



Leadership NOTES

Creating a GPTW... Great Place to Work

I once had the opportunity to participate in a leadership development experience that paired schools and businesses for the purpose of sharing ideas and strategies for success. The business partner I worked with was Hixson Architecture, Engineering, and Interiors in Cincinnati, Ohio. After a quick tour of the facilities, I sat down with Hixson CEO Wick Ach and asked him what leadership insights he might share that I could apply to education. His answer was surprising and memorable. He walked over to the whiteboard and wrote four large letters- GPTW. He then tossed the marker back into the tray and sat down at his desk. "That's it" he said. "That's my strategy." He went on to explain that GPTW stood for Great Place To Work. Back at the whiteboard now, Mr. Ach drew a series of connected arrows like a flow chart. He explained, "My job as CEO is to make Hixson a great place to work. If I do that well, (he drew an arrow from GPTW to the words best architects and engineers) I'll attract and keep the best architects and engineers. Over time, those architects and engineers will create satisfied clients (He connected best architects and engineers to the words satisfied clients). Satisfied clients come back for repeat business. Repeat business drives our profitability (He finished with arrows to repeat business and then profitability). It's that simple," he said, "and it all starts with creating a GPTW." He finished by saying "I'm not an education expert. But, if I were a school principal, I'd take the same approach. In fact, I'd draw it up just like this except I'd swap great teachers for great architects and engineers and I'd swap student learning for profitability. Everything else would stay the same." I agree wholeheartedly. In fact, as I reflect on the thousands of observations and school visits that provide the basis for the Artisan Teacher Field Guide, I think I can now take the GPTW approach a step further and describe some characteristics of schools that attract and keep great teachers— Artisan Teachers. Over time, some schools attract and retain more than their fair share of artisan teachers, while other schools lose their most talented teachers. I've found that great teachers are not necessarily like athletic free agents



willing to go anywhere to play for the highest bidder. I have noticed, however, that they will drive past several schools closer to their home to find a place that suits their needs. What are they looking for? What school characteristics turn out to be most inviting for highly talented, artisan teachers?

Artisan Teachers Work Where They Are Valued.



What teacher characteristics are valued most at your school? Is it a teacher's good attitude, work ethic, local community connections, years of experience, or extracurricular activities? All these attributes are valuable, of course. A GPTW values teachers' instructional talents and skills above everything else.

Artisan Teachers Work Where They Are Appreciated.



One definition of appreciate is "to be fully conscious of, to be aware of, to detect" (dictionary.com), as in a person who appreciates modern art or fine wine. I believe talented teachers seek out settings where administrators know what great teaching looks like and understand the finer points and nuances of effective teaching.

Artisan Teachers Work Where They Are Recognized.



In artisan-friendly schools, administrators regularly point out effective episodes of instruction. They provide immediate and specific feedback to teachers on their instructional moves and strategies. The key is to provide abundant, immediate, and specific recognition of teachers' talents, not in a general way as in "nice job," but specifically as in "when you..., that caused..."

Artisan Teachers Work Where They Can Be Developed.



Ultimately, the greatest attractor of artisanship is the opportunity for growth and development. Some administrators focus much of their classroom observation time on evaluation instruments or supervisory walkthroughs. Administrators in artisan-friendly schools focus their energies mostly on the development of teachers and teaching. They agree with that old Iowa proverb, "You don't make the lambs fatter by weighing them more often. You make them fatter by feeding them." Administrators who develop a reputation for developing artisanship will, over time, attract more than their fair share of it (Rutherford, 2010).



It is my sincere wish that the descriptions and illustrations of teacher artisanship contained in *The Artisan Teacher: A Field Guide to Skillful Teaching* will serve as a valuable, trustworthy, and easy-to-use resource for creating and sustaining a **Great Place to Work**.

