

Are You The One?

ABSTRACT

The author believes the role of instructional leader is vital to the success of teachers and the students. Knowing your leadership style and the traits or qualities that you possess will lead you to a more successful career in educational leadership. This article focuses on the qualities and traits that principals are seeking when interviewing prospective administrators. It provides the teachers' perspective on what qualities or traits they desire in an administrator.

Are you looking for an administrative position in the public school system? Do you know what building principals and classroom teachers are looking for in their campus level administrators? Presumably principals and classroom teachers would have similar interests regarding desirable qualities or traits in campus administrators; however, the truth is quite different.

The purpose of this article is to describe qualities and traits of effective administrators, as seen through the eyes of building principals and faculty. Would-be administrators will learn what they need to know to be successful in job interviews.

High school, intermediate and elementary school principals and teachers were asked the following question: What five qualities/traits do you look for in an administrator on your team? Rank them in order, with number one being the most important quality or trait and five being the least important. Explain why you picked number one as the *most important*.

The majority of the administrators selected similar qualities or traits, even selecting the same number one. Each of their responses is provided below.

High School Principal:

1. Passionate/Enthusiastic/Committed – You have got to love what you have “chosen” to do. If one is truly passionate, that passion can become contagious with staff, students, parents, and fellow administrators.
2. Professional/Polished/Articulate
3. Flexible/Adaptable
4. Persistent
5. Change Agent

Middle School Principal:

1. Understands, likes and wants what is best for kids: If administrators don’t have this quality, they won’t be able to lead others in the right direction.
2. Outstanding teacher in the classroom
3. Good verbal/written communication skills
4. Good time management and ability to multi-task
5. Positive outlook and personality

Elementary Principal:

1. Passion: Willing to make the impossible possible. Administrators should have the attitude that they can “whip a bear with a fork and spoon.”
2. Charisma
3. Good listening skills
4. Committed to the job
5. Have a vision for the future

How interesting and surprising that all the principals identified the same traits as the most important quality they look for when hiring administrators. Each principal communicated that passion and enthusiasm are essential traits for successful leadership. Principals elaborated that a love for the job and the ability to make decisions that are in the best interest of the student will improve the learning environment. Other administrators that answered the above question also identified loyalty, intuition, risk taking and experience as additional important qualities.

While teachers share with principals the same goal of student success, what they are looking for in administrators is diverse. Below are the responses from high school, intermediate, and elementary school teachers.

High School Teacher:

1. Consistent: A supervisor who is inconsistent (in behavior and decisions) would make the day-to-day life of those reporting to him or her a stressful situation that would inevitably breed ineptness and bitterness.
2. Courageous
3. Knowledgeable
4. Compassionate
5. Organized

Middle School Teacher:

1. Approachable: Once you get a sense that the administrator is approachable, you have confidence they know what they are doing.
2. Discipline management is consistent and fair.
3. Empathetic

4. Recognize employees for a job well done
5. Visible to staff and students

Elementary Teacher:

1. Clear and definable standards of teaching for each grade level: The degree to which the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) can be interpreted and applied varies greatly among teachers. It is imperative there be agreement between the grade level teachers and administration concerning those skills students need to have before entering the next grade level.
2. Clear vision and goals for the school, as well as the ability to motivate people to work towards them
3. Respect for all employees as a valued member of the school team
4. Strict adherence to discipline policies and procedures for students
5. Availability and accessibility

While the number one qualities teachers identified might have varied, every teacher listed consistency with student discipline referrals as one of the top five qualities desirable in administrators. As I visited with teachers, they spoke most fervently about student discipline referrals. Teachers were adamant that all administrators be consistent when implementing discipline procedures.

There was more variance within the teacher responses. Other qualities listed as important for administrators were as follows: be respectful, support teachers, have a love of the job, have good listening skills, be cheerful, be sensitive to others, have good communication skills, and possess people skills.

William Kritsonis in William Kritsonis, PHD on Schooling, explains:

Principals are expected to do many different things for many different people, such as teachers, students, central administration personnel, state departments of education, and the local community. Students expect a personal relationship. Teachers expect support with discipline problems, professional treatment, and being able to participate in the decision-making process. Parents expect instructional leadership, collaborating with parents, and keeping the interest of students foremost...Although principals cannot always meet the expectations of everyone, they must at least determine the feasibility of meeting the expectations that impact on the school (2002, p. 252).”

Principals make decisions every day that impact the entire school community and therefore must have a global view of what is in the best interest of all stakeholders.

Classroom teachers’ primary focus is on the students in their classroom, instructional strategies and assessment, and their grade level or subject/department teams. Because of this limited perspective, not all teachers have the opportunity to become aware of the expectations placed on the school administrators.

Finally, I would like to offer my thoughts on the five most important traits or qualities administrators, including principals, must have in order to successfully lead others.

1. Perform your job with zeal. Remember everyday why you chose this career and let that passion guide you in your work.
2. Lead with integrity. Be honest and sincere.
3. Be a visionary. Have a vision for the future and collaboratively set goals with all stakeholders to accomplish the vision.
4. Listen to all stakeholders and have excellent communication skills (both written and orally)
5. Never lose your sense of humor. Smile every day, even on “bad days.”

In conclusion, teachers should be a priority to every campus level administrator.

Teachers directly impact instruction, and their opinions regarding school business are vital. Appreciate teachers and include them in the decision-making process.

Whatever your leadership style, be passionate about what you are doing.

References

Kritsonis, W. (2002). **William Kritsonis, PHD on Schooling: Historical-Philosophical-Contemporary Events and Milestones.** Mansfield, OH: BookMasters, Inc.

BIOGRAPHY

Teresa A. Hughes
Klein Forest High School
Associate Principal
Curriculum and Instruction
19307 Solon Springs Court
Tomball, Texas 77375
thughes@kleinisd.net
(832) 484-4602