Technology

LEWIS A. RHODES

In Search of Leadership: The Making of a Videotape

Now on videotape

The Principal as Instructional Leader:

Reflections on Effectiveness

Supplementing nearly every hit Hollywood movie is a TV special called "The Making of ..." (*Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and so on), designed to share the problems and experiences of the movie's producers. ASCD's new videotape, *The Principal as Instructional Leader: Reflections on Effectiveness*, provided a similar opportunity—the unique chance to explore the problems of both understanding and communicating the concept of "leadership."

The tape's basic purpose was to synthesize what we know about effective principals in a format that might facilitate the translation of that research into practice. Doing so presented three problems:

1. How do you visually *show* "leadership" when research suggests that the daily work structure of both effective and average principals is characterized by a continuing variety of largely unplanned, fragmented, reactive interactions? Moreover, principals (like students and teachers) vary greatly in skills, knowledge, and experience.

2. How do you convey research facts and insights via a nonlinear medium that does not communicate facts well?

3. How do you organize and present the information in a way that might tap a principal's intrinsic desire to be more effective?

With the help of an informal advisory committee[1] the following strategy evolved.

Although principals respond daily to the same types of school management concerns, there was something

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different about the nature of the effective principal's responses. Although each researcher's terminology differs slightly, we were able to group the characteristics of effective leaders into five general *patterns of response*:

1. *Visionary*—responds to the need for staff, students, and parents to have a positive direction to work toward.

2. *Resourceful*—responds creatively to the ever-present need for more resources than those allocated by the district.
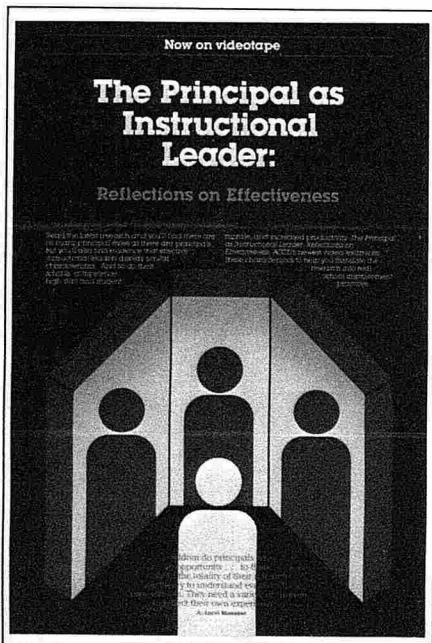
3. *Participative*—recognizes that staff members are the key to effective student learning and responds to their needs for meaningful involvement and collaboration in their own work situations.

4. *Supportive*—recognizes the isolation within which most teachers work and responds to their needs for specific instructional support.

5. *Monitoring*—responds to everyone's need for diagnostic information on progress and problems, and for new ideas for dealing with them.

To concisely communicate these five behavior patterns via television, we looked at how leadership is learned in the first place. As with teaching, parenting, management, and other forms of interactive behavior, we tend to "do as we were done to." That is, we learn from the perspective of the person at the receiving end of the relationship. This explains why instruction in new techniques is usually more effective when it allows the student to "experience" its effects and consequences rather than to "understand" them via cognitive input alone.

This knowledge, along with the awareness that television is a superb medium for conveying human experience and feeling, led us to propose not only to describe effective principal behaviors but to present the impact of

those behaviors as experienced by school staff members. Our hypothesis: enable the viewer to experience vicariously the values and consequences of the behavior being described. Viewers could then use these experiences as criteria to evaluate their own present or future actions.

Learnings

We learned much about effective school leadership from our interviews with principals and staff members, and even more as we analyzed and synthesized what they said. Many of these learnings are incorporated in the final tape; others, because of space limitations, will have to wait for another opportunity.

Did we learn anything about communicating concepts such as leadership? Viewer feedback will help determine the answer. We did, however, come away with a better sense of the fundamental constraint on understanding and communicating about effective instructional techniques.

