Ontario Institute for Education Leadership
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Ontario Leaders Collaborating for Student Achievement, Equity and Well-being
La collaboration des leaders en Ontario assure la réussite, l'équité et le bien-être des élèves.

Leadership Style and Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs) – Gilles Rodrigues
Gina Kozak

> This story by Gilles Rodrigues and Gina Kozak is intended to show how personal leadership resources have a direct impact on the leadership style of a school principal striving to promote student well-being and student success.
> It vividly describes the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) beginning with a review of how to develop the organization to support desired practices and build internal accountability. This mission is accomplished by building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership.

This could be the story of any principal new to the role. We all carry our personal experiences and teaching experiences with us when we arrive at a school. These experiences have a major impact on our leadership style and the way we approach our role within a school community. My approach has been shaped by my background in junior division, particularly Grade 6, and in special education. Well-being and success (in that order) are two factors that come up on a daily basis in my new position.

Integrating into a new school community is not always easy, particularly if the community is already well established, with experienced members who have existing routines and a successful track record. Everything is going well; everyone you meet tells you how lucky you are and everything is running smoothly—a situation that can lead to widespread inertia. Things are done as they have always been done, unquestioningly, and recurring issues are blamed on external factors.

The first important personal leadership resource is proactivity. Why wait to be asked to take action when change is clearly needed? While it is important to believe in ourselves and our ability to complete a task or achieve a goal, this feeling is pointless if we are unable to spark change and put in the required effort within a team. In addition to your psychological

> Psychological PLRs: proactivity, resilience
> Social PLRs: perceiving emotions, managing emotions

resources, you will need to draw on your social resources; believing in yourself is one thing, but getting 30 people to believe in themselves to achieve a goal is another.

When I arrived at the school, one of the first things I noticed was the layout of the spaces, the visuals in the classrooms, the poor visibility and the lack of space to move around. Identifying the problematic situation wasn't hard, but getting staff to acknowledge the problem was a different story. Transforming the classrooms into flexible spaces was added to the agenda for my first meeting with staff, along with supporting examples. Naturally, I made the connection between flexible spaces and student well-being and success;

> 3. Developing the organization to support desired practices
>
> 3.1 Building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership

after all, you don't invest financial resources into transforming spaces just because it looks nicer. Once the end goal had been established, leaders emerged: individuals who believed in the project, its merits

and its impact on students. With the lead teacher, we began the transformation process. Once this phase of the project is complete, the necessary emotional conditions are in place and other staff members get involved.

As a school leader, we can now move on to the next step. Now that staff had a "taste" of flexible spaces, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of these transformations, as school budgets are often tight. You will need to draw on your planning skills and establish a realistic and achievable timeline. The first space cost almost nothing, since there were already resources scattered throughout the school and it was simply a matter of reallocating these resources where they were needed. The second required a slightly greater investment compared to the previous space, as did the third.

> 3. Developing the organization to support desired practices
>
> 3.6 Allocating resources in support of the school's vision and goals

When complete, each space will have cost under $5,000. However, to make meaningful changes, a positive attitude isn't enough. You need to be able to take risks and lead others along these winding pathways by showing them that beyond the mountain lies a vast, beautiful valley where life is good and there is room for hope. Climbing the mountain doesn't have to be hard; it can be a wonderful human adventure.

> 1. Setting directions
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> 1.4 Communicating the vision and goals

The other aspect I focused on was internal accountability. This much overused notion is often invoked to describe a "lack of internal accountability," giving negative and off-putting connotations to this crucial practice. I decided to approach this by making staff accountable for the school budget. Once again, force of habit had created a kind of budgetary inertia, which involved holding onto money as long as possible until the "bulk order" in February! My approach to internal accountability was to allocate an annual budget to all teachers in September to fund their instructional initiatives. This empowers staff to get involved in instructional planning and makes it impossible for them to neglect their duty to engage in professional reflection. It also raises awareness of their responsibility to offer students more interesting experiences and richer learning experiences and gives staff the economic power and increased autonomy to do so. In this way, internal accountability becomes an intrinsic concept rather than an externally imposed ethical obligation.

> 5. Securing accountability
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> 5.1 Building staff members' sense of internal accountability

Simply through financial empowerment, the entire staff gained a sense of confidence and a renewed sense of efficiency. This has now led to the emergence of new committees run by staff members that have a higher impact within the community at large. Unexpected leaders are emerging, such as a Grade 2 teacher who has become a "champion" of the sciences and has organized two external activities at the school and in the community. The link between staff well-being and student well-being is undeniable and we expect to reap the benefits in terms of student success.

> 3. Developing the organization to support desired practices
>
> 3.2 Structuring the organization to facilitate collaboration

Although delving into the Ontario Leadership Framework may seem daunting, you will find many answers and avenues for growth. It is also important to take the time to develop and cultivate your personal leadership resources in collaboration with mentors, colleagues and inspiring advisers.

With this first year behind me, I wish you the best of luck as you continue on your leadership journey.