

Motivation Momentum

By: Beth Waterman, Roachdale Elementary

Contact: bwaterman@nputnam.k12.in.us

Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

As a 29 year administrator, I have seen many changes in education and worked for many educators who have gone on to retire through the years. Along with constant policy changes in education, maintaining a safe culture, politics, and wearing many hats, added stressors from life can really double up the weight that an administrator carries around.

I have witnessed the trap of giving up the fight and just going along with the status quo, counting the days until one can retire. I do not want to be that principal. I want to remain positive, driven, and energized through the last day that I enter the halls of a school.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to learn how to keep the fire of motivation alive in me so that I am successfully leading my school.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered how can I stay as motivated at the end of my career as I was at the beginning of my career?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wonderings, I began by surveying staff at my school. I wanted to know what they felt were triggers to burn-out, how they would recognize burn-out in an administrator, and how this negative attitude would impact the school as a whole.

Next I developed a daily journal. I initially recorded the good, the bad, and the ugly from each day. Eventually I realized I wanted to focus on the positive and began to gear my journaling in this direction. I found an accountability partner that worked with me. We each shared a positive from our day and on days that the positive was hard to find, we helped to find it within the other person.

Next I began researching books, blogs, and articles referencing administrator burn-out and how to stay positive. This offered many thoughts in changing mindset and setting new intentional habits. A staff team building exercise re-energized my staff in December. Smart Team Building offered a free trial. Staff were selected for teams with different country themes. They had tasks to complete through the week and culminated in a staff breakfast and fun competition. Staff response was overwhelming and laughter was heard throughout the building this week.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, three important things I learned include: 1) There is a direct correlation between a positive leader and a positive school. 2) "If you realize your job is weighing too heavily on your body, mind, and heart - take action." 3) "Burnout occurs when our heart is one place and our work is in another."

Teachers reported in the staff survey that they identify a burned-out leader when they hear constant complaints, no regard for how people are treated, increase in discipline issues, stagnant culture, and lack of support. Triggers that can lead to educator burnout are: Lack of parent support, testing scores, teachers under performing, daily grind of an administrator, not feeling supported by staff, too many changes and demands made on administrators at once, change, tough years in life, and stress. The results of a less engaged administrator include other staff members try to take over leadership roles, scores drop, issues are overlooked. All of this information confirmed that the leader plays a huge role in the culture of the building. Evidence of stressors weighing heavy on my mind, body, and heart came through in the pages of my journal. Items such as community members initiating a claim involving the ACLU, to lack of available staff and substitutes, extreme student behaviors, and a difficult school board were all words that were written as concerns in my journal. It was time to take action.

Finally, the awareness of where my heart was has led me to my third learning statement. With three siblings in latter stages of Muscular Dystrophy, my husband working away from home during the week, and our church family going through a difficult split, my heart was certainly not in the same place as my work. I struggled with feelings of guilt with not assisting my one healthy sister overseeing all of the needs of my siblings and our elderly mom. Separating from my husband each week created a lonely feeling at home. The strength that I gained from serving in what was once a very alive center in our community left me longing to be in a different place.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Through this action research project, I have learned that my outlook and attitude has a direct impact on students, staff, and parents in my school. When I am positive, my teachers are more positive. During the purposeful team building activity, there was so much laughter and energy in the building and it was contagious. Students were curious about what the teachers and staff were doing. One staff member said she felt like part of a family when she left school at the end of the week.

Knowing that my administrative leadership plays a great role in keeping the ship on course, I have to maintain a positive attitude. I continue to seek for the bright spots in my day. I keep focused on our school statement - "Every Child, Every Day, Whatever it Takes." I share a positive statement of affirmation weekly with my staff. I also put into practice, the idea, control what you can, let go of what you can't. I have learned to reflect more, take time for family, and build a support system around me. Mac Anderson said, "Great leadership usually starts with a willing heart, a positive attitude, and a desire to make a difference." I have all of those components within me.

References:

- Brock, B. L., & Grady, M. L. (2002). *Avoiding burnout: A principals guide to keeping the fire alive*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Pierce, S. (2014, March 12). 10 Ways to Stay Motivated When Negativity Seems All Around [Web log post]. Retrieved January 2018.