

A Reflection of The Leader in Me

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After reading *The Leader in Me* by Stephen Covey, I have taken away many useful thoughts and applications related to my classroom teaching, school behavior, and daily life. I hope to gain the ability to be a better person overall and to teach my students to be this way also. I want to be more responsible with my time and talents and show this to my students through modeling. My students will then be able to take more responsibility in my classroom by doing many of the routine tasks, making them feel like they have a place and teaching them life skills.

Proper behavior, not only the disciplined behavior that is required in school, but life behavior seems to be lacking in our young people. I see the need for change in behavior in not only our school, but also many public schools. The description of typical schools (“stories of bullying, rude manners, low test scores, disrespect, lack of discipline, violence, low graduation rates, mediocre teachers, ...”) is what I have come to expect as a description of almost all public schools. While we do need to improve some of the behaviors that occur in our school, both with the students and the staff, I don’t feel that every example given above is an accurate description of our school. We have excellent, hard-working teaching in our district, but the quality of their instruction and abilities is often overlooked when faced with the difficulties that our students bring from home. When reporting on public schools, though, the media many times focuses on topics that are unbecoming to us, so this is what the general public believes to be true.

I feel that “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” are characteristics that all people should have. If we really think about it, we could probably conclude that these are things that would have been, for the most part, general norms of society in past generations. It was just expected that people would act correctly in society and be

productive in their lives. It was not something that was taught as a special program or something that would need special emphasis. That being said, we are all well aware that children in today's society are not taught the values or the skills that they need from their families or homes. Therefore, as with almost everything else, it becomes our responsibility to instill these ideals in our children.

When considering whether or not to implement *The Leader in Me* system, I think it could be a challenge on several levels. We, as teachers, have much skepticism about change, new programs, and/or new ways of doing things in our school, but this comes validly. There have been many occurrences where we seem to jump on to a new bandwagon, (good, bad, or otherwise), but then rarely get to see the program implemented as directed or for a long enough time to see it through to its full potential. I had an acquaintance once tell me that is called "S.O.S." or Shiny Object Syndrome. Like a small child or a pet, when a new program (the shiny object) is dangled, we move toward it because it is pretty and shiny. But not long after, a different shiny object is dangled in another direction and we all move that way, forgetting about the first shiny object. We need to pick one object and stick with it. *The Leader In Me* is a prime example of a system that could work in our district. This may lead us to some of the hope that is mentioned in the book. That being said, the culture and atmosphere of A.B. Combs is something that I would love to see at Bucyrus Elementary and would be happy to take part in creating.

As the book stated, "Times have changed", and have they ever. Another difficulty that we may face is that many teachers, especially the old-school types, will have a difficult time shifting their idea of what it means to be a teacher. A drastic change

from past generations is what teachers are expected to teach in schools. In the past, memorization and factual knowledge were of utmost importance, and those children who were good at this did well in post-school careers. Not only are we expected to teach them to “know” things, we also have to teach them be able to do something with their knowledge, to live and get along with others, and to be a whole person. That is the basic premise of current education. We are supposed to teach the “whole child” to be a productive part of today’s society by instilling in them the skills that they need to succeed with some sort of moral compass.

Our kids need to know how to do things, figure things out, collaborate, and in general, be human. They no longer need to know a bunch of facts and then be able to recall these on demand. When we have spent so much time thinking teaching is one thing, and then come to find out is really another, it will most likely take a paradigm shift to make this successful.

So, that is a huge charge that is placed on the on teachers. Is it fair that we have to basically raise the children that come to our classes because they don’t get what they need at home? No. Is it fair that the general society expects us to do this? No. Is any of this fair especially in the face of state-mandated testing and ridiculous evaluation requirements? No. Is there anything we can do about this? No. Is this what is best for children? Yes. Would we want this for our own children? Yes. And so we proceed. We proceed by reading books such as this one that help us redefine our purpose and show us how to do so. We proceed by reading and evaluating the latest research and then make a determination if it will be valuable in our situation.