The Missing Metaphor

Paralleling the research on effective principals have been similar studies of leadership in other areas of society. Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*[2] is a well-known example. Regardless of the nature of the institution, when an organization is perceived as the *people* in it, good management is the same. The critical barrier to good management (or the support of it), however, is that organizations are *not* typically perceived *as* their staffs. This is an issue of fundamental belief or perception—and it is not a minor one—since one's belief about "the way things are" ultimately serves as the reference point for designing organizational relationships and structures as well as the continu-

ing criterion for intuitive judgments. Peters and Waterman call this barrier to understanding "the missing perspective"—the "lack of any feeling for the whole." William Spady of the Far West Lab calls the needed change in perception a "paradigm shift."

The ultimate importance of fundamental beliefs is best illustrated by two examples—one from history and one from the present. Before Copernicus, when people believed the earth was the center of the universe, reality had to be forced to fit that structure. Some things did fit, but others, such as the apparent looping paths of planets, had to be twisted to suit the theory. Once people accepted the sun as the reference point for our universe, they were able to perceive and understand relationships that had always been there and, more importantly, to see new possibilities. In the recent past, the overwhelming effects of a similar shift in perception can be seen in the development of the so-called Japanese system of management. W. Edward Deming, believed by many to be the "father of people-oriented management," was questioned on this topic.

Q: What do you think it is that blocks an attitude of looking toward people as a resource . . . to this people approach?
Deming: A lot of nonsense. People approach? I don't know what the hell you mean.
Q: I mean that everybody has to be involved. Feel they have a stake.
Deming: The workers have *always* been involved. The only ones that *have* been involved. That's the problem.[3]

The Japanese clearly accepted Deming's fundamental belief that the person who directly contacts the product is the one who can most affect quality, and their systems of management evolved from it. Americans, by and large, have tried to copy Deming's strategies, but without accepting his underlying belief.

The relationship to education is obvious. Education reformers who view the daily reality of schools from the reference point of learner-outcomes have great difficulty communicating the value of their ideas. Learner-centered approaches don't seem to "fit" into our mental pictures of the way that schools are organized and managed. As in industry, a common perspective is missing from which all can see how the people in the organization relate to its purposes. Today, when many proposed strategies for increasing school effectiveness do *not* require major and costly changes, the need for this perspective is vital. Once one *accepts*, like Deming, that teachers (the "workers" who touch directly the lives of children) are the *only* ones who can make the final decisions that affect quality outcomes, then many of the proposed organizational changes become natural outgrowths.

Someone once said that "change comes when the contained become aware of the shape of the container." The challenge ASCD faces in developing new videotapes and publications on effective schooling is to find the metaphors that will help viewers to question their assumptions and beliefs about the way things fit in schools. ASCD's new videotape, *The Principal as Instructional Leader: Reflections on Effectiveness*, is an attempt, but we still have a long way to go.□

[1]Roland Barth, Robert E. Blum, Michael Cohen, Gene Hall, Lawrence Lezotte, James Lipham, and A. Lorri Manasse.

[2]"If Americans Don't Want to Listen to Me, It's Their Funeral," *Washington Post*, January 15, 1984, p. D3.

[3]Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr., *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies*. New York: Harper and Row, 1982.

Lewis A. Rhodes

Making a Videotape, Part II

Last month's column shared learnings and perceptions generated during the development of ASCD's new videotape on principals' instructional leadership. This month, the release of another new tape, *School Improvement Through Staff Development*, provides a similar opportunity to share insights that developed as we tried to understand and resolve the communications problems that faced us.

The Principal as Instructional Leader:

Reflections on Effectiveness

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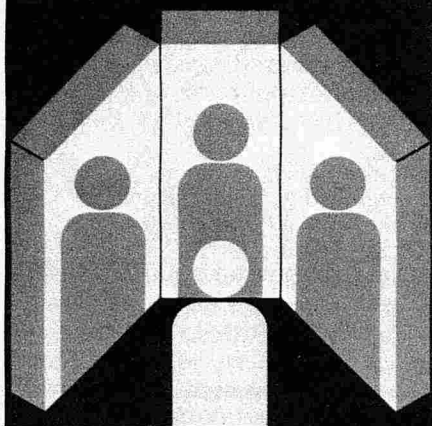
Three conditions loomed as barriers to communicating this tape's basic message, which was articulated by one of the principals we interviewed: "If you want to improve the school, you'd better improve your staff. . .because, literally, your school is the staff."

