



# Leadership Development

*Anywhere, Anytime*

Practical Tips for School Leaders – #52

January 26, 2021

## *Listen, Learn, and Lead*

*“To lead is to make an emotional connection on a very real and human level in every interaction.”*

Gary Burnisen

Reading *Leadership Now*, January 25, 2021 reminded me that is what educational leaders do each and every day in everything they do. Think about it, how many real connections did you make today in your role? Did you pass over opportunities that you could have learned from or supported someone else? Reflective practice is a skill that can help us identify behaviors we excel in and others we can spend time developing. Knowledge is what we know, and wisdom is acknowledging what we don't know. Why is it important to reflect, listen and learn?

I have heard Simon Sinek say, 'The leader is not the one in charge, the leader is the one who takes care of those in his charge.' Today's blog spoke to capacity building; an educator's job is about assuring that all people in your charge are able to achieve. Think about your interactions today. Did you empower them to be better tomorrow than they were today? How did you respond to the teacher, parent, staff, or student that needed your attention? Did you take their problem on or did you utilize an intentional method for helping them determine their own next steps?

Leaders communicate high expectations, provide a framework for purpose and support others so they can actually see and believe in their ability to achieve, perhaps perform at levels they never imagined. If you had a chauffeur or a person to transport you on the back of their bike would you have a reason to drive or ride a bike? Who taught you to ride a bike? To drive a car. Did they communicate to you they knew you could master the skills? Did you have the will to accomplish both milestone tasks? In your role how do you assure people they can stretch their present abilities to master something new? Do you help them understand that perfection is not expected?

Gary Burnisen, *The Six Degrees of Leadership*, defines six skills that work together in practice to provide leaders skills to help people in their charge reach their potential.

**Anticipation:** The need to know what lies ahead in light of what we know today. To accomplish this we must embrace humility, avoid complacency, and know that others see you as a function. (He defines function as your title, and they may not tell you what you need to hear!) Keep focused on what is going on. What are people thinking, feeling, fearing, saying, and experiencing? What does the present state mean to moving forward? In schools this can change in an instant.

**Navigate:** “Navigating is both direction and velocity. Plan a little, think a lot, decide always.” Leaders need a clear head to assure they are steering and adjusting the course in the right direction to accomplish the vision and the goals.

**Communicate:** What you say is the message of the organization. Tell your stories, connect to people, model for them, and follow through on what you say.

**Listen:** It’s so easy and gratifying to hear the good. Effective leaders seize the chance to listen for what may be difficult to hear. How do you make it safe for people to say what is on their mind or share their true feelings? Do you ask for and accept feedback? Do you appreciate them for that? Recently an executive leader asked me to give him some feedback on a public presentation he had made. I asked him, “Do you want me to be honest?” He said yes. I told him truthfully some things had gone well while providing him honest critique he could use to make his presentations better in the future. He thanked me and said I was the only one who actually gave him constructive feedback. Do you believe that growth is possible when you know the truth? Or do you want everyone to always concur with what you say and do?

**Learn:** Gaining perspective of situations requires us to relate what we know from the past to the unknown of the present situation. In doing so this gives us an opportunity to connect the dots and understand patterns. Learning is built on curiosity. How do you use uncomfortable issues to help you learn?

**Lead:** All of the degrees come together to enable leaders with the skills to effectively lead. In doing so, we must acknowledge our fears, listen, and learn. No one single person has all of the answers, leadership is about the power of the team. Talented people around us will help us grow. Listen, learn, and lead.