The D.O.T. Approach: Effective Delegation, Organization, and Time Management

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

I joined IPLI at the beginning of my second year as a principal of an elementary school in Kokomo, Indiana. After completion of my first year, I was truly exhausted and overwhelmed.

In year one I was spending 10-12 hours a day at school and working on the weekends. In addition to my new role and a steep learning curve, some of my struggles were due to the fact I was given a new secretary (she had never been an elementary secretary before), a new lead custodian, a new behavior facilitator, and I had to hire 5 new teachers. This was a whole lot of new!

At the start of year two, more new continued…new assistant principal, 4 new teachers, and new support staff. I knew my effectiveness as a leader was not where I wanted it to be. This led me to reflect on what I could do differently increase my productivity. Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to identify the barriers to more effective use of my time.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered what could I do to increase my effectiveness as a building leader and decrease my stress and work load? My research led me to what I call "The DOT Approach." This includes effective delegation, organization, and time management.

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wonderings, I began to look closely at how I spent time each day and how I could make changes to become more efficient using it. I started my research with looking at what responsibilities I could delegate. I was guilty trying to do too much by myself. I had never had a secretary. Receptionist, or assistant principal and determined I was not sharing the work load effectively. I began my research by requesting a job description for each position from our Human Resources Department. I learned that there were several responsibilities I was doing myself that I should ask them to begin doing versus doing it myself. I began to identify tasks that others could do to share the work load. I met with receptionist, secretary, instructional coach and assistant principal to determine job responsibilities and tasks I needed them to do. All were willing to help in any way they could. Next I reached out to teacher leaders on our grade level teams and worked with them to take on some additional responsibilities with our PBIS program. I now recognize I shouldn't and can't do everything…running a school is a team sport!

Next I looked closely at my personal organization at work. I was struggling to find items I needed and was overwhelmed with piles of paper on my desk. Effective organization means knowing what to do, when to do it, and how to access resources. After reading Smarter, Faster, Better by Charles Duhigg, I reflected on what needs I had and how to meet them. I came up with the following way to improve my personal organization. First, I created schedules for all weekly and monthly meetings. Then I began to use my Outlook Calendar more intentionally to track meetings and set reminders to keep me on time and on task. I gave my secretary,

instructional coach, and assistant principal access to my calendar to prevent double booking of my time (this was happening frequently). I then committed to setting up files (not piles) to organize meeting notes and artifacts, as well as 3-ring notebooks for meeting agendas, student attendance data, and the building budget expenditures. I completed this work over spring break and my end of the school year was more successful than the year before!

Last, I examined my time management. I focused on The 5 W's…who, what, when, where, and why. I determined that it was possible (and necessary) to reduce number of meetings I was having with my teams. We went to every other week and began to use an agenda to stay on task. I also worked really hard to set aside time daily for email work. I decided to remove email alerts to stop diving down rabbit holes. I started to schedule protected time for observations and projects so I was able to get into classrooms to work with teachers and students. My secretary now knows not to interrupt this important time in my schedule. I am still working on making reasonable "To-Do" lists for the day. I print out my daily schedule to keep me on-task and on-time for meetings. Each morning I strive to remember Covey – "plan your priorities, don't prioritize your plan."

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, three important things I learned include:
- Learning Statement One: Delegating allows others to share important tasks and creates opportunities for them to learn and grow.
- Learning Statement Two: Effective organization is knowing what to do and when to do it.
- Learning Statement Three: Make reasonable goals for your time each day and focus on what is most important.

Delegating allows other to share important tasks and creates opportunities for them to learn and grow. More work gets done and creative ideas are shared when everyone works as a team. Problem solving as a group becomes an expectation and work is no longer done in isolation. I found that sharing the work load was liberating and my team was ready for it! They were proud to be part of projects and even offered to be the lead on several. I know longer feel like I need to do everything myself and look forward to sharing the load with my team. My data for this learning is through observation and completing staff evaluations. We had a 10% increase in teachers completing their leadership points before the end of the school year.

Effective organization is knowing what to do and when to do it. Schedules allow important meetings to occur with the staff and are needed to complete the job. I learned that Outlook (or Google) Calendars are an important tool to keep an administrator organized. You can communicate with staff efficiently when you use these programs and keep track of important meetings and due dates. Reminders are easy to set and keep a busy principal on track.   Organized files and binders allow you to find what you need quickly and effectively. I pledge to have files, not piles!   Below is a photo of my newly organized filing cabinet. I am able to find what I need for meetings and projects quickly and easily.

Make reasonable goals for your time each day and focus on what is most important. I worked really hard to set aside time daily for email work…then stick to it! I found making reasonable "To-Do" lists for the day was easier said than done and is still a work in progress. Referring to my daily schedule helped keep me on-task and on-time for meetings. It also showed others when I was busy.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

I have learned a tremendous amount about myself during this action research project. I know I have areas to continue to improve. I want to do a better job of collecting data to drive my decision making. I need to find ways that are simple and effective. However, throughout the year I have learned the following:
- Stay focused each day
- Know what your priorities are and plan them
- Allow others to work beside you…doing it all diminishes your effectiveness
- Keep refining agenda forms to maintain accurate records of our work
- Do a little filing every day so you don't have a huge pile to do at the end of the week
- Give staff a voice and purpose to work together towards a common goal

Every day I try to remember why I started this journey…to make a difference in the lives of children!

References:

Duhigg, C. (2016). Smarter, Faster, Better: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business. New York: Random House

Dana, N.F. (2009). Leading with Passion and Knowledge.   Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin