

NEW SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

By Dr. Richard J. Voltz



October 6, 2016

My Main Observation of Teachers:

I observe many classrooms in my role as a coach for principals in their work with teacher evaluation. In the vast majority of classrooms I visit, the teacher does most of the talking and the students are passive in their own learning. This is especially true in classes that have a large number of challenged learners.

If there is one suggestion I would recommend for almost all teachers is to talk less and have the students talk more.

Another suggestion I would have is for the teacher to prepare the questions he/she will ask to the students before teaching the lesson. This should be part of the lesson preparation. The teacher needs to print a copy of verbs as related to the level of knowledge from Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) or Bloom's taxonomy. The teacher needs to make sure that the majority of questions have verbs in upper levels of these scales. For example verbs to use that represent evaluation include argue, choose, defend, explain, predict, summarize and support. These verbs will require full sentence(s) replies by students. This is opposed by low level verbs such as define, list, name, recall, and state.

I was working with one principal who required her teachers to prepare questions before teaching a lesson. The principal required no more than 25% of the questions from Level 1 and at least 25% from Level 4. Thus, the teachers were using verbs such as appraise, create, judge, prove and synthesize instead of define, recite and report.

How often do you acknowledge important employees?

I was reading an article recently that reminded managers to acknowledge key employees. Often what occurs is that a key employee decides on his or her own, without the manager knowing, to seek employment elsewhere. The manager finds out when the employee turns in their termination letter.

At that time the manager is shocked and tries to talk the employee into staying and tells the employee how valuable they are to the organization. The message from this article is to tell employees on a regular basis how important they are to the organization or you may risk losing them.

We all know that money is not the only or even the primary reason employees stay with an employer. It is the self-worth the employee gets from the organization and from his or her supervisor. Spend time each day talking to employees and tell them how important they are to the organization.

I made it a practice as a superintendent to write a positive note to at least one employee, student, parent or community member each and every day. I wrote the note with a pen, not a computer, and mailed or gave the note to the person. This practice pays great dividends later and might stop the exit of great employees.

Principals as Instructional Leaders

We all know that principals should be instructional leaders and the *Illinois School Code* even requires principals to spend the majority of their time as instructional leaders. If a trained observer followed your principals around for one week and recorded what your principals were doing every five minutes, what do you think the results would be?

The Wallace Foundation did this for several principals in schools throughout the United States and the results were 66.7% on management and 29.7% on instruction. Management was defined as dealing with student discipline, student supervision, employee supervision (not teaching related), employee discipline, office work/prep, building management, dealing with parents, and attending management meetings. Instruction is defined as working with students, observing teachers, conducting classroom visits, providing feedback to teachers, talking to parents about student learning, teaching/modeling, participating in professional development, planning, curriculum, and assessment.

We need to support principals in their roles as instructional leaders. Some school districts are hiring additional support staff for the principal to free up time for the principal to do instructional activities. Of course, this is a local decision but if you want the principal to be a true instructional leader then we must find ways to give the principal the time to do this important work.

Fitness Tips

We all need motivation to take care of ourselves. We should eat healthy and exercise on a regular basis. Joe Thiel, owner of Fitness Together in Springfield sent me this information. I thought I would pass it along to you as a reminder that we need to take care of ourselves, our family and our friends as well as all the students and employees in our school districts.

7 Habits of Highly Fit People

Lots of people ask me how to quickly and easily get fit. While I know they are hoping for a simple answer, the reality is that getting and staying fit is a lifestyle, not a quick fix. Sorry, but someone has to tell you the truth.

So what do fit people do in their "healthy lifestyle"? Take a peek at the following 7 Habits of Highly Fit People:

Habit #1: They Don't Buy Junk

Fit people know that if they keep junk food in the house it will land on their waist sooner or later. So they don't buy any. Even buying junk food for your kids or spouse is not advised since: 1) you'll likely eat some of it eventually, and 2) your loved ones shouldn't be eating that junk either. It's called junk for a reason.

Rid your home of chips, cookies, candy, baked goods, pre-packaged snacks and anything else that belongs in a vending machine. Replace the above with fresh fruit, veggies, nuts and other healthy whole foods snacks.

Habit #2: They Have Priorities

Fit people make exercise a priority. Along with keeping a job, paying the bills and going to the doctor, exercise is an important part of their lives. What I've found is that fit people put exercise before leisure time. Sure, fit people enjoy leisure, but it is scheduled around their workout time.

