

NEW SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

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Being A Superintendent Is Also Hard Work

In the last New Superintendent Update I wrote about the difficult job that teachers have. This week I would like to concentrate on the difficult work of the superintendency.

Members of the IASA Professional Development Committee have been working for over a year on writing new administrators' academies for school administrators. Dr. Lynn Gibson, Hononegah High School District Superintendent, chaired a team that wrote an academy titled "Moving From Vision To Action: Learn How to Become an Essentialist." As a result of Dr. Gibson's vision I decided to read the book *Essentialism* by Greg McKeown.

This book motivated me to prepare a presentation titled "Work – Life Balance." I have now given this presentation several times to superintendents and the reaction I receive from the participants is amazing to me. Many of the participants come up to me after the presentation and thank me for the message that I am sending. The message is you have "choice" in the decisions that you make.

I am sure you have discovered how isolating it can be to be a superintendent. It is a position that I liken to a sole survivor on a deserted island. It is difficult to find somebody else to confide in because of the nature of the job. It is easy to become an isolationist and internally deal with the various problems, concerns, initiatives, pressures and so forth of the position. Over the ten years I have been in this position with IASA I have observed new superintendents gain excessive weight, seem to age exponentially, lose focus concerning family, friends and their own well-being. This is not every new superintendent but it is more than I would ever have guessed.

In Dr. Gibson's academy and in the book *Essentialism* I believe you learn to say no and learn you have a voice in your own choices. Every school board member idea, every student perceived crisis, every parent complaint, and every teacher grumble does not need to be addressed immediately by you. As a leader you need to develop supports and other leaders who can take care of the majority of these issues. We do have choices on the actions we take. If we put everything on our own backs the load will soon burden us to the point that we will not be able to stay on our feet, both figuratively and literally.

If you find yourself not getting enough sleep, not finding the time to spend quality time with family and friends, not eating and exercising to a healthy standard, or not taking vacation or weekend days to refresh your own energy then you need to rethink your priority. When I was a superintendent, a veteran school board president stopped by the district office when I was working past midnight and told me to go home. He said it will not be engraved on your

tombstone that you worked 24/7. Your gravestone will reflect whether you were a loving husband and father so spend time with your family. His words have stayed with me forever.

When I entered the superintendency we did not have cell phones. School board members and staff could not contact the superintendent 24 hours a day. When you left work you were not constantly bothered by emails, texts, or other social media communications. You need to develop a system in which you are not connected 24/7 to your position. If a building is on fire and your cellphone is not in your pocket, I guarantee somebody will get in touch with you via other means.

The real message in the book and the academy is that you have the “choice” to make whatever decision you make. If you let your job consume your life it is because you make that choice. If you choose to eat unhealthy it is your choice. If you choose to reply to every text and email it is your choice. You have the choice to either turn your cell phone off or silence it and put it in another room when you get home so you can spend time with the people in your house who love you.

Gwen Moran published an article titled “[6 Things You’re Doing That You’ll Seriously Regret in 10 years.](#)” They are the following:

- Giving Up on Romantic Relationships
- Neglecting Friendships
- Being Sedentary
- Putting Off A Health History
- Ignoring Stress Management
- Letting Fear Drive Decisions

Don’t look back in the near future at yourself and regret not focusing on the things that mean the most in your life. A superintendent I mentored once told me a story about the message his wife put on the garage door that led in to the house. “The people inside this house love you!”

How to handle email (and other communications)?

As a follow up to the preceding article I thought I would offer some strategies to help you say no and maximize your work efficiency. Remember the purpose of these strategies is not to get you to work more; its purpose is to allow you to spend more time with other aspects of your life.

Have you considered allowing all of your email to go to an account that is managed by your secretary? (At one presentation I made this suggestion and a new superintendent told me she did not have a secretary. If you do not have a secretary you can skip this suggestion.) If all your emails go to your secretary she could do the following:

1. Trash all emails that are junk or do not have to be answered or read.
2. Respond to any emails to you that he/she has the information for and can answer. For some of these he/she may need to share the answer with you, others are routine and can just be answered.
3. Divide the remaining emails into groups that have to be answered soon and those that can be answered later. The emails needing attention can be forwarded to you at the proper

time. You then need to determine a process to read and respond to emails. I would suggest at certain times of the day only. For example, when you get to the office, before you go to lunch, and before you leave the office for the day. The secretary forwards the emails on a timely basis based on the importance of the response.

My guess is that this process would allow you to get other more important work done. It also will teach you that you do not have to read and respond to every email as it is delivered which is a distraction to your work flow.

Superintendent's Communication to Community Members

As a district superintendent, I wrote a regular column that our local newspaper was kind enough to publish. This concept of writing to the community was derived from a conversation I had with a citizen of the community. We were trying to pass a referendum and he mentioned to me that the school district should communicate to the public on a regular basis, not just when the district needed money for buildings, staff, etc. This really impacted my thoughts, and from that time forward I wrote a regular column to the public about the school district. It was similar to the regular updates I write to you as a new superintendent.

With the current advent of social media communication devices such as Facebook, blogs, Twitter, Instagram and others I would also publish my article in these sources. This would encourage citizens to participate in the decision-making process of the school district. If you are worried about having inappropriate public responses to your social media communications, remember that you can screen these comments prior to allowing them to be published. You can tell the public that you will not allow social media responses with swear words or libel information to appear on the site. Of course, you will need to include any negative comments or opinions or suggestions that are contrary to what you are proposing. This is an alternative way to obtain feedback from your public.

Tip of the Week

Now more than ever in my career administrators have the opportunity to make positive changes to education. Cease the moment and be a leader in your school district.