School Business Leader

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FOR SCHOOL BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS

INSIDE . . .

Share Your Leadership Expertise

Do you have a story to tell? A successful practice to share? Share your experience and your expertise with your colleagues by submitting an article for ASBO International's magazine, *School Business Affairs*.

We're looking for articles on such topics as:

- Facilities Management
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FAMOUS LEADERS

"Good leaders must communicate vision clearly, creatively, and continually. However, the vision doesn't come alive until the leader models it."
—John Maxwell, American author, speaker, and leadership coach.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Conscious Listening: Why You Should Try It and How

John Keyser, principal and founder of the coaching firm Common Sense Leadership, says that an organization's results will be affected greatly by its organizational culture. If employees are not fully engaged, enthusiastic, collaborative, and proud of their work and company, and respect their boss and senior management, their contributions tail off and results become inconsistent.

People want to feel valued and be heard. Keyser says as leaders, it is our responsibility to listen patiently and try to understand and learn from others—we need to understand the importance of "conscious listening." If we don't, we do not deserve our staff's trust and respect.

Conscious listening is a major reason Keyser advocates for more women holding senior leadership positions. Generally speaking, Keyser argues, women are better listeners than men and conscious listening means a great deal to the culture and the spirit of people in the workplace.

Here are Keyser's nine tips to becoming an accomplished, conscious listener:

1. Commit to listen to understand and learn.
2. Put the other person at ease; maybe sit side by side rather than across a desk.
3. Lean forward, give comfortable eye contact, and a slight smile.
4. Quiet your mind and stay fully present!
5. Give affirmations such as "Okay," "I see," "Makes sense."
6. Ask clarifying questions.
7. Ask if you could repeat what you've heard to ensure you have it right.
8. Use silence. Don't rush to fill the space; it's likely the person will continue, and you'll be able to deepen your learning. "Let silence do the heavy lifting."
9. Take notes to help you remember and, even more important, to show respect for the other person. Show that you appreciate their thoughts and opinions.

Conscious listening takes commitment and practice, but improving this soft skill will increase our effectiveness as leaders. It will also deepen and strengthen our relationships, and that greatly benefits our quality of life!

Adapted from "How to Be a Conscious Listener—What it Means for Us and Others," by John Keyser. Common Sense Leadership, http://commonsenseleadership.com, June 2014.

ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BUSINESS OFFICIALS INTERNATIONAL

What do you do to de-stress? Email your stress management tips to Elleka Watts, ewatts@asbointl.org.

8 Secrets to Managing Millennials in the Workplace

Born between 1980 and 2000, members of the Millennial generation are well-educated, sociable, talented, collaborative, and achievement-oriented. However they also enjoy (and expect) leisurely activities and instant gratification, and have higher expectations in the workplace than any previous generation. Here's some advice to lead this group in a way that will maximize their output in your organization.

1. **Provide structure, leadership, and guidance.** This generation was super-scheduled as children. They need clearly outlined expectations and their managers to lead by example—just as their parents did.

2. **Encourage their "can-do" attitude.** Millennials reach for the stars. Give them some challenges and let them work autonomously. Then evaluate their progress, make suggestions, and be available to help if needed.

3. **Respect their ideas.** They may be young, but they still have good ideas. Coach them on the most appropriate ways to express themselves within your particular environment.

4. **Use technology.** They know how to use technology and will develop innovative ways of using it well before it is accepted in the workplace. Give them the tools they need, monitor their use, and let them go.

5. **Establish work groups or task forces.** Developing task forces and varying Millennials' routines will inspire them to be better employees. If we isolate them in cubicles, they will wither and die.

6. **Provide some outlets for spontaneity.** Millennials are hard-working multitaskers, so it's okay to offer them some opportunities to be social. Simply moving a task force meeting to a local coffee shop is something they'll appreciate.

7. **Be friends.** They want to get to know us and want us to get to know them. Ask them what they like to do; share information about your hobbies and family. Reach out to them on a different level.

