, a fixed mindset is not permanent. We can reflect and realize we have closed off avenues and opportunities to improve. Having a growth mindset - looking for and embarking on the challenging path of improvement- can make all the difference.

As you and your leadership team reflect on this year- don’t let the “sportscasters” be the ones who tell us how to change. Reflect as if you are the players and coaches who were at the game, ask the right questions, use a growth mindset and watch as the goals and ideas that come from reflection lead to improved practice in your buildings.

References
Principal Endurance:
Finding Your Pace and Stride to Thrive as a School Leader

by David Boren
Director of BYU School of Leadership

by Joseph N. Jensen
Principal, Timpanogos High School

In fourth grade, we ran the infamous P.E. mile. Amidst groans and complaints of classmates, I (David) confidently decided to win by sprinting the entire race. For two laps I ran as fast as I could, setting up a first place finish! On the third lap, my legs turned to Jell-O, and I felt woozy. Ignoring my body’s complaints, I ran full speed ahead. Head spinning, my body screamed for me to stop. The next thing I knew, I woke up on the ground, surrounded by classmates with worried expressions. I had passed out in the middle of the race! Not only had I not won—I hadn’t even finished.

Every school year can feel like a grueling race, and an administrative career makes a marathon seem miniscule. We can easily push ourselves too hard for too long, to win the educational leadership race, hurting our schools as well as our physical, mental, and emotional health. New principals, or administrators in a new assignment are particularly prone to this tendency. Let’s review a few guiding principles for effective endurance.

**Pace yourself. Focus on consistency over intensity.**
Little strokes fell great oaks. Linda & Roger Flavell, 1993

In 1911, Britain’s Robert Falcon Scott and Norway’s Roald Amundsen raced by dog sled to the South Pole. The British team covered great distances during favorable weather, and rested when conditions were unfavorable. In contrast, the Norwegian team sought measured progress every day, in both calm and calamitous conditions. Because conditions in Antarctica are rarely ideal, Amundsen’s daily consistency helped him beat Scott to the South Pole by five weeks (Collins & Hansen, 2011).

Simon Sinek observed that to make real progress, “consistency becomes more important than intensity” (2019, p. 24). Wouldn’t we prefer a teacher that consistently provides solid teaching and learning day in and day out over a teacher who delivers an occasional, over-the-top, amazing lesson from time to time? Wouldn’t we rather have a teacher team meet consistently and do solid work every day/week, rather than a team that has an amazing collaborative session only once a month? Wouldn’t teachers prefer a principal that provides steady, ongoing, job-embedded support over a principal that can put together a couple of sparkly PD days but is not consistently supportive throughout the year? Brushing our teeth 60 seconds a day is more effective than 60 minutes once a month. How can we better pace ourselves and focus more on consistency as educational leaders?

**Develop the art of selective neglect and avoid initiative fatigue.**
Any successful person has to decide what to do in part by deciding what not to do. Angela Duckworth, 2016, p. 67
Competitive runners know they can’t race effectively every day. Most administrators are capable, hard-working, high achieving, passionate people-pleasers. We are idealistic and want to do a good job. Good principals realize they don’t have the time, head space, or overall capacity to do A+ work in everything, all the time. Therefore, the best school leaders master the art of selective neglect. As Buffum and colleagues point out, “when everything is important, nothing is” (2012, p. 47). We must ease up on perfectionism, being all things to all people. We can’t immerse ourselves in every issue. The key is intentionally identifying which issues need our personal best attention and efforts, and which don’t, by deliberately deciding what to neglect. Some tasks can be delegated. Some require compliance but not quality. Some can be ignored. Effective school leaders “are prepared to get a grade of C on compliance as long as they get an A on learning. Their priorities are to spend more time on developing other leaders and the group, creating a compelling vision for the school, and enhancing parent involvement than on completing compliance tasks” (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016, pp. 16-17). We don’t advocate for sloppy, negligent, or apathetic leadership. Certainly, having our budgets, facilities, schedules, materials, and forms in disarray can get in the way of learning. However, compliance can become an end unto itself if unchecked.