First, many school people have experienced both inservice staff development and school improvement as fragmented, one-shot, and frequently unrelated efforts with little history of long-lasting effects.

Second, the historical separation of these two processes provided a chicken-or-egg dilemma. Would this be a tape about school improvement *or* staff development? Which would attract a wider audience to the dual message that long-lasting improvement is possible *only* through personal growth of the school's staff; and that staff development that is not related to overcoming the daily constraints on personal satisfaction and effectiveness has little enduring effect?

The final barrier came from the systematic nature of proposed solutions for improving both schools and their staffs. The steps or stages in *systematic* school improvement and staff development efforts all tend to look and sound alike, regardless of what we call them. Although the developers of each "new" model apply their own labels and acronymns, the models derive from a common logic of purposeful, human, problem-solving behavior:

- Figure out what's bothering you—diagnosis; assessments of needs, wants, concerns, problems, barriers, and so on.
- Explore various ways to deal with it and pick the most practical and

advantageous one—searching alternatives, goal-setting, and so on.
- Determine how to do it—planning.
- Take action—implementation, operation, management, and so on.
- Find out how well you're doing it and use the information to continually modify your actions—feedback, formative evaluation, maintenance, institutionalization.

How could we communicate that the long-lasting benefits of systematic processes are not in the individual steps or stages, but rather in their combined effect? In particular, they allow individuals to identify and orient their actions toward mutual purposes, and to establish nondependent relationships based on each person's contribution toward these same mutual goals.

School Improvement Through Staff Development addresses these communications constraints by focusing on the common *effects* of these systematic processes and steps. The experiences of teachers and administrators, in five schools currently involved in systematic staff development efforts focused on instructional improvement, provide the content that illuminates the process. The schools—Shearer Elementary (Napa, Calif.), Ulatis Elementary (Vacaville, Calif.), Holbrook Elementary (Hamtramck, Mich.), Hoover Middle (Kenmore, N.Y.), and Versailles High School (Versailles, Ohio)—represent different stages of the processes as well as different demographic situations.

Viewer feedback will tell us whether this approach communicates effectively. We still may be no closer to finding the "missing metaphor" discussed last month—a way to view and understand the daily reality of schools as a people-system—but, interestingly, another metaphor related to the purposes of

this tape did emerge as we looked back on our experiences *after* completing the tape.

As we went from school to school one thing stood out. There are *sparks of caring and concern* glowing, in relative isolation, in classroom after classroom across America. Sometimes they burn out, or are stamped out, because there are few ways to provide both the fuel and oxygen they need to burst into flame.

In schools that are *systematically* trying to improve instruction through *direct instructional skills training*, we saw two things happen:

● The systematic nature of the process, which provides common direction and allows building staffs to participate in overcoming the barriers to their own effectiveness, *opens the damper* and effectively *fans the spark* with trust, respect, and the ideas of others.

● The practical instructional skills (for example, many of the strategies involved in "Effective Schools" or "Madeline Hunter" type training) that are the focus of the training provide the *solid fuel* necessary to convert concern and caring into action—but not just any action. These teacher acts generate more immediate feedback about one's effect on children, thus providing the daily "fuel" of satisfaction and personal worth that keep the spark alive.

While this metaphor may have helped us better understand what we were seeing, hearing, and feeling in the schools we visited, it is *not* part of the tape. Nevertheless, it may be what school improvement through staff development is all about.□

School Improvement Through Staff Development (35 minutes in length) was developed by Georgea Sparks and Dennis Sparks with the assistance of Ann Lieberman, Susan Loucks-Horsley, and Fred Wood. It is narrated by Dennis Sparks, Executive Secretary of the National Staff Development Council. The videotape may be ordered from ASCD for $225 ASCD members, and $260 nonmembers. (Please specify stock number 614–134 when ordering.)