

Growing into an effective Principal

- Y N Kaushal

Growing or developing? Do you develop yourself to become an effective Principal or you happen to grow into an effective Principal? While primarily you are responsible to become an effective Principal, you are helped by the circumstances and experiences that favour your growth.

First and foremost requirement is that you want to be an effective Principal. Some people get thrown into the position of Principal because they are the senior most and every one feels that they deserve to be the principal. And they reluctantly accept the position. Very rarely such a person will become an effective Principal because she will not give her 100% to the role of a principal. Most likely such a Principal will be a maintenance Principal. Unless you are strongly motivated to become an excellent Principal, you will not become an institution developer. Effective Principals not only run the school well, they take them to new heights. 'Reluctant' Principal is not my ideal.

In this article I am laying out my thoughts on six planks (also called Competencies) that you need to focus on becoming a very effective Principal.

1. Academic Leadership.

In school system, a very good teacher is respected by colleagues. Without being an excellent teacher in your subject, you may not earn the right to be respected. Another aspect is that you need to be aware of the latest developments in the field of education. You need to provide thought leadership to your school. This is something that you need to develop by continuously updating yourself. Reading will help. When you get opportunity to attend conferences absorb new knowledge as a sponge. If you are creative and innovative, this will be an added advantage. When you become the Principal, chances are that you would be a well-respected teacher in your subject. Your challenge usually

would be how you keep up-to-date in your subject, how you learn foundations of other subjects and how you develop yourself as spokesperson of the academic community.

2. Managing Self

Mastery over others starts with Mastery over Self. You need to be aware of your own strengths and weaknesses. Self-awareness and self-acceptance gives you quiet confidence in yourself. You should be comfortable under your skin. Knowing your weaknesses, you can figure out where you need to seek cooperation from others so that their strengths compliment yours and you are able to achieve your goals. Awareness of your emotions and ability to regulate your emotion is a crucial competence that you require.

You are a role model. You need to be an enthusiastic person, spreading positivity and optimism all around. You need to be optimistic to the extent that it is contagious.

Ability to manage your time, conquering procrastination and punctuality are hallmarks of a good leader.

Value inculcation is a prime responsibility of the school. Principal has to be the living epitome of positive values.

3. Communicator par excellence.

Principal has to be communicating all the time. You would be speaking in the morning assembly. You speak to parents in the Parent Teachers Association. You have to talk to individual students, staff, teachers and anyone and everyone. Your audience is eager to listen and expect you to be inspiring, reassuring and clear. Your communication with other stakeholders is also equally crucial. Many principals also face reporters and TV journalists.

This is a demanding chore. Introvert Principals find that this drains their energy and need time for recuperation. You need to choose your words with care and deliver your messages with impact.

Active Listening is the skill that you need to master. Regularly you would listen to people who come to you to share their problems. Listening with open mind and without prejudice will help you to grasp the core issue. This will help you to resolve their problem faster and satisfy them. While you may not be able to solve hundred percent of the problems, a good and empathetic listening gives a comfort.

Your presentation skills will come handy when dealing with Governing Society/Board of your school and when presenting your viewpoints to Government officials.

4. Managing relationships.

Continuously connecting with different stakeholders and maintaining good relationships is an important function in role and requires you to nurture these relationships. I found one of the Principals of Don Bosco School in Delhi doing it in a simple way. At the start of the day, he would stand near the gate for about 15 minutes before the start of the school. As the children entered the school, he would greet them and enquire about how they are feeling that day. He would call out many by their names. Children felt thrilled. They felt they are welcome in the school. They are respected. What a positive start of the day. Keep an open door policy for the children. Any child who wants to meet you, meet him/her immediately. Make sure you solve their problem quickly.

Managing relationships with teachers is another key factor. They should see you as a guide and confidant. You have authority. However, you should not act in authoritarian manner. Usually you meet each teacher periodically. Be aware if you are missing out on interaction with any one. Review the list of teachers once a month. If any one is falling off your radar, call him/her for a cup of tea in your office. Try joining them for lunch in the common room. You need to take at least one round of the school every day. During this, meet the staff members. Connect with them.

Relationships with parents of students is symbiotic. They have entrusted you with the development of their children. They are concerned. Your relations with them should be reassuring. However, many of them have talents and resources that can be used for enriching school activities.

Keep relations with Principals of other schools cordial. Once a year, invite Principals and Vice Principals of selected schools to have a lunch meeting at your school. This will help you to understand how they are handling the current issues in their respective schools. You need to maintain relations with significant persons in your society. Meet the local authorities. Invite District Magistrate to a significant function, SP to a sports function etc. Develop your network. Remember, managing relationships is not automatic. It requires considerable investment of time and energy.

5. Institution developer

Running an institution and developing it are two different functions. This means creating a culture which is unique, open, creative, proactive, and achievement oriented. You need to have a vision for your institution. You may create it jointly with your team. Your team should believe in it and have commitment to realize it. Initially, on your assumption of the role, you would need a year or so, to stabilize in the role. So, do not rush into the vision project straight away. (Unless your school is a new one.) However, after a year or so, start the conversation and share your vision with your team. You need to walk the talk. Commitment to realize the vision must be demonstrated.

6. Managerial Competence

Management of the school is inherent in the role of Principal. I do not think that a Principal requires an MBA degree or an MBA will be able to manage a school well. What is required is that a principal should be able to perform following managerial functions well. The skills required are portable across different sectors.

- **Planning**

Planning an annual calendar for the school is an important task. This is one of the most important task also. School is a complex system. Academic events are one aspect. Sports activities and events are next important. Cultural activities and other extra-curricular activities are equally important. You would be doing an

exercise on how to create the annual calendar for your school. This will give you a bird's eye view and will be a guide for the whole year.

- Organizing

Next you need to assign different tasks to various persons in your team. You need to develop an ability to recognize the different characteristics and talents amongst your team members. Some of the tasks and functions are not to be assigned to one person but a group of persons. Here selection of the team is important. Part of this is also recruitment and selection of new teachers and staff.

- Motivating

- Developing Faculty and staff

- Controlling and reviewing

- Decision making

Though decision making is involved in all other functions mentioned earlier and later, what is important is that you should be decisive. Lack of decisiveness creates an environment of confusion, you are seen as a weak administrator and team's productivity goes down.

Participative decision making is a preferred mode in an academic institution. Involvement in decision making creates commitment. Centralization of decision making in you will suppress the initiative of your colleagues. However, "buck stops with you". Be ready to take a decisive stand where consensus is eluding or criticality of the situation demands quick decision.

- Conflict management

- Change management

- Conducting effective meetings

- Managing Finances

- Managing Facilities

- Classrooms

- Laboratories

- Auditorium
- Offices
- Sports grounds and stadia
- Library
- Managing IT Infrastructure
- Managing Transport section
- Managing Housing (if available with the school.)

Note: The above is based on Principal's Competency framework that I propose for assessing the potential of a candidate for the position of a School Principal. How to assess these competencies is a matter of another article.

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(This article is also put up as a blog at

<http://kaushal-on-education.blogspot.in/2015/07/growing-into-effective-principal.html>

My thoughts on this topic are evolving. Chances are that if you happen to visit the blog at a later date you will find a newer and richer version of this article.)

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