At times we can feel frustrated at our lack of progress as a school, despite embracing several exciting initiatives. We work so hard to meet the minimum standard of multiple initiatives that we lack the time, energy, or resources to improve in the areas that matter most. We suffer serious “initiative fatigue” by trying to get an A+ in every conceivable area. Dylan Wiliam (2017) warned: “In education we are always looking for the next big thing before we’ve gotten good at the last big thing.” We will likely benefit from cutting excess fluff, saying “no” to some appealing ideas and programs, and focusing on a few vital areas (Patterson, et. al, 2014). As Kirtman and Fullan advise, “Get a few core things right, in concert, and relentlessly pursue and refine them” (2016, p. 77). By effectively prioritizing, learning and well-being will improve for students and adults. How can we better develop the art of selective neglect and focus on essentials in order to avoid initiative fatigue?

**Sprint strategically.**

*We can be so busy doing everything that we end up doing very few things well. Jim Knight, 2016, p. 197*

Savvy racers sprint strategically, rather than haphazardly. They choose to push harder at purposeful points in a race to be able to win. Reflecting on Steven Covey’s Time Management Matrix helps us choose when to sprint by better understanding the relative importance and urgency of tasks (Covey, 2013; see Table 1).

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Table 1. Revised Time Management Matrix based on Covey, 2013.
Too often, we confuse urgent and important. Urgent refers to tasks with an in-your-face deadline. Important refers to tasks that align closely with our mission, vision, and values and support core goals. A task with an urgent deadline is not necessarily important. Conversely, some tasks with no deadline are extremely important. Certainly, urgent matters need to be addressed (e.g., student injury; upset parent; gas leak; district report due by the end of the day, etc.). However, if we spend the bulk of our time frantically addressing urgent issues, we will likely neglect many less urgent, but extremely important issues (Quadrant 2). As a result, those issues will often evolve into urgent issues we can no longer ignore (e.g., if we neglect the well-being of teachers, some will eventually quit and we will have some urgent hiring/training to do). Coaching expert, Elena Aguilar, points out: “The domain of not urgent and important is the highest leverage area to work in...This is also the domain...where most educators spend the least time--given the amount of urgency we encounter on a daily basis, it's really hard...[to] recognize that much of [our] daily responses to the urgency could be mitigated by spending time working in the not urgent and important zone” (Aguilar, 2013, p. 229). How can we sprint more strategically in school leadership?

Take a break.

Take rest; a field that has rested gives a bountiful crop. Ovid

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, marathoner Derek Clayton consistently finished in the top 25 in international races. While not the best in the world, he arguably trained the hardest, often running more than 100 miles a week. An overtraining injury forced him to take a break from serious training. A month after his injury he accepted an invitation to run a marathon in Japan, but treated it as a training run, thinking that due to his break in training, he would not be at his best. To his surprise, he won the marathon, beat his own personal best time, and set a new world record (2:09:36:4). A few years later he had a similar experience. He got injured, took substantial time off, and came back to set another world record that stood for 12 years (2:08:33.6). Derek Clayton’s experience helped others better understand rest, renewal and tapering—practices commonly implemented by competitive athletes since that time. Appropriate breaks will be different for every school leader. Sometimes a consistent short break will do the trick. Other times a longer break might be needed.

In the 1967 Fukuoka Marathon, Derek Clayton (left), set a world record time of 2:09.36.4. Credit: runnerstribe.com

We should not feel selfish or
apologize for taking appropriate breaks. Shawn Achor shared the following perspective: “I had too narrowly defined what ‘being productive’ was. I started to feel guilty when I did anything that wasn’t working. Nothing else, not exercise or time with my wife or relaxation, was productive. So I never had time to recharge my batteries, which meant that, ironically, the more I worked, the more my productivity plummeted.” (Achor, 2010, p. 73). Of course, some people can go overboard on taking breaks, but as the Buddha taught, “If you tighten the strings too tight, they will break; if you leave them too loose, they won’t play.” Appropriately balanced breaks prepare us to give our best to those who need us at our best. Ideally, we should not, like Derek Clayton, get to the point that the only time we take a break is when an injury forces that break upon us. Let’s find ways to take daily breaks by exercising, spending meaningful time with family, or attending to hobbies or activities we care about. Let’s also find ways to take bigger breaks. How can we help ourselves and others by deliberately taking needed breaks?

