



Leadership NOTES

Principles of Personal Influence

in-floo-uh ns – noun: The capacity or power of persons or things to be a compelling force on, or produce effects on the actions, behavior, opinions, etc., of others. (Dictionary.com)

The essential attribute of personal influence is the ability of a person to affect the thinking and/or behavior of other people. To be an effective influencer, one goes beyond skillful communication and employs a variety of interpersonal behaviors that move others to thought and action. In the education arena, the ability to move others to action in the service of student success and school improvement is a key, perhaps the key, attribute of leadership.

The following set of influence principles is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather a starter set of strategies that, in conjunction with solid communication skills, enable school leaders to more powerfully shape the course of school improvement.

Being present in the moment. Administrators have to do many things at once. They multi-task, deal with distractions, and try to balance work, home, and personal lives. Still, administrators are powerful when they are 100% present and available to the opportunity at hand - not thinking too far ahead, not dwelling in the past, not being preoccupied, not being self-focused. We all know what it's like to be in the presence of someone who is distracted. And, we've experienced how powerful a moment can be when the person we're sharing it with is "all-in" with us (Bowling & Hoffman, 2000). With all distractions and pressures of the school swirling around in an administrator's mind... those that can, if just for a moment, block it all out and simply be present and available to staff members are exercising a powerful component of personal presence.

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A little personal complexity. Leaders who can't be described with a single word are more compelling to staff than those who can be. "He's structured, but spontaneous." This is not to suggest that administrators should be complicated and unpredictable. It is just an observation based on experience. A little complexity draws staff members' attention and engagement. It makes the leader more unique, more interesting, and more memorable (Leiter & Maslach, 2006).

Princess Diana was greatly loved and admired throughout the world. Perhaps her most endearing characteristic was her ability to be both royal and common. She was Diana, Princess of Wales, a member of the British Royal Family, and also a former kindergarten teacher. This duality is often a part of strong personal presence. We are drawn to individuals who are intelligent - yet approachable, beautiful - yet humble, large - yet gentle, silly - yet profound, or accomplished - yet other-focused.

Being influence-able. Staff members are more influenced by leaders who are influenced by their staff members. Influence, like trust and communication, is a two-way street (Fukushima, 1999). A principal might say to the faculty "I've changed my thinking after reading the survey we completed last week. These words signal that what faculty members do personally affects the thoughts and feelings of the principal. Interesting isn't it... being influence-able makes the administrator more influential.

Loss of self-consciousness. There is something extra compelling about a leader that occasionally becomes so engaged in the work of serving others that they temporarily forget to worry about what others think of them. I suspect this is because we are all self-conscious beings and to see another person temporarily freed from the normal state of "worrying what others think" is compelling.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990), in his national best-seller *FLOW- The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, identifies loss of self-consciousness as a key indicator of the Flow state (pp. 62-63). Flow, according to Csikszentmihalyi, is the state of being completely caught up in an activity such that it is enjoyable and satisfying. A violinist, in the middle of a concert, or a rock climber, completing a technically difficult part of an ascent might be said to be in a state of flow. When a school administrator is in the “flow,” it is a particularly influential moment.

Discussion Questions...

Identify the four principles of personal influence in the leadership behaviors of particularly influential leaders from your past experience- both inside and outside education. Share how the leaders used the four principles to their advantage and to the benefit of their organizations.

Identify which of the four principles resonates most with your personal style and values. Explain why you chose this principle.

Imagine how you might apply one or more of the principles of personal influence to your own leadership situation. What might you do to begin? What follow-up might you choose? How will you hold yourself accountable for trying and adapting one or more of the principles?

Author’s Note: *Principles of Personal Influence* was originally written as a supplement to the Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS) Developing Level Facilitation Guide, ©2017 by Rutherford Learning Group, Inc., The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE). The four principles are also discussed in *The Artisan Teacher: A Field Guide to Skillful Teaching*, Chapter 22: Personal Presence, pages 149-151, ©2013 by Rutherford Learning Group, Inc.