

ON-DEMAND PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP SERIES



EPISODE 4 **Attracting and Retaining Talent**



Episode 4: **Attracting and Retaining Talent**

doodles and notes

The quality of a school's instructional program, meaning the actual teaching skills and abilities of its faculty, is the highest effect-size variable toward the successful learning and achievement of students (Fink, 2012). Given this truth, the ability of a school to establish and sustain a culture that, over time, attracts and retains top teaching talent is an important and essential endeavor.

One pervasive organizational trend observed over the past twenty-five years is the emphasis that creative, innovative enterprises place on attracting and retaining top talent (Lawler, 2008). Today's creative class workers, including in the education sector, express a different set of needs when describing an ideal job setting than typical employees of a generation ago. Key attractors include the opportunity to work on a high-performing team, to do meaningful work that makes a difference, to have professional and collegial relationships with peers and supervisors, to personally identify with the purpose and aims of the organization, and to enjoy a measure of trust, autonomy, and deep ownership in the organization's work (Rigoni & Adkins, 2016).

It is important to realize that exceptionally skillful teachers have other employment options (Feng, 2014). They are highly prized both inside and outside the field of education. And why not? Consider this starter list of characteristics of exceptionally talented teachers.

They are...

- Excellent problem solvers
- Creative and innovative
- Accountable and responsible
- Effective communicators
- Skillful collaborators and team players
- Early starters and late stayers
- Persistent and resilient
- Self-motivated and low-maintenance
- And, they accomplish great results with limited resources

It is not surprising that, with this type of skillset, they annually have job opportunities not only at schools near and far, but also with non-educational enterprises (Goldhaber, Grout, Holden, & Brown, 2014).

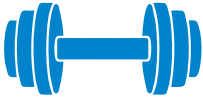
It is also important to realize that, because extra-skillful teachers have more options, more opportunities, and more potential employers, they are potentially more mobile. Talent is a powerful attractor of other talent (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Therefore, in an environment of mobility, exceptionally talented teachers tend to congregate, rather than separate.

This MLDS On-demand episode seeks to provide a framework for a school leader to assess and develop a school culture and a set of professional working conditions that can attract and retain top teaching talent- to the great benefit of learners and learning.

“Your talent is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift back to God.”

Leo Buscaglia

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EXERCISE: Respond to the introductory text. To what degree does your personal experience and knowledge base confirm or deny these basic tenets from the introduction:

- A. Instructional quality is the top effect-size variable with respect to student achievement.
- B. Excellent teachers are attracted to schools already staffed with excellent teachers.
- C. The effectiveness of the principal is a key ingredient in an effective teacher's employment choices.
- D. Exceptionally skillful teachers, because of their skillsets, have many employment options inside and outside of education.
- E. A school can design its culture and working conditions to intentionally attract and retain highly talented teachers.
- F. What other responses might you offer to this treatment's introductory statements?

Particularly skillful teachers are attracted to and retained in schools where they are:

VALUED | APPRECIATED | RECOGNIZED | DEVELOPED

Skillful 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 school that seeks to attract and retain talent, however, values teachers' instructional talents and skills above everything else. In the school setting, time is a dependable measure of value. Where administrators spend the majority of their time is what is seen by the staff as most valued. Value is also accurately interpreted by what administrators communicate about most, what they choose to share with parents and community members, print in the newsletter, post to social media, or point out to visiting administrators or district leaders.

Skillful teachers work where they are APPRECIATED

A definition (Dictionary.com) of appreciate is [to be fully conscious of, to be aware of, to detect] as in a person who appreciates modern art or fine wine. To appreciate is to see the actual and accurate value of something, to notice fine gradations of quality, to be an enthusiast or even a connoisseur. A professional chef prepares consistently high-quality meals every day. However, when the local paper's restaurant columnist is in the house, it calls out the best of the chef's abilities. Why is this? Perhaps truly talented performers are extra-motivated to perform in the presence of someone who knows the difference between good, great, and exceptional. Excellent teachers, likewise, enjoy teaching in a school where the administration knows and appreciates the finer points and nuances of effective teaching.

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“Talent is like electricity. We don't understand electricity. We use it.”

Maya Angelou

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Skillful teachers work where they are RECOGNIZED

In talent-friendly schools, administrators regularly recognize effective episodes of instruction. They provide immediate and specific feedback to teachers on their instructional moves, approaches, and strategies. Their feedback is abundant, immediate, and specific recognition of teachers'



talents and efforts, not in a general way as in “nice job,” but specifically as in “when you..., I noticed..., that caused..., your students benefitted because...” In survey after survey of job motivation factors, the recognition of achievement by valued peers and supervisors is consistently at or near the top of the list (Hertzberg, 2008).

Skillful teachers work where they can be DEVELOPED

Ultimately, the greatest attractor of talent is the opportunity for growth and development. In his bestselling book *Flow- The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi writes that human beings report the most gratifying times in their lives are not moments of high leisure, but rather instances where one has developed the capacity to do a difficult thing exceedingly well (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Some administrators focus much of their classroom observation time on evaluation instruments or supervisory walkthroughs. Administrators in talent-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 talent, will, over time, attract more than their fair share of it.

“True happiness involves the full use of one’s power and talents.”

John W. Gardner

“Genius is talent set on fire by courage.”

Henry VanDyke

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Additional Resources

Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS) Developing Level Facilitation Guide. Learning Experience 9: Human Resource Leadership. Pages 78-85.

Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS) Transformational Level Facilitation Guide. Learning Experience 9: Human Resource Leadership. Pages 64-70.

Creating a Great Place to Work

<http://www.rutherfordlg.com/new/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/great-place-to-work-111015.pdf>.

What Type of Talent are You Seeing

<http://www.rutherfordlg.com/new/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/What-type-of-talent112515.pdf>.

How Talent Friendly is Your School

<http://www.rutherfordlg.com/new/wp/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/SOCLNotes7TalentFriendly.pdf>.

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