**Improve incrementally from where you really are.**

In 2010 Dave Brailsford was hired to do something that had never been done before ... help a British cyclist win the Tour de France. His initial goal was to have a British Tour de France winner within five years. Incredibly, British cyclists went on to win the Tour de France in 2012, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018. Brailsford’s primary strategy was to focus on making 1% improvements in the most important areas affecting the cycling team. Over time, these 1% improvements combined to have a tremendous impact (Clear, 2018). How often do we wear ourselves out by going after the one silver bullet program, the huge revision of the schedule, or some other large-scale initiative? Legendary UCLA basketball coach John Wooden taught: “When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur...Not tomorrow, not the next day, but eventually a big gain is made. Don’t look for the big, quick improvement. Seek the small improvement one day at a time. That’s the only way it happens—and when it happens, it lasts” (as cited in Maurer, 2014, p. 27).

To improve incrementally, we have to get better at identifying our current reality. We can only do the best we can from where we are. Often in education a new initiative is forced upon us, and we pretend to implement it, at great expense of energy, time, and resources. To make 1% improvements we have to first be real about our starting point. It is impossible to start from somewhere we are not. How can we as a school improve incrementally from where we really are?

**Run together! Don’t go it alone.**

*Please don’t try to do it alone. Relentlessly search for or build community. Adam Saenz, 2012, p. 88.*

Any of us that are runners know that we can run longer distances at faster rates when running with a team than when training on our own. As a team we can push each other, provide encouragement, and rein each other in when needed. Together we progress further, faster. The very act of running or working in a close, cohesive team improves unity, endurance, and overall performance (Pink, 2018). Some researchers found that “If you look at a hill while standing next to someone you consider to be a friend, the hill looks 10 to 20 percent less steep than if you were facing that hill alone” (Achor, 2018, p. 31).

Running teams also benefit from the principle of drafting used by cyclists and birds. Team members take turns running in front in order to block the wind for those running behind. As JV Venable explains, drafting only works when teams close gaps, run close together, and take turns blocking the wind for each other (2016). Too often principals believe they have to be out front, in the traditional, heroic, charismatic leadership role. It takes more courage and is far more effective, if, instead, principals distribute leadership and create conditions for the group to lead the group instead of always running at the front (Fullan 2019). Collaborating with other principals, both formally and informally, also provides
support and strength. As Brené Brown points out: “Most of us are good at giving help, but when it comes to vulnerability, we need to ask for help too” (2012, p. 53). Most parents, teachers, students, and other administrators are all willing and anxious to step up when needed and take their turn blocking the wind. We do not have to go it alone, nor should we try. Do we ask for help from other administrators, parents, teachers, and students? If not, we should. How can we better run together?

**Conclusion**

School leadership is an ultra-endurance sport! To avoid feeling woozy and having our leadership legs turn to Jell-O, let’s employ these principles of principal endurance:

- Pace yourself. Focus on consistency over intensity.
- Develop the art of selective neglect and avoid initiative fatigue.
- Sprint strategically.
- Take a break.
- Improve incrementally from where you really are.
- Run together. Don’t go it alone.

Doing these things well ourselves and helping others do the same can ensure that our run as educators will be beautiful, challenging, and exhilarating, and we won’t pass out in the process.

**References**


In 2010 I began my first year as a secondary administrator. I remember sitting in my office a few short weeks into my new assignment pondering my new job and trying to understand my role. An interesting thought hit me.

“You can be the winner when people visit your office.”

The thought startled me. It’s not really in my nature to power trip, so I wasn’t sure why the thought came. As I thought deeper about it, I understood it to be a warning.

Because of the newly acquired position of power I’d received in my new assignment, the decisions and judgments I made could send people – teachers, parents, students, and others – out the door as losers. I wondered if such a reality may, in fact, be true. And, if so, how was I going to choose to lead and influence others? It was reaffirmed in my mind that I should always seek the fair and best outcome for others, not myself. That realization was an awakening and a grounding that allowed me to firmly decide what type of school leader I would be. As a result, I posted an imaginary message above my office door that only I could see. It said, “It’s not about you.”

Leadership isn’t about you. Leadership is, however, about your influence on others. How do your relationships with those around you lead, lift, inspire, help, instruct, and empower them? Your leadership will be impactful and meaningful when you focus on helping others achieve their goals, grow as individuals, seize new opportunities, and become leaders themselves.