Treat exercise time with the same importance that you would a business meeting or trip to the dentist.

Habit #3: They Stop When Full

Fit people stop eating when they feel full. Sound simple? It is, but how many times have you stuffed yourself simply to clear your plate? Or, how many times have you eaten another piece of cake despite being stuffed? The next time you feel full; take it as a sign to stop eating. Yes, even if your plate isn't empty.

Habit #4: They Push Themselves

Not only do fit people make time to go to the gym, they challenge themselves during each workout. While it is easy to simply go through the motions while exercising, you're cheating your body out of great results when you don't push yourself. Exercise should make you sweat, make your muscles burn, and leave you with a feeling of accomplishment.

Find ways to make each workout more challenging. For competitive people, the best way to push yourself is to exercise with a friend of similar strength. Another great way to challenge yourself is to set small attainable goals. These goals could be to push heavier weight, to sprint longer, or to do cardio at a higher intensity setting.

Habit #5: They Don't Eat and Watch

Fit people know that eating in front of the T.V. is mindless eating. When your attention is on your entertainment and not on your food, then you'll be less tuned in to what and how much ends up in your mouth. Eating in front of the T.V. is also very habit forming. Ever notice how you crave munchies just as a reflex of sitting in front of the T.V.?

Eat before or after your entertainment and pay attention to what and how much goes into your mouth.

Habit #6: They Drink Water

Fit people drink lots of water. And not just in addition to other beverages, but instead of them. Water is their main drink, while other drinks are occasional treats. Calorie-filled drinks are one of the quickest ways to consume excess calories which quickly turn into fat. Consider water your beverage of choice. Drink plenty of it each day and drink other beverages only a few times each week.

Habit #7: They Are Supported

Fit people don't leave their motivation to chance. They know that if their personal trainer, boot camp instructor or workout partner is waiting for them, then they are less likely to skip a workout. It is so easy to hit snooze or to talk yourself out of the gym as soon as your behind hits the couch after work. Fit people take the option of skipping out of the equation.

Tip of the Week

Start getting your plans set for calling off school due to "adverse weather." You never know when bad weather will hit, so meet with your secretary and the person responsible for bus transportation for your school district. If you own your buses, this could be the head mechanic or transportation director and if you lease buses, it is your point person you deal with from the bus company.

In rural areas, it is a good idea to obtain the names and phone numbers of the township road commissioners. These are the people responsible for clearing the rural roads. In urban areas you probably will rely on IDOT or county officials. Know who to call in your area to get accurate travel information on bad weather days.

Obtain a list of the phone numbers for all media outlets you will need to call. This usually includes local radio and television stations. The media outlets usually provide school districts with passwords to report school closing information. Obtain home and work phone numbers for neighboring superintendents. Your schools may develop some type of calling tree and you will need to have phone numbers of principals so the phone trees can get started. You also may want to work with your technology people and see if you can remotely access your district website so you can post school closing

information on the website in “real time” format. Put all of this information on a small card that you can carry in your wallet or purse so you have access no matter where you are. You may also want to save this information in your smart phone or electronic planner. Many school districts now have a system to call parents via a “call out” system. If your district has this system you will need to determine if you will use it for this purpose and if your district does then review the procedures to make the outgoing calls.

It is very difficult for you to make all the phone calls, so you should design some type of protocol for making these calls. The following procedure might work for some:

1. Start your phone trees or other method to notify staff. Remember to include support staff phone trees as well. Bus and food service personnel are usually the earliest to arrive at school so they should be notified first.
2. If you have a means to notify the public via the district web page, you would do this early in the process. Some districts now use an embedded Twitter icon on their district website, thus, this is an option as well.
3. Call the media outlets.

The hardest part of this whole process is making the decision to call off school. It has been my experience that superintendents talk to neighboring superintendents to find out what they are doing. Usually if one district calls off school in a local area, the other neighboring districts need to look seriously at calling off school. Sometimes it is a “no brainer” and everyone calls off school. However, sometimes it is a very difficult call. You will need to know what time your buses leave to start picking up students. This is the time you need to make the final call. However, on one occasion, I made the call for buses to return students to their homes when a blizzard hit late.

As I “seasoned” in my role as a superintendent, I learned to make these decisions on the side of student safety. Almost all complaints I heard about whether to have school or not, came from the decision to have school, not to cancel school. You have emergency days worked into your calendar and they should be used if you think students will not be safe traveling to and from school.