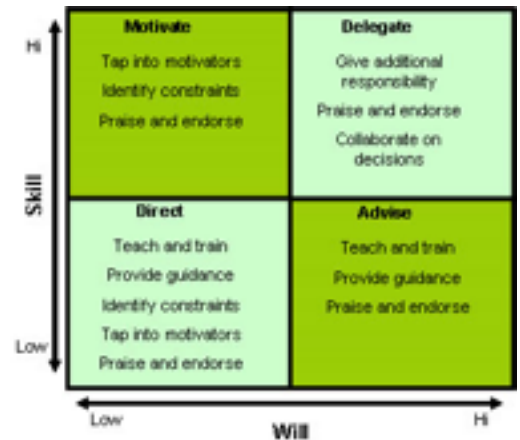


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The Webster Case

1. How do you guide the principal to assess the staff? What are your conclusions about this school?

It is going to be essential that you get into these teachers' classrooms on a daily basis. It's going to be imperative that you make your expectations clear and let them know what you'll be looking for on each informal and formal observation. The asked for behaviors, such as posting student work, looking for higher order thinking questions, student engagement, are the ones that get done. In this situation, it sounds like if it's not being asked for, it's not going to be delivered. By setting explicit goals, you will get these results. There is something called the "The High Low Matrix". This is a tool that can help leaders overcome one of the more challenging aspects of their role... understanding the skills and wills of employees, and what in turn can best motivate them. According to Bolman and Deal, in the real world, people have many different levels of expertise, enthusiasm, and motivations. As the HR director, I would introduce this idea to this principal and have them specifically focus on the low skilled and low willed area.



2. What are the questions you would ask the principal to get her to think about improving the effectiveness of the staff? What evidence would you use to help this principal realistically and fairly look for teacher improvement?

If the district was using a Danielson-style model for teacher evaluation, I might ask which of the four domains she felt was the biggest area for needed improvement. By focusing on one of the domains at a time, it can make the over whelming task of evaluating a little easier to manage. For example, if the biggest problem was teachers' lack of planning and preparation, the principal could focus on training the staff in setting clearer instructional outcomes. If it was the classroom environment itself that was barring student growth, PD could be arranged to help teachers relearn more effective behavior management. Likewise, if the domains of instruction or professional responsibility were lacking, goals for the year could be structured around them. Data collection tools could be created that help the principal to be able to quickly and efficiently target which areas needed the most improvement, and could thus set the course for the rest of the year.

3. What kinds of staff development would you suggest she initiate for this school year?

For situations that involve a low-skilled and low-willed staff, direct coaching should be emphasized. Since these particular teachers seem to be not very skilled and not very motivated, the two key areas to focus on are training and praising. You will first need to provide the teachers with the tools to develop their skills through laser-focused professional development. Using staff meeting time to only talk about budget shortfalls and central office mandates are a missed opportunity for growth. According to Lencioni, meetings should be strategic and tactical. Because the teachers are not delivering results there can often be a challenge with their confidence level that is inhibiting their ability to apply new skills and ideas. Giving the teachers daily check-ins offer frequent, informal, and low risk opportunities to practice their skills and to succeed. It also gives you the ability to provide them with the positive feedback they need, and will result in a confidence building experience for them.



4. How will you help this principal understand the parents and community? What importance will you place on working with parents?

Academics are critical, obviously, but fostering the other sides of the child, the social side and the communication side builds life skills. These “residuals” of education count for, in my opinion, more than 50% of the value of school. These lessons usually aren’t taught explicitly as a part of the curriculum, so it is essential that we learn as leaders that there are more important things that happen in a school year than watching test scores improve and watching the clock for the number of instructional minutes used in a day. There are multiple types of relationships that we can focus on developing, in order to establish a healthy and sustainable school climate. In the long run, learning to look for and build these relationships is critical.

First among these would be the teacher-student relationship. When students believe that their teachers care about them, see them as competent, respect their views and want them to succeed, they are almost guaranteed work toward meeting those expectations. Another facet to the community-building are the school-parent-community relationships. Parents and community members should feel that their school has a welcoming environment. It should be accessible and open to parent participation, and recognize parents’ expertise and provide opportunities for their contributions. I once heard that everyone you meet knows something that you don’t. Remembering this simple fact can create a sense of mutual cooperation between school and home, and can create pathways for communication and collaboration with parents and the community.

5. What are the “landmine” issues for which you will warn the principal? What are the cautions?

In this situation, I guess I would say that the biggest concern would be the growing ESL population. It's great news that the school district had hired new ESL teachers who seem engaged and passionate about the job, but nevertheless, the teachers who have them in their homerooms may not be receptive to working with them, or making any accommodations to help them adjust to English as a second language. Sensitivity training led by these enthusiastic young teachers may help the older ones get on board and help this population grow.

6. Create a success rubric along with this principal. What indicators would you look for and with what timeline?

While it would be nice to be able to control factors such as class size, socioeconomic status, environment, and stability of the teaching staff, there are other factors that we can focus on to measure success of the school. With this principal, I would help them to develop a timeline for the year that looks at helping children feel safe and successful in school. The next effort would be directed towards redesigning their schools to increase professional collaboration and dialogue, and finally improving home-school relationships.

7. What do you feel are the most serious challenges to moving forward and how would you help the principal?

Although it would not be a pleasant experience for the individuals involved, if a teacher was not working productively in service to the school's redefined mission, vision, values, and goals, it would be necessary to replace them. It seems by looking at the appendix with teacher effectiveness ratings, there would be a few prime candidates that may be ready for “early retirement”. By using the momentum of a changing staff, redirection may be possible, but only after all attempts at professional development had been exhausted. Leading in a challenging school like this one is certainly not for the faint of heart. It seems as though Webster has everything possible going against it. It would take courage and persistence, as well as strong leadership skills to be successful in this most challenging of environments.