8. **Teach patience.** Millennials generally lack a realistic idea about how long it takes to achieve real goals and how slowly organizations and people respond to change. Coach them and coax them along the way.

Adapted from "Making Sense of Millennials," by Nan Wodarz, Ed.D., School Business Affairs, *July/August 2008, p. 44.*

WHAT HAVE YOU MISSED ON THE GLOBAL SCHOOL BUSINESS NETWORK?

Are you prepping for your Certified Administrator of School Finance and Operations® (SFO®) exam? Or maybe you already took the test, but didn't quite hit the mark and want to try again? Don't stress! Your peers are swapping study guides, testing tips, practice quizzes, and other resources on ASBO International's interactive membership community, the Global School Business Network, at **asbointl.org/Network**.

Don't miss out on these popular study materials, courtesy of Brenda Burkett, ASBO vice president and CFO of Norman Public Schools in Oklahoma, and the New England ASBO Leadership Academy.

Please note that while these resources may serve as a helpful guide for SFO exam preparation, using them does not guarantee you'll pass the exams themselves.

- **SFO Certification Exam Presentation Slides.** Features information about the exams, glossary terms, and other key facts to remember before you take the tests.
- **SFO Quiz.** A practice quiz to help you study with true or false and multiple-choice questions.
- **SFO Answer Sheet.** An answer key to the SFO practice quiz to check your school business knowledge.

Share Your ASBO Membership Story

**Erin Green
(Member since 1992)
Greendale School
District, Greendale, WI**

"ASBO has made a huge difference in my career and in my district. ASBO has provided the professional development and professional network to allow me the chance to develop my skills and knowledge base in order to let me lead at the state and national levels. This leadership journey has resulted in some very worthy programming in our district, such as an onsite health clinic for staff and students and families, free professional counseling and therapy for staff and students and families, a National Green Ribbon award from the U.S. Department of Education for the district in 2014 highlighting our work in sustainability, an Award of Excellence from the EPA in 2010 for healthy indoor learning environments, and an ASBO Pinnacle Award in 2012. The story is not over, as the impacts of ASBO will continue long after I have left this work. And isn't this the goal?"

Knowing When to Disengage and Recharge

Educational leaders are tasked with guiding and inspiring others to accomplish their organization's goals, while simultaneously enforcing policy and encouraging cohesion and collaboration. They must communicate clearly and stirringly, and maintain high levels of efficiency and focus across a huge variety of tasks. All of this responsibility, in the context of a chaotic and challenging educational leadership environment, means that most leaders do not prioritize time for renewal and recharge themselves. It is the last thing on the to-do list and, frequently, the thing they don't get to—with important consequences for the work.

We recently consulted with a superintendent who decided she would cease emailing anyone on her senior team or within her organization from 9 p.m. Friday night until 7 p.m. Sunday night. She was reluctant, but agreed to try. She herself had a great first weekend (sent us text pictures of herself fishing and going to a baseball game—not working!), and was surprised to observe on reflection later that week that her staff had lost little productivity by not receiving emails from her during the weekends, and seemed to arrive on Monday morning much more focused and ready to engage with the challenges of the week.

We understood the superintendent's sense of urgency, and her reluctance to reconsider this practice. "How do I communicate my sense of urgency?" she asked us. "The work requires this." But overvaluing attention to our professional lives and

undervaluing rest and time off for our personal lives, and the lives of those we lead, can have debilitating long-term professional consequences. This superintendent had a chronic problem with turnover on her senior staff. With some changes to her management habits, she was able to retain much more of her staff in the following year as the jobs in her organization became more sustainable.

Arianna Huffington, founder of *The Huffington Post* and a vociferous crusader for new definitions of cultural and personal success, said: "If we don't redefine success, the personal price we pay will get higher and higher. Right now, America's workplace culture is practically fueled by stress, sleep deprivation, and burnout." At *The Huffington Post*, for instance, she installed nap rooms. At first, employees were hesitant to use them, but now they're always booked.

We know that many educational leaders could use a nap room, but we see few organizational cultures where this would be acceptable—yet.