It's nice to see how when teaching/training children in the 7 habits, it is, as the book says, ubiquitous. When we have so many requirements to our teaching and tasks that we must complete each day, thinking of adding another thing to teach is simply not an option. So when the 7 habits are worked into the regular routine of the day or into an already-prepared lesson, it makes the institution of the 7 habits much easier and more tolerable. While the 7 habits can be taught within the means of a prepared lesson, it can be taught as a skill by itself through a direct lesson about that specific skill. Or it can be modeled by the teacher or other students showing how specific skills can be used. This is good that the skills can be taught in multiple ways and that there is flexibility in how we as teachers can present them. This is feasible for us to be able to do.

In my music class, I can implement the 7 habits by, as the book suggests, choosing music that is "inspiring, uplifting, and reinforces positive traits." I can also present discuss the traits that refer to interdependence when the students work in groups. When the students practice for performances, I often talk about students being leaders and taking responsibility for their parts as I cannot do it for them. There are many ways that I can institute the habits in my classroom.

When looking at the entire school, a fairly simple step to encouraging the 7 habits would be to create a highly effective habitat. I think that we have select pods of highly effective habitats in our school, but as a whole, I am not certain that we are. We have very much of the reactive culture that was discussed in the reading. We really need to focus on the culture-by-design approach and apply the 7 habits. One the easiest things to do would be to focus on the physical environment to change the visual culture of our school. It would not be that hard to do, although I do like the idea of children making

most of the displays. This would take much more time than if teacher-created displays would be used, but I think it would be well worth the wait. I do think, though, that to get things started, we as teachers should begin to make displays for hallway. These need not be permanent.

I also like the idea of using a common language. If a common language were used throughout the whole building, it would make my job as a specialist so much easier. Currently, we have almost each individual classroom with different rules, guidelines, and buzzwords. With 30 classrooms, that makes a lot of different procedures for us to remember. If we would all use the same words and policies building-wide, life would be so much easier.

I think shared leadership is also important. No one is really going to feel valued or show any kind of ownership over a situation where they have no input. When students are looked toward to make important decisions (or at least help in making important decisions), such as when the children helped to interview teacher candidates, this shows the ultimate shared leadership and trust in them. I could give children more leadership roles in my classroom. By expecting them to be more responsible, it would actually alleviate some of the things that are on my plate.

Valuing children's opinions and ideas is also very important. When children come up with ideas and share them with us, I think many times we blow them off as not even worthy of consideration. In my music classroom if a child has enough courage to express an idea to me, I could at least try it. Then if the idea did not work, that would be a good teachable moment to discuss why it did not work and what could be changed to

make it better. Usually, I feel like I don't even have enough time to complete my planned lesson.

The home/school relationship seems as though it will be one of the most important factors to reaching not only our children, but also the community. It also seems as this will be one of the hardest things to do, as our children learn many bad habits and how to tolerate and live in a culture of poverty from their parents. Most have no long-term vision or even the hope for a different future. Perhaps bringing parents into the schools for special "events" such as our Breakfast Buddy program would be one way that we could easily reach parents. Since so many parents are free during the regular school day due to lack of employment, perhaps they could be enticed to come to *Leader in Me* events. Maybe if they see the responsibility that their children are given in schools, they will allow them to do so at home.

When looking at the three aspects of the home environment that promote the leader in me, I again wonder if this is feasible for the parents and families in this community. While the ideas about "what you see, what you hear, and what is felt" are all very positive and most likely impactful to the family, it seems like many of our families would not take time to focus on these. Many of our families are dysfunctional. This part of *The Leader in Me* system will be a large task for us to try to undertake.

I think that trying to start using *The Leader In Me* system here in Bucyrus will be well worth the effort, but as such, it will need to be a valiant effort on the part of all involved. It will need to be implemented with true fidelity and not just talked about in this manner. It will to be given time to take hold and grow into its full potential. The staff needs to realize that it will not happen overnight and does not have an ending point

at which we no longer need to use it. If implemented correctly, I believe it could have a profound impact on not only our school and our children, but also our community.