

T&L/ETWD/Educator Development

Principles for Principals December

For questions or comments, please contact LouisianaLeaders@la.gov.

December's Topic: Capacity Building - Continuous Improvement

*"Relationships are not an end; rather, they are a **means** to an end."* (Hall & Simeral, 2017, p. 70)

Last month, the focus of this column was the principle "**Building Functioning Teams.**" A significant amount of space was devoted to the role that relationships and teamwork play in a school's overall atmosphere and environment. This month's principle, "**Knowing Roles lead to Fulfilled Responsibilities,**" further underscores the importance of relationship building in the successful execution of a school's primary function: improving student outcomes.

Relationships Drive Our Behavior

Upon initial review, it may not be immediately apparent what role our relationships play in knowing our roles and fulfilling our responsibilities. However, in their book ***Creating a Culture of Reflective Practice: Capacity-Building for Schoolwide Success***, Hall & Simeral (2017) help clarify the role relationships play in shaping what individual members of a school team think. And that ultimately, what we think (about ourselves, our work, our abilities, etc.) directly affects what students learn.



(Hall & Simeral, 2017, p.80)

Through this lens, the first two components of Hall & Simeral's (2017) work ("How we think" and "What we do") can be analyzed in terms of relationships, roles, and responsibilities, with "what we think" being a direct reflection and manifestation of our relationships, and "what we do" being directly tied to roles and responsibilities.

Our Relationships Shape Our Perspectives and Our Perspectives Shape Our Thinking

First and foremost, “How we think” is directly related to our relationships with other team members. It has often been said that “Leaders find a dream and then the people, the people find the leader, then the dream” (Maxwell, 1998). Meaning that for school leaders to have a staff that buys into their vision of success, the leaders have to get the people to buy into the leaders *as leaders* first! This is why last month’s principle started with relationships, and this month’s is continuing that thread. Without investing time in building relationships and teamwork, the vision will fail regardless of how “correct” it might be. But how do leaders develop these relationships with intentionality and a focus on meaningfulness with their school faculty and staff? Hall & Simeral (2017) provide four decision-making responsibilities in a “Reflective Cycle of Relationship Building.” Since they define thinking as this “Reflective Cycle,” we can start our analysis of Relationships, Roles, and Responsibilities here.

The four steps to the “Relationship Reflective Cycle” are:

1. **Building Awareness:** How aware am I of the impact of my behavior, words, and beliefs on my staff? How aware am I of how the staff and my close team receive me?
2. **Working with Intentionality:** What behaviors, words, and beliefs do I need to develop and implement to have a positive impact on the staff’s belief in me and each other?
3. **Assessing Our Impact:** How and how frequently do I check in on the outcomes of my behavior, words, and beliefs?
4. **Becoming Responsive:** Am I adapting and adjusting my practices in response to my assessments to meet the shifting needs of my environment?

At the core of this approach, Hall & Simeral (2017) believe that only a leader willing to consistently self-examine and adjust their approach through this process will effectively develop meaningful relationships with their staff. That if the leader is unaware, unintentional, has no regard for their impact, or refuses to adjust — that if either one of those pieces fails — then the staff will not buy into the leader, and no amount of defining the roles and responsibilities will actually execute change in student outcomes.

...And Our Thinking Shapes Our Behavior

What is meaningful about the “Reflective Cycle” is that it is not limited to the leader’s internal reflection. The “Reflective Cycle” can be used throughout the process of forming and developing the roles and responsibilities of all components of the school “team”. In fact, only through a reflective process can proper definitions of individual roles and responsibilities emerge.

The four steps to the “Roles and Responsibilities Reflective Cycle” are:



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My Three Things

1. **One thing I wish I would have done differently my first year:** is recognize the talents and abilities of my staff. I felt it was my responsibility to do everything. It truly is a team effort.
2. **One thing I was glad I did my first year:** was reshaping the culture of the school by building strong collaborative teams with systems in place to monitor students’ progress. We also created new school logos and t-shirts. Everyone felt a sense of purpose and vision.
3. **One thing every principal should know/do:** is build relationships with all stakeholders. This is vitally important to the long term success of the principal and the school.

1. **Building Awareness:** How aware are we of our goals, expectations, and needs? Do we collectively believe we can achieve those goals? Do we individually think of other members of our team as capable of achieving those goals and expectations, and of meeting those needs?
2. **Working with Intentionality:** What is our plan for addressing this? Have we collectively discussed what each individual can and should contribute to the overall strategy?
3. **Assessing Our Impact:** Have we achieved commitment, consensus, or compliance with the stated expectations? Can the administration, coaches, and staff clearly articulate the distinct differences between each group's roles and responsibilities?
4. **Becoming Responsive:** Is there a formal process for goal attainment evaluation that provides for opportunities to adjust our practices? How do we adapt our communication plan as we analyze and understand our results? Are we celebrating our wins?

Ultimately, what you will undoubtedly notice about either “Reflective Cycle” is that it is less about defining for you what roles and responsibilities are required of the various members of your team, but more about empowering you to develop a process that allows you to live out the principle of **servant leadership** (August) through an active process that helps the **functioning team you have built** (November) to commit to the roles and responsibilities collectively determined and/or understood. Leaders must understand their own roles and responsibilities to enhance student learning effectively!

Hall, P., & Simeral, A. (2017). *Creating a culture of reflective practice: Building capacity for schoolwide success*. ASCD.

Maxwell, J. C. (2007). *The 21 irrefutable laws of leadership: Follow them and people will follow you* (10th anniversary ed.). Thomas Nelson.

Questions for Reflection:

Based on this month's topic.

1. What steps can I take to gauge better how my team perceives my leadership?
2. Am I aware of the dynamics among my staff and how their relationships with each other influence their belief in our school's vision? How can I assess these dynamics more effectively?
3. What specific behaviors or communication strategies can I adopt to foster stronger, more meaningful relationships with my faculty and staff to support our shared goals?
4. How frequently do I seek feedback from my staff to evaluate the effectiveness of my leadership in building trust and teamwork? What methods can I use to measure the impact of my relationship-building efforts? What could this look like?
5. How can I use the Reflective Cycle to help my staff collaboratively define their roles and responsibilities, fostering ownership and commitment to student outcomes?
6. What processes can I implement to ensure my team regularly evaluates our collective progress toward goals, celebrates successes, and addresses challenges?