



Leadership Development

Anywhere, Anytime

Practical Tips for School Leaders – #27

July 2, 2020

Mentoring and Emotional Health

Why is it so important to have mentors as we travel life's journey? One critical reason is because both our professional and personal life throws us curves. As prepared as we are, we never know what the day will bring. One of the most interesting aspects of school leadership are the challenges and changes which arise each day. Some issues are simple while many more are complex and involve multiple steps to solve the problem or aid a colleague, student, parent, teacher or staff member. When we have an identified mentor to consult, they are able to guide us through those critical times.

Have you thought about your Board of Directors? We all have them: friends, family members, teachers or coworkers we know we can trust when we need to talk through a problem or issue. We know they will provide the guidance we need to make the crucial decisions in work or in life. A mentor serves as a trusted guide on the side. As it has been said by others "a mentor may serve us for a reason, a season or for a lifetime." Who are your mentors? Who do you trust will guide you in accordance with your core beliefs? Who are those who have the integrity to maintain your confidences?

Whose Board of Directors do you sit on? Mentoring is a reciprocal relationship as both parties benefit by the interactions and the powerful exchange of ideas. As a mentor you may be able to help another person steer their course when they may feel rudderless. You may be able to anchor a colleague or a friend when they feel unmotivated, undervalued or overwhelmed by the task. Mentors can assist if we face social emotional issues ourselves which may impair our ability to support others. Who reaches out to you for sustenance? Who do call you when you need guidance or a thought partner?

When you engage with your mentor or a colleague reaches out for your guidance, do you get as much from the conversation as they do? Are you able to sit back and listen with empathy, seeking to understand their dilemma without trying to fix it for them? Do your mentors listen reflectively to you? Reciprocal mentoring can be a learning opportunity and has the potential to build the capacity of both parties. A rich conversation with a mentor can relieve stress and reduce anxiety by providing an opportunity to give voice to thoughts. It also helps by giving us an opportunity to talk about our practice, how we approach issues, and maintain personal/professional balance.

As an instructional leader you are expected to be the pillar that everyone depends on. This can be an awesome role especially when there are so many unanswered questions. Teachers are asked to be the rock for students. What processes can you implement to assure everyone understands the critical role of mentor as we begin school this fall? How can the mentor relationship be defined and developed to include teacher to teacher, student to student, and teacher to student as an approach to building relationships and healing the impact of the time apart?

Paula Steele