

CARRYING THE CHALK DUST: LEADING WITH A TEACHER'S HEART IN THE PRINCIPAL'S CHAIR

by:

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Positions are temporary, and job titles come and go, but the way a principal treats people leaves an impression that lasts for years. This reality highlights that authority and power offer a short-term duty to guide, not a lifelong right to misuse power (Fullan, 2014). A profound transformation in school climate becomes possible when leaders replace hierarchical posturing with authentic, trust-centered relationships (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Teachers' performance devolves into reluctance and distrust when a leader fails to foster authentic human connection (Leithwood, 2021). Hence, school leaders need to preserve the basic decency that keeps standards high while building a legacy of mutual respect (Garg & Rastogi, 2025).

A position of school leadership ironically requires administrators to stay grounded. Memories of sheer exhaustion from lesson planning, classroom management, and grading keep leaders empathetic (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Likewise, keeping classroom reality front and center keeps administrative ego in check and makes learners' welfare the top priority (Sergiovanni, 2015). In this way, administrative guidance becomes far more realistic, encouraging, and useful, especially to teachers losing direction due to professional frustration (Gimbel et al., 2021). Remembering where they started turns routine administrative tasks and decision-making into an act of shared professional service (Aguilar, 2020).

Effective school leaders cultivate the patience to listen. They listen far more than they speak, actively choosing to learn rather than dominate conversations. This habit reflects not merely vulnerability, but an openness that signals to staff that it is safe to try

new ideas or voice professional struggles (Edmondson, 2018). This humble posture keeps leaders focused on core educational goals. They also create space to solve problems collaboratively instead of positioning themselves as the sole experts in the room (Goddard et al., 2015). Teachers take real pride in institutional goals and work harder on their craft under a supportive environment (Kraft et al., 2016). Humility becomes the bedrock of a vibrant learning community (Qadach et al., 2023).

Supportive principals actively share their knowledge and skills, readily coaching teachers who need instructional support. They capitalize on untapped team potential, uncovering hidden talents and strengths across the faculty (Harris & Jones, 2019). They provide targeted training, delegate real responsibility, and clear pathways for lead teachers to stand out by identifying emerging abilities (Danielson, 2012). They continuously invest in professional development to unlock individual potential, recognizing that these growth efforts directly improve classroom instruction (Desimone & Garet, 2015). Thus, this strength-based approach turns a school into a nursery of professional growth where teachers feel trusted to thrive.

School leaders' true achievement rests not on their own resume but on how well their teachers grow and thrive (Sinek, 2017). Their empathy helps school heads design working conditions that protect teacher well-being and performance. By actively streamlining administrative tasks, leaders reduce unnecessary paperwork that detracts from actual teaching time (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). They know teachers' small wins and regularly acknowledge their victories (Kopparter et al., 2022). This consistent support protects educators from burnout specially during times of curriculum reform and institutional change (Day & Gu, 2014). Empathetic leadership creates a healthier, more balanced environment for teachers and learners to grow and co-exist (Avolio et al., 2024).

Integrity provides school leaders with the proper grounding they need to preserve vision and mission as their primary mandates. Honesty is not an option but a prerequisite. It makes choices based on equity and learners' needs rather than convenience or

administrative shortcuts (Stefkovich & Begley, 2016). They are the paragon of ethical behavior. Modeling sets a baseline of trust and high expectations that radiates into every room (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2022). They treat teachers as respected colleagues, making sure resources and recognition are distributed fairly (Green, 2017). The school has a shared vision of quality education when integrity drives administrative decisions (Northouse, 2021).

School heads ignite motivation. They encourage teachers with confidence to try new teaching methods and strategies to engage learners in every lesson. They remember their own early failures and know that real innovation needs a safety net where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). They support creative teaching ideas with practical resources and the flexibility to test out new tools (Hattie, 2012). This frequently motivates their teachers to explore and push past comfortable routines to realize their full abilities (Lieberman et al., 2017). They are encouraging principals because they transform a school into a working laboratory for continuous and receptive academic institution (Dufour et al., 2016).

School heads have to retain their identity as teachers despite assuming administrative and managerial responsibilities. They need to preserve their teacher's heart, honoring humble beginnings, and putting love and service first over title. They lift their schools when they build honest relationships, stay humble, mentor staff, show empathy, act with integrity, and encourage innovation. These build a healthy culture where teachers feel supported to discover their full potential and deliver great lessons. Principals are not meant to rule from a pedestal, but rather to support the people below them in upholding their potential, passion, and service to the youth.

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