

Preface

The principalship has become more challenging over the past ten years. Many school districts have looked at support systems such as mentoring and coaching to assist neophytes through their first year as principal. Best practices and research have been reviewed, and successful mentor programs have been developed across the nation that address growing concerns about principal recruitment and turnover. “After five years in the district, one-third of all principals hired had left that district,” Dr. Susan Villani (2006, p. 9) cites the Denver Board of Education. Other districts across the nation can relate to similar statistics. Again as cited by Villani, the Institute for Educational Leadership identifies research that supports the theory that the principalship is in crisis, as does the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2001). Districts must make a concerted effort to address principal attrition by developing a process that encourages and supports experienced educators in pursuit of principal positions. Mentoring can be a significant segment of the total package needed to recruit, support, and retain effective principals.

In Albuquerque, this process began with a small group of principals reflecting on their first year as new principals. They recognized that their cohorts were the only means of support available in a nonthreatening atmosphere. This was their motivation for pursuing a formalized support system for new principal appointees. This group evolved into the Extra Support for Principals (ESP) advisory board.

The advisory board realized that a beginning principal comes into a new school setting having to adapt to all the responsibilities the predecessor may have handled with ease. New principals are aware that a district will have expectations that may include a variety of concerns, such as improving curriculum and test scores, student safety, or enhancing school climate. There may be a need to provide extra support in the areas of budget, instruction, state standards, or evaluation procedures for the newly appointed administrator. The Kentucky Association of School Administrators and the Appalachian Education Laboratory identified time management as the single most requested in-service topic by new

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principals (Villani, 2006, p. 7). Poor time management can become a contributing factor that can impact the health, mental state, and success and progress of the new administrator. Stress can lead to issues that may contribute to principal attrition rates. The Albuquerque Public Schools (APS) ESP advisory board embarked on a quest to provide a mentor program for new principals that would provide a **safe** environment, a **simple** format, and a professional **support** plan to minimize the feeling of isolation that new principals can experience. In the total support concept, I address district concerns while providing unencumbered mentoring for the new administrator as illustrated with the Venn diagram in Chapter 3. The “safe, simple, and supportive” concept evolved out of those concerns. This approach for extra support gives the mentor an opportunity to assist the new principal with growth and development as the mentee becomes an effective leader. It also provides opportunities to support and advise on district mandates, management, or operational issues. I address stress and burnout in Chapter 10.

As coordinator for a principal mentoring program in APS for the past twelve years, I have had the opportunity to share and exchange ideas with school districts, individual principals, doctoral students, researchers, consultants, and university professors across the nation. Although there are many successful mentor programs, increasing numbers of these programs have a brief lifespan of no more than three to five years. Why are these programs vulnerable? And, conversely, why has the program in APS lasted twelve years? Patterns emerge that have negative or positive impacts on programs. Certain established practices become predictors of success or failure of a program. I review these predictors at the end of Chapter 10.

Principal Mentoring: A Safe, Simple, and Supportive Approach will present successes and concerns of mentor program development. Mentoring is addressed on a supportive and comprehensive level. Additional mentoring approaches are recommended throughout the book. A significant concept of this book is the focus on the relationship between the mentee and the mentor. Mentees are often reminded that the objective of the program is not to create extra work and hardship, but rather to create an environment in which the new principal is safe and supported through a simple process. The book will be devoted to establishing and developing that safe, simple, and supportive approach. Chapters 3 and 4 will focus on the development and implementation of mentoring relationships. Chapter 10 focuses on some practices that might have a negative impact on the successes of a mentor program, and Chapter 11 encourages reflections on principal recruitment and retention.

Again, the purpose of this book is to share information about a successful mentor-mentee model and to provide insight that will stimulate

innovative ideas and creative thinking within and among school districts, large or small, rural or isolated. My primary goal is to emphasize “how to,” rather than “research shows.”

W.O.W.

Words of Wisdom will be injected on occasion into this document based upon the personal experiences of the author from the inception of his involvement with mentoring programs over the past 12 years.

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