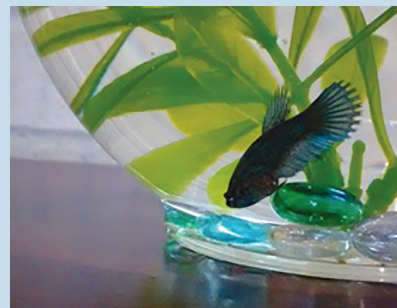• •

"By three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is bitterest." — Confucius.

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Although many of us are charged with leading learning organizations, and learning theory describes the importance of reflection for consolidation and scaffolding the next level of insights, culturally in education we tend not to create pauses for think-

ing and feeling in our learning and leading, or do so only superficially. "By three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third by experience, which is bitterest," Confucius said. We believe in experiential learning, but we think instituting real reflection time as a cultural practice is critical; we see the bitter results of too much rushing and too much effort flung in too many unfocused directions. Mindful practices begun at the individual leader level have a way of echoing out from the leader, creating opportunities in meetings and in conversations for groups to slow down, to take a moment to tap the wisdom of the assembled, to move work to the next level by reinforcing (through thoughtful pausing) what is wise and powerful and helpful.

Adapted excerpt from The Mindful School Leader, Practices to Transform Your Leadership and School, *by Valerie Brown and Kirsten Olson. Corwin Publishing, 2015. Chapter 1; pp. 26–28.*

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Lewin's Leadership Styles: Which One Do You Use?

In 1939, a psychologist named Kurt Lewin conducted a series of leadership experiments and identified how three different leadership styles can affect the way a group performs.

Which of Lewin's leadership styles best fits your natural leadership approach?

1. **Authoritarian Leadership.** Authoritarian leaders make decisions without consulting others. They provide clear expectations for their subordinates and expect obedience and loyalty from them. These autocratic leaders create and enforce the rules, and they take sole responsibility for all decisions and their followers' performance.
   - **Pros:** This style allows for rapid decision making and is useful when group input would not affect a decision's results. It's also useful when others lack the skills, motivation, or consensus to make a decision.
   - **Cons:** Decision making is less creative under authoritarian leadership. This style can be perceived as controlling and dictatorial. If abused, it can create a hostile "leader vs. follower" working environment and result

in high absenteeism, low motivation, and employee turnover.
   - **Best Used:** When creativity and group participation isn't important and a decision must be made quickly.

2. **Participative Leadership.** Participative leaders encourage other staff to join in the decision-making process, but they still have the final say. This leadership style is democratic, collaborative, and facilitates team interaction and a good working relationship among employees.
   - **Pros:** This style is more appreciated by employees because they feel their input matters, which can lead to higher job satisfaction. Team members are more likely to produce creative, innovative solutions to problems when they work in a collaborative setting. This approach engages team members, improves motivation, and fosters team unity.
   - **Cons:** Because this style requires various inputs from multiple actors in a more democratic approach, it takes a lot of time to make decisions. This style can be problematic when a group is indecisive and can hinder productivity.
   - **Best Used:** When a decision doesn't have to be made immediately, and a creative, innovative solution is the most important goal.

3. **Delegative Leadership.** Delegative leaders offer little guidance to group members and leave the decision making up to them. This relaxed, laissez-faire (hands-off) approach minimizes the leader's involvement, allowing team members to think for themselves. Delegative leaders give their staff a lot of freedom and trust how

they work, but provide support and advice when it is needed.
   - **Pros:** The freedom and autonomy that this leadership approach gives to employees can lead to high job satisfaction, and helps staff members feel important and trusted. It is particularly effective when the employees are highly qualified, independent workers.
   - **Cons:** In a group setting, this style can lead to poorly defined roles, a lack of direction, and low motivation for employees who need constant oversight to be productive. It can be troublesome if employees cannot manage their time or priorities, or if they don't have the skills/ability to do their work effectively. This approach may backfire on the manager, as he or she may be perceived as too lazy or bothered to properly lead.
   - **Best Used:** When employees are capable, motivated, and self-driven to make decisions and act on their own, and they can manage their own time and workloads.