I am Definitely Going to Take a Course in Time Management, Just as Soon as I Can Fit it into My Schedule - Louis E Boone

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

As a principal the thing that I enjoy the most is watching students learn, but I find myself doing paperwork, responding to emails, disciplining or going to meetings. To be the most effective principal I can be requires me to be in the classroom, but that I find is easier said than done. I also find that as soon as I leave my office I end up talking to the secretaries because they need me to do something before I leave the office, a staff members needs to see me right away, or the. "I am so glad that I see you, as Johnny is not doing his work. Would you mind talking to him?" While these things are important and need attention right away, I still find it hard to get into the classroom as much as possible.

Time management within a principal's daily life is always a struggle. Between trying to find time for classroom visits and also time to tackle the administrative issues that are presented each day, the tasks of a principal can seem daunting. Many times during the day I am called into different situations that doesn't enable me to be a productive instructional leader. I am always good at the beginning of the year about visiting the classrooms, but as the year progresses I get caught up in a whirlwind of situations and I can't make it into the classroom as often as is needed. In thinking back, I have determined that I have fewer discipline issues, case conferences, district meetings, emails, and parent situations to deal with when the school year starts as compared to the rest of the school year. I try to squeeze my visits into my spare moments, but lots of times it just doesn't happen and that is not the sign of a good instructional leader.

Research shows that closing your door for a certain period during the day to tackle those emails and other important tasks can be affective. This is hard for me to do and on the rare occasions that do close my door, it is inevitable that someone will come and knock on the door. It always starts with I am sorry to bother you, but I have a quick question and a half hour later they are walking out the door. While the conversations are meaningful, it has taken up the time that I needed to get those small tasks completed. Sometimes I will tell my secretaries that I am not available and make time during the day to tackle my email, complete reports, call parents or whatever else has to be done to get through the day, but that does not happen often.

It seems that classroom visits get put on the back burner. I always have good intentions but not good follow through. I know the importance of classroom visits and the impact that it has on a student's learning. I also know that when I have a parent meeting or a case conference and I can have some input into what I see in the classroom, it has a powerful effect on the conversation.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to track my day and determine a way that I could get into the classrooms at least five hours a week (not including teacher observations).

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered if tracking my daily routines can help me adjust how my time is spent each week and enable me to spend more time visiting classrooms.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wonderings, I started keeping track of how my day was spent. I didn't use anything fancy, but rather wrote things down on scrap paper, post it notes, etc. I needed to know exactly what was causing me to not be able to get into the classrooms on a daily if not weekly basis. Logging my time allowed me to focus on establishing productivity methods that would allow me to actually know how I spend my day versus how I think I spend my day. I was overwhelmed at first with the amount of quick start/stop activities. But, I felt that this was due to focusing on every activity that I did in a day (which Is not an easy task). I knew that I couldn't give up and eventually I started to see ways that I could improve my time each day. I used the insights from time tracking to make a committed choice to prioritize my day based upon tasks that enabled me to reach my goals i.e. spending more time in the classroom.
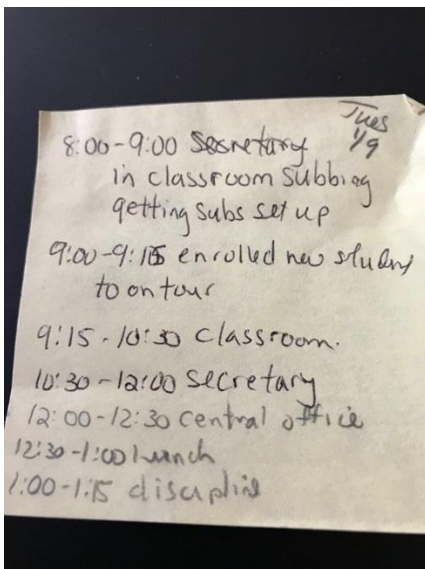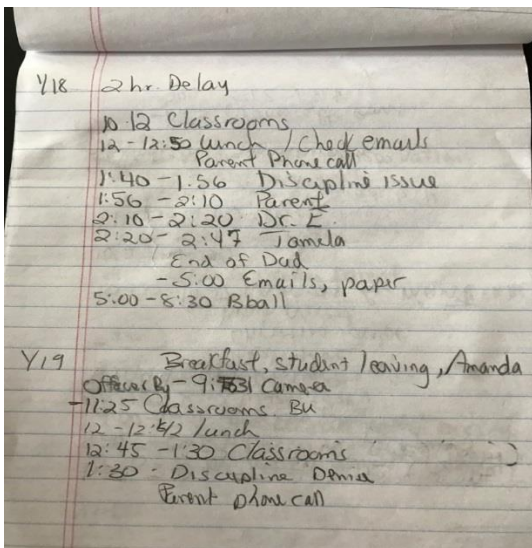
2/5

8:30 - 10:30 504

10:30 - 11:00 misc.

11:00 - 11:30 teacher meet.

11:30 - 12:00 Classroom

12:15 - phone call

12:15 - 12:45 lunch

12:50 - 1:30 - 504

- 2:40 Classrooms

obs. Sarah

12:30 - 1:00 Classrooms

1 - 2 case

2 - 2:30 obs Baker parent

3:00

2/6

8:00 - 8:15 breakfast

8:15 - 8:30

9:00 - 10:00 basketball parent meeting

- 11:00 Discipline CO

- 11:20 Teacher 6th

11:20 - 11:30 Parent

11:30 - 12:15 Walmart

12:15 - 12:30 video of recess/ate

Since tracking my time for three months, I divided up my data into the following categories: Parent phone calls; Case conferences; ISTEP; District initiatives; Discipline; Observing classroom instruction/evaluations; Miscellaneous. I found that parent phone calls accounted for 8% of my time: case conferences 11%; ISTEP was 11% (this was for the first round of ISTEP); District Initiatives 22%; Discipline 25%; Observing classroom instruction/evaluations 17%; and Miscellaneous 6%.

