

# Building Culture...How Can I Achieve More by Doing Less?

By: Cinda Ahlrich, Milan Elementary

Contact: [cinda.ahlrich@milan.k12.in.us](mailto:cinda.ahlrich@milan.k12.in.us)

## **Background That Led to Your Inquiry:**

During the first few months of being a principal, my staff was asked to fill out an IPLI survey about the leadership of our school...Results indicated an area of greatest concern was "Collaboratively develops and implements a shared vision (where we want to be in 3-5 years) and mission (what we do)"

Being a new administrator to our building, my goal was to seek input from professionals (staff), and my desire was to allow their voices to be heard. I began to wonder, how best could I accomplish this?

First, I would need help and input from the professionals in my building to establish a common vision. Knowing that this vision would be difficult to conquer on my own, I decided to empower my staff to work together as teams toward bringing about improvement toward this goal. Also, I understood that providing staff with the opportunities for input and action, I would also be fostering an environment of collaboration and teamwork.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to empower the members of my staff to work toward a common vision of cultural improvement for our school and at the same time, promote a positive moral within our building knowing staff would be more engaged in change if they were given a voice in doing so.

## **Statement of Your Wondering:**

With this purpose of creating and working toward a common vision, I wondered: how could the formation of collaborative teams give my staff greater voice and ownership of cultural outcomes at MES?

Could serving on a MES Action Team improve staff morale?

(Would the formation of MES Action Teams provide me with more time to improve my instructional leadership?)

## **Methods/Procedures:**

Former President, Lyndon Johnson once said, " "There are no problems we cannot solve together, and very few that we can solve by ourselves."

I began to think of all the areas our school could work toward improvement and realized this was too much for one person (myself) to solely conquer.

Milan Elementary was working to become A Leader in Me School. As part of this process, our employees would be forming "action team" groups anyway. I decided to combine this effort with my wondering and sent out an inquiry surveys to staff to find out what action teams they would like to become a part of and if they

would be interested in being a leader of a group. As surveys were returned, the following groups were established:

- Professional Learning
- Student Learning
- Family Learning
- Leadership Environment
- Shared Leadership
- Leadership Events

In addition, I also had six employees to volunteer to lead these groups.

During one of our PLCs, I asked staff to work together to establish a common vision for our school. I guided them through a Leader in Me path finding activity.

PLC Guiding Question:

What is the biggest obstacle our school must work through to accomplish our school Mission Statement. From that activity, it was concluded we needed to create better home to school relationships. Identifying that obstacle helped our teams to have a better vision for school improvement.

### **Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As our action teams ( including all teachers, secretaries, instruction assistants) began to work together, I documented their progress. Some outcomes I began to note from the start included:

- Our staff moral improved as they worked together for the common good.
- Walls of our school were painted with murals and bright colors to make our school more welcoming. (This was done by volunteer staff during their Christmas break and then again during spring break!)
- Parents were invited in to have lunch with their children. (Schedules planned by action group.)
- Special family nights were planned to bring parents and grandparents into our school.
- Parents were better informed about great things happening at school through social media and in the the local newspaper.
- Student jobs were posted, and student applied. We now have student greeters and cafeteria helpers every morning, and the students love helping out!

### **Providing Concluding Thoughts:**

John Maxwell, internationally recognized leadership expert and author numerous book on the subject, shared the following:

“Four Stages of Morale:

Poor Morale----The leader must do everything.

Low Morale---The leader must do productive things.

Moderate Morale---The leader must do difficult things.

High Morale---The leader must do little things.”

I have learned... I can achieve more by doing less.

I learned that by empowering others, I can be a better leader. In working together on action teams, my staff not only carried out some monumental tasks to improve our home/school connection, they also improved the cultural of our building in how it appeared to others and how it changed staff morale. This progress affords me more time to focus on my next wondering...How can I make use of my time to be a better leader for my staff and our school?

**References:**

Maxwell, J.C., 2001. The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.