While some aspects of leadership should not be made to be about you, there’s no mistake that your awesomeness matters! In that sense, leadership is about you. What you do, what you say, What you model, what you bring to the table each and every day – all of it matters. And it matters a lot.

I’ve thought about, discussed, watched, read, acted on, and reflected much on the topic of leadership over the years. I have had many mentors and people that have taught, led, and inspired me. I want to share a few leadership principles with you that have become fundamental drivers for me in my approach to leadership.

Be your best self. None of us is awesome at our worst. All of us are awesome at our best. We owe it those that we lead and serve to come to work and be our best self. People are counting on you. You cannot afford to let your less-than-best-self interact in a professional setting to the detriment of relationships and/or the organization. Make the daily (by the minute?) decision to be your best self. If you feel your “lesser self” coming out, take a break, hit the reset button, and get back on track. It is imperative that you do so. Be your best self.

Earn your job every day. You were hired for the position you now hold based on your qualifications, prior good work, the references of others who know you, a positive and professional interview, and your track record as a leader. You better be who and what you said you’d be. Ask this question, “If I were to interview today for my current position, would I still be the choice?” I hope so! If not, make a course correction. Those who hired you should have daily confidence that they made the right decision. Be grateful for your position and never take it for granted. They don’t just give positions like yours to anybody. Earn your job every day.
**Be a positive, rational influence.** What are you doing with your leadership? How are people being influenced by you? A few years ago, while working with our school leadership team, we identified this phrase as a sort of mantra for school leaders. What does it mean? It means that we are positive in our thoughts, our interactions, our conversations, and our relationships with those around us. It means we are rational in our thoughts, our reactions, our pursuits, our corrections, and our purpose. The two elements of being positive and rational mean that we are truthful about reality, yet we believe and act with the hope in a best future outcome. Others can count on us to be fair and rational, yet know that we will not engage in negative chatter, gossip, or other despair-based behaviors. Be willing and intentional about your choice to see the good in others, despite their weaknesses. Be a positive, rational influence.

**Celebrate.** There is so much good happening around you! Seek it out, identify it, and celebrate it. The intentional focus on celebrating the positive things taking place in your work location will elevate morale, inspire more celebration-worthy events, and validate the efforts of others. Be a cheerleader for those around you. Take the time to acknowledge good work and great effort. This is true for students, teachers, staff, coaches, and anyone that is in your school or work community that has done anything to make the school better. Celebrate small things. Celebrate big things. Celebrate progress. Celebrate effort. Celebrate.

**Listen Intently.** People have stories to tell, and they need an audience. Be known as someone who cares enough to listen and to understand. Listen to students, listen to parents, listen to teachers and staff. Read between the lines for the undertones and underlying themes of communication. Ask one more question. Dig a little deeper. Be sincere. Listen intently.

**Lead with Love.** Yep, love. The leader who loves those he or she serves and leads will better know and understand the needs of others, will have greater empathy, will judge circumstances more accurately, will extend and gain trust, and will create a safe space for people. Loving sincerely and valuing each individual can be done. Give the benefit of the doubt. Show grace and mercy. Be firm and fair. Be demanding in expectations and lift others to a higher place than they might believe they can reach. But, in all of these pursuits, lead with love.

**Be an example.** People watch the leader. They know everything he or she says or does. Be constant. Hold yourself to a high standard, and strive to meet it in everything you do. Apologize to others when you fail in that pursuit. Be genuine. Ask yourself, “If everyone in my school/organization were to do or say what I’m doing or saying would our school/organization be successful?” It is a great question to get at the heart of the matter quickly. If the answer to that question is yes, then continue. If the answer is no, fix it. And fix it fast. Be an example in attitude, conversation, professionalism, effort, and kindness.

There are many other points of interest and discussion related to leadership in general, and, more specifically, school leadership. We’ll save those for another day, perhaps. The concepts listed above have shaped me and are constantly on my mind in the work I do. I share them because they are worth adding to whatever leadership principles may be currently guiding you in your work. In fact, they may be exactly the same, but worded differently. At the end of the day, please embrace the power within you to lead. Share your awesomeness as you set about to make a difference in your sphere of influence. You got this! Go be awesome.

