

We See What We Look For

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

I have been in administration for five years, but this is the first year as an elementary school principal. I built a lot of good relationships at my previous school and felt quite lonely in my new position. My academic coordinator reported that teachers were intimidated and a bit scared of me. The teachers shared how they see me and it did not match how I see myself. It was time to build some relationships!

There was a struggle to earn trust and they discussed their struggle to receive positive feedback. How do I get these people to buy in to what I am proposing? How do I get them to trust me? How can I feel I am building positive relationships?

I need to share the amazing instruction and ideas I was seeing in their classrooms. I need to build a relationship with them to earn trust and so that when feedback is given it is seen as helpful and not negative.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered if writing notes to staff would make connections and build relationships.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights on my wonderings, I started writing notes to individual staff members. When doing walkthroughs, I focused on the parts of the instruction or environment that were positive. I was afraid the notes would come off as insincere, especially, since I was doing it as part of a research project. The walkthroughs helped me focus in order for the notes to have genuine praise.

I kept track of who was receiving cards on a calendar. My goal was to write one note a day. However, it was easy to write multiple notes for activities, professional development, and planning that was occurring in the school. I added a staff checklist because I forgot who had already received cards. Unexpectedly, I started keeping a journal also. I noticed that the cards was having a ripple effect. Some other teachers started writing notes and would hang the notes in the classrooms. I wanted to document when I saw that happening.

First, I would write any notes for people that it felt natural to write a card. Second, I would write a check next to their name on the staff on the list. Finally, I would look at the calendar to see who and when I wrote a note. I did not like that I could not measure the impact the notes had, other than noticing who had a card hanging up, said something to me, or wrote other staff notes. It took me the entire quarter to write each staff a letter once.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data two important things I learned include: 1. Writing letters to staff does build relationships. The notes became a conversation starter for conversations (journal). 2. I feel positive about the relationships in the building because I was searching for the positive. It was much easier to write notes because now I was searching for it. I could see the best in everyone (calendar and staff list).

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

I have learned through the project that is not natural for me to give positive feedback. I am always thinking how can we improve and steering us forward, but not taking in consideration the needs of others. I am not sharing what they can do, only what they can't do.

References:

N/A