DATA ANALYSIS
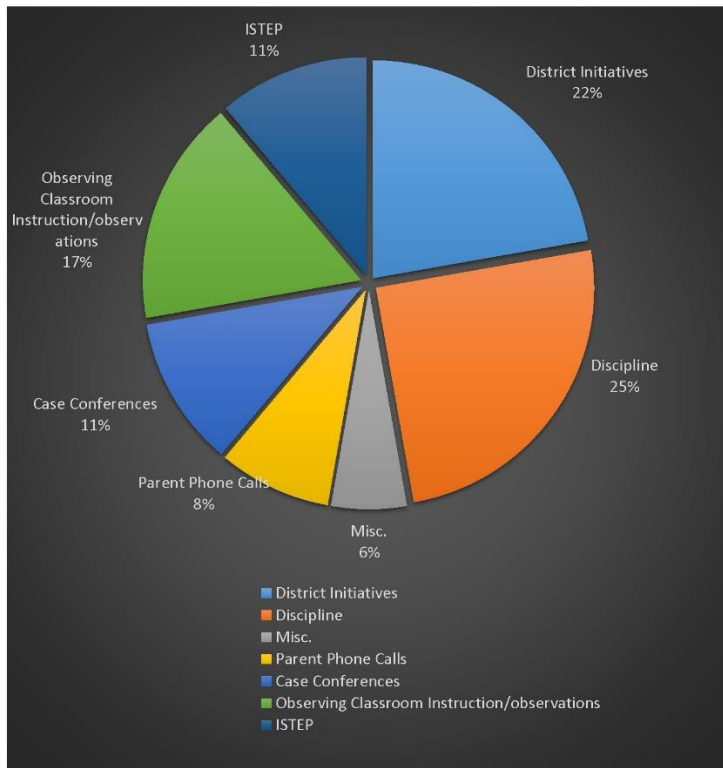
I realized that when my day was not planned out, I was not getting the needed classroom time. When I started to plan my day and block off times for classroom visits, I found that I was more intentional with my visits. Through looking at my data I also noticed that I did a really good job at visiting classrooms in the morning and at the very end of the day. I was seeing the same subject matter being taught by the teachers and I had to find time to vary my visits.

About a year and a half ago I hired two new secretaries. I never realized how much time I was spending on tasks that they could have done. It's vital to put competent people in key roles and delegate maximum responsibility to them. I have a strong urge to do everything themselves and get impatient when others don't do things just right. I needed to curb this tendency. The key to long-range sanity and effectiveness is hiring good people, nurturing them, and refraining from micromanagement. My secretaries are two amazing women who constantly ask me what they need to do to help me. I have found that I can delegate more for them to do and not be such a control freak. I now share my calendar with them so that they can see what I am doing each week or month. I also now put in time for classroom visits. They hold me accountable for that time. They will come to my office and let me know it is time to go, no matter if I have someone in there or I am on the phone. This is my cue to wind things up.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data I learned that with preplanning I can fit in the time to be in the classroom. I also learned that some of the things that prevent me from getting in the classroom can be delegated to others and by rearranging my day I can visit classrooms at various times during the week.

When it comes to time management, I now know that classroom visits can be done as long as I ask for help, prioritize my time and be realistic about what I can accomplish on any given day. When good staff is hired and I put an emphasis on time management, daily life in my school will run smoothly. It's vital to put competent

people in key roles and delegate maximum responsibility to them. I have a strong urge to do everything myself and get impatient when others don't do things just right. This tendency needs to be curbed. The key to long-range sanity and effectiveness is hiring good people, nurturing them, and refraining from micromanagement. This is hard for me to do, but with time and effort I am delegating more of the small stuff to the secretaries, counselor and staff. I have found that the staff is a great resource of knowledge and they like being asked to help.

I am going to schedule my walkthroughs on my calendar and ask my secretary to direct me to get out of the office. I am making a personal rule to obey my calendar at all times. I realize that it might need to be modified at times, but I am only going to deviate from the calendar only for emergencies. I will define emergency with my secretaries, so that all of us know when it's ok for me to be interrupted.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

What I have learned from doing this action research is that I can get into the classroom when it is preplanned. By visiting the classrooms, I am more familiar with the curriculum being taught and the teachers' instructional practices. I can share ideas with other teachers in regards to the best practices that I am seeing in the classroom. I have also had teachers share their teaching practices with others during our school professional development and also our corporation professional development sessions.

I have also learned that I have amazing teachers who are doing great things in the classroom. I love to see them share with me how a project is going or what new strategies they are using. I even have teachers asking me to come to the classroom to watch a non-evaluative lesson.

I have tried to schedule some of my classroom visits during the teacher's collaboration time as well. During this time I am able to answer questions and also gain a knowledge of potential professional development or I can direct them to someone who can help them get the answers they are searching for.

One of my next steps is to analyze the effects of positive notes being left after a classroom visit. Moral can sometimes be low and I am hoping by doing this the teachers will get the affirmation needed to help them continue to move forward. I started doing some of this at the end of last year and as I was cleaning out a classroom from a teacher who had resigned, I found the notes that I have left her. Some of the other teachers have them by their desks. They obviously appreciate the kind words.

Another initiative that I am going to try is setting up a desk in a busy hallway where I can complete paperwork and still be visible to students and staff. In that way, I get my work completed and, at the same time, I am able to observe teachers and manage student behavior.

References:

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