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**Todd Dawson** is in his twentieth year in education. He is currently the principal at Lone Peak High School in the Alpine School District. He is a former English teacher, Staff Developer, Assistant Principal, Middle School Principal, and HR Director. He is married to Jennifer, and is the father of five children. He enjoys hiking, cycling, backpacking, golfing, reading, and spending time with friends and family.
As administrators, working late on a weeknight can become routine. The activities are long, managing parents and students can be demanding and night after night you’re pulled away from home and family. However, last year, the Wednesday nights I spent in the school board room became some of the most rewarding late nights I’ve had in years. In February 2019, I was tasked with researching, creating, and implementing a peer court for the Canyons School District. Although surrounding cities such as Draper and Sandy had functioning peer courts, it was the desire of our Responsive Services Director to house one within our own district walls.

At that time, only one other district-based peer court existed in the state and it was facilitated by the Ogden School District. Fast forward to the 2020-2021 school year and on to Wednesday evenings where I found myself sitting in the Canyons School Board Room with 23 students from across the district, performing their duties as members of the inaugural Canyons School District Peer Court.

Each case begins the same as the student member reads our purpose:

Good evening. On behalf of the Canyons School District Peer Court, I want to thank each of you for being here tonight and participating in these proceedings. I am Judge (student name) and I am the head judge tonight.

Canyon School District Peer Court Program is a community-based intervention/prevention program which encourages young people to take responsibility for their actions and make better choices in the future.

It is designed to provide an alternative to the Juvenile Justice System in the hope they will escape the School-to-Prison Pipeline. As Youth Peers our goal is to meet with students and their families and help determine the appropriate next steps in order to restore justice, hold students accountable, and provide support for the student and their family for success.

**Equity, Empathy and Compassion**

Our student judges were diverse in ethnicity, backgrounds, socio-economic status, and yet they worked collaboratively to listen and address the needs of their Canyons District peers. As the school year progressed, they too grew and matured in their roles, gaining confidence and understanding the meaning of Empathy, Equity and Compassion – the values guiding our decisions.

So many moments made an impression as I observed the thoughtfulness with which each disposition or judgement was made. After a family left our “courtroom” one evening, a student judge looked at me with great concern and said, “Ms. Hilton, I think he might hurt himself.” I too had been concerned with the things I heard during the testimony and knew I would follow up with the school to get this young man additional supports. To hear my worries validated by one of his peers touched my heart. Our judges took their roles seriously and wanted to help each student that passed through the “courtroom.”

**Dispositions** - Court lingo for Consequences and Requirements

Student dispositions include: something restorative, something for personal improvement, something for education and something for the school or community. Each student has four weeks to complete a disposition and can receive an
extension of two weeks. Dispositions were as varied as the students. For example, Improving or maintaining grades and attendance were always included. Other requirements might be attendance in classes at the Canyons Family Center; Community Service, planning family activities, interviewing professionals and reflective essays among other meaningful activities.

The key factor in a disposition was the assignment of a district mentor. The adult mentor met with the student each week for four weeks to guide and encourage their progress and completion. She not only made contact with the student, but also the families. One of the pleasant surprises of peer court was the opportunity to help entire families. Sometimes that meant classes, food, and clothing. Building trusting relationships with these families was vital to the success of each student and it was an added benefit of the program.

They’ll know how to help us...

One particular family was struggling with their 16-year-old son. My administrative assistant came to me one day and said, “Sam’s (name changed) parents are here to see you.” I was surprised and proceeded to the conference room where I saw two very distraught parents. “Sam” had snuck out during the night and was in a fight that required stitches. After returning from the emergency room, the father said, “Let’s go see Suzanne, Charisse and Denisse. They’ll know how to help us.” Our peer court team was happy to support this family as they navigated the challenges before them. I will never take for granted the trust these parents have in us. They “dropped in” two other times during the school year and I hope they know we will do our best for them each time.

