**What Are 5 Priorities For Every School Principal?**

By [**Peter DeWitt**](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/) on February 19, 2017 7:30 AM

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**[](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/5%20Priorities.jpg)**

Stepping into a leadership role can be fairly daunting, regardless of whether the person has previous experience or not. A new building or district role can bring in new personnel issues, new initiatives, and a whole new staff to get to know and understand. This all happens when we ask them to be instructional and collaborative leaders. It's a lot to handle and is not for the faint of heart.

A few months ago I posted a couple of blogs on leadership coaching. One was inspired by the thought that if [**coaching is so powerful why aren't more leaders being coached**](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/2016/10/if_coaching_is_so_powerful_why_aren't_principals_being_coached.html). After all, if leadership is so complicated, why don't we offer more coaching opportunities to help those in leadership positions to be more successful in the role. The next blog post on coaching leaders focused on [**5 reasons leaders need coaches**](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/finding_common_ground/2016/10/5_reasons_principals_should_be_coached.html). At the end of that one, I posted a link for readers to fill out a survey asking why they would want to be coached, and what their priorities would be if they were coached.

Strangely enough, school safety did not come up on the list, but I do not believe it's because leaders don't see this as a priority. I believe school safety did not come up because it's something leaders naturally do every day, and they don't need to be coached in that area. It is almost as if for school leaders safety is an innate responsibility they just do without always consciously thinking about it. It's the softer skill stuff they need help with.

Other priorities do weigh heavily on the minds of leaders, and are less innate. It's an interesting topic because whose priority are we talking about? Anyone who has been in a leadership role understands they have priorities and those priorities do not always align with those priorities of the district they are working in. Other times they get hired for a leadership position and have a set of priorities they think they will go after, and realize soon into the new position that those priorities change.

*Can a leadership coach help work through those?*

**5 Priorities of Leaders**Around 300 school leaders filled out the survey naming the priorities they would like a leadership coach to help them with in their roles.  Clearly, this is a small scale survey, but I believe small scale surveys can tell us a lot about the thinking of those who fill them out, and their line of thinking can have implications for leadership at large.

**The 5 priorities that leaders would like to be coached through are:**

**Community Engagement** - What do we want from the community that surrounds our schools? What do they want from us? Community engagement is important and can often be one-sided. Both parties can have a "*What have you for me lately?*" kind of attitude. Leaders are hoping to find out what the community at-large thinks of the school, and they want to figure out more innovative ways to engage them.

**Communication** - We have so many different ways to communicate but it doesn't mean we communicate any better. Social media gives us the opportunity to share our message but it doesn't mean we are engaging in two0sided dialogue as much as we are engaging in one-sided monologue. And let's face it, e-mail seems like a great way to communicate but it's created many problems because of the tone that it can take on that may or may not be there.

Communication is difficult because what we have in our heads doesn't always get clearly articulated in the messages we send out. Leaders want to communicate better, which is why this came up as a priority for them.

**Collective Teacher Efficacy** (1.75) - John Hattie has really helped bring collective efficacy to light, although the research around it has been around for awhile. [**Tschannen-Moran, M., & Barr**](http://wmpeople.wm.edu/site/page/mxtsch/scholarship), M. (2004) write, *Collective teacher efficacy refers to the collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities.*

Leaders who know about Hattie's research are looking for practical ways to build the collective efficacy of their teachers, because research shows that it can have a profound impact on student learning in a school.

**Politics of Distraction**- I took some liberties with this one. Many respondents asked how to get through the politics in their school district. Their hope was that a coach with experience could help leaders negotiate their way through these issues because they may have been through the same thing before.

Where I took liberties is calling it the Politics of Distraction. Hattie, who I work with as a Visible Learning trainer, wrote the [**Politics of Distraction**](http://www.pearson.com/content/dam/corporate/global/pearson-dot-com/files/hattie/150602_DistractionWEB_V2.pdf) in 2015. I think leaders need to understand more than just the politics within their own district, but understand the traps we usually get caught up in when it comes to leadership. Hattie addresses those in his paper. Good coaches can help leaders understand those traps.

**Time management** - Where do leaders spend their time? Where should they spend their time? We often have an idea of what we want to do when we walk into our buildings, and then something happens and we never get to those things were really wanted to do.

As a former principal I made a list of everything that I had to do as a principal. Yes, it was a long list. I went back and highlighted all of the things I liked to do the most. My focus was to try to spend as much time in the highlighted area as possible so that I would feel like I was being proactive instead of reactive in the job.

Time management is definitely an area where a coach may be able to help a leader understand their blind spot and help them spend their time doing things that will make them more collaborative and proactive as leaders.

**In the End**Priorities can be interesting because depending on the leader, the priority may be different. Actually, depending on the building or district, the priority may be different because it may be defined by the situation. The ones from above were the overwhelming favorites of the leaders who filled out the survey on leadership coaching. Regardless of whether leaders have a coach or not, perhaps these five will help them rethink their present situation.

For me, my focus is always on helping leaders become more collaborative so that they can maximize the strengths of the staff they work with, increase collective efficacy, and not feel so isolated within their job. What are your top priorities?

**Peter DeWitt, Ed.D. is the author of several books including**[**Collaborative Leadership: 6 Influences That Matter Most**](http://www.corwin.com/books/Book249055)**(September, 2016. Corwin Press/Learning Forward).** **Connect with** [**Peter on Twitter**](http://twitter.com/PeterMDeWitt)**.**