Interviewing a former NFL player as part of a disposition? Yes, we get creative. A very bright young man passed through court one evening. He was an expert regarding Bit Coin and firmly announced he was going to be an entrepreneur, not needing college. His mom quickly corrected him - he would be going to college! As I thought about possible disposition options, I knew we would need something “outside of the box.” I reached out to a former student, Bryan Kehl, who played 8 years in the NFL and returned to finish his college degree and earn a Masters’ degree. He was more than willing to meet with this young man and share his story. Bryan’s current occupation involves buying and restoring companies - an entrepreneur. Within the first 10 minutes of their meeting, the student was captivated by an impromptu economics lesson and then they proceeded to discuss the ups and downs of running a business. Everyone left with a smile on their face that day and the young man had gained another adult mentor in his life.

Year Two

Forty-five students were referred to Peer Court during the 2020-2021 school year. I am anxious to see this number increase as we support our CSD students and families, providing alternatives to suspension and police charges. This year with the new legislation governing school attendance, Peer Court will be suggested as an intervention for our students struggling with daily attendance. As school administrators, we know poor attendance is often a symptom of something much deeper. Our goal with peer court is to offer support and resources to change circumstances preventing a student from regular attendance.

Other than our senior peer court panel members, only three chose not to participate again. I admire these students who have taken on a role to be true advocates for their peers. The integrity with which they fulfill their roles is impressive. Each week, my team and I comment on how grateful we are to learn from these students.

Did we have an impact?

Ashton Pelly was one of our Peer Court judges. She chose to write about Peer Court for her application to Villanova University. (Ashton accepted the Eccles Scholarship at the University of Utah and will be majoring in International Studies.)

My name is Ashton and I just completed my first year as a member of the Canyons District Peer Court. I didn’t have to think twice about applying to peer court. I knew there was an issue with the school-to-prison pipeline - I had seen it all over the news, and heard about issues in my own community. In the midst of my frustration with the criminal “justice” system, combined with my desire to help dismantle injustice systems, I came across the Canyons District Peer Court. I eventually decided to submit an application and I never looked back. Peer court taught me countless lessons, primarily that justice comes in many forms, and that we should all, no matter the situation, lead ourselves with compassion. I never knew that I could make such a difference right within my own school district. I chose to use Peer Court as inspiration for my application to Villanova University.
The application asked: In St. Augustine’s book *Confessions*, one of the themes is the idea of redemption and second chances. Tell us a story about second chances. It can be your experience or one that you have come across through others or through media.

I have been lucky enough to receive countless second chances throughout my life, however, I never considered the extent of the act of giving others second chances. This new idea was one that I quickly became familiar with through the Canyons District Peer Court. Designed as an intervention-prevention based program, the court aims to put an end to the school-to-prison pipeline by offering my peers within the district a second chance, rather than being launched into the criminal justice system. For each case the defendant would be engaged in a restorative practice, which included career research, giving apologies, or receiving a mentor.

When I walked into the district board room for my first day, it had been converted into a makeshift courtroom. The unease of the cold and barren room immediately made itself noticeable. Though as I sat in on the first case, I was immediately touched by the stories told by the first defendant, a sixth-grader recently offset by a bully. I later found myself making emotional connections with each defendant, despite our differing circumstances.

There isn’t a feeling quite like that of seeing the smiles on the faces of the kids four weeks after their appearance while they detailed their progress. With smiles all around, the room that first felt cold and dark, grew warmer and brightened up. And although this was my first experience of witnessing second chances come to life firsthand, I learned that above all that compassion and empathy prevail.

Many Thanks to the Ogden School District Peer Court Team who generously shared their documents, knowledge and above all their passion for supporting students through peer intervention.

Charisse Hilton just finished year 28 in public education. She has been a history and health teacher, Student Government Adviser, Assistant Principal and a Principal at both the Middle and High School Levels. Her involvement in student leadership began at Hillcrest High School. She was appointed to UASSP as the UASC Executive Director in 2007. She serves with a national organization (NASSCED) with executive directors from all over the country. She served as Vice-President and President of NASSCED and as a board member. Their purpose is to collaborate, plan and guide student leaders. Charisse is a firm believer that students must be engaged and anchored at their schools by SOMETHING. She encourages student leaders to facilitate and support those “SOMETHINGS!” Currently, she serves as a Program Administrator in External Relations for Canyons School District.

**UASSP Summer Leadership**

Introducing incoming UASSP Executive Director Rhonda Bromley

Honoring UASSP Retirees