A Principal's Leadership Paradigm Analysis

for Resolving Chronic Absences

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Abstract

This paper explores three leadership paradigms in relation to the issue of chronic absences in a rural high school. The ethical implications of each leadership style are also analyzed. The transformational leadership style, the command and control leadership style and the collaboration style are applied to the chronic absence problem at Wilmot High School. Principal Mader analyzes all three styles to determine which leadership style will be most effective in reaching her solution to the absence issue at her high school.

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The Principal of Wilmot High School is Ms. Jennifer Mader. Ms. Mader is a graduate of

the high school and will send her own children to Wilmot when they reach high school age. Ms.

Mader is well liked by the community, teachers, parents and staff. She leads with a firm, but fair

hand in all decisions. One of the most troublesome issues at Wilmot is the chronic absences of a

handful of students. Approximately 50 students, 10 freshmen, 10 sophomores, 12 juniors and 18

seniors are absent on average one day each week. The students who are sophomores, juniors and

seniors have had this problem each year they have been enrolled at the high school. As the

school is small, the absences are noticed and are part of the school culture. Everyone knows it is

a problem. The students seem to be getting away with it and others are starting to think it is okay

to miss school. There are no consequences to the absent students. However, Principal Mader is

determined to solve the chronic absences problem at Wilmot and reframe the school culture

regarding absences. In this paper, I will argue the Command and Control Leadership style is the

optimal ethical leadership approach to making a positive impact on school absences. I will do

this by consulting three theories of leadership and comparing them. The significance of my

findings and argument is that schools will be able to resolve the issue of absences with the most

effective leadership style.

The Principal's solution is somewhat extreme, but ingenious. When the next semester

starts, the Principal will communicate the new absence policy to all stakeholders. Then, the

implementation will begin immediately. The policy states that if a student has "chronic" absences

defined in the policy as an average of one or more days absence each week, the school will take

measures to ensure the students attend school. Specifically, the school already hired an outside

security agency to drive to the chronically absent student's house, roust them out of bed, if necessary, and drive them to school. If the student is not home or refuses to go with the security agency, the sheriff will be called, and an immediate truancy ticket will be issued. The tickets will be paid through community service undertaken by the student. Parents cannot pay their child's way out of the ticket. Parents need to allow the security service to take over the problem of getting the kids to school and cooperate with the security service.

Principal Mader is extremely flexible in her leadership styles. She can be a command and control leader at times, a transformational leader when needed and a servant as leader if the issue is one of import. In this situation, Principal Mader analyzed all three styles of leadership before deciding which would prove to be the best and most effective for this chronic absence problem. Although usually a leader is one style or the other, Principal Mader is somewhat special in that she can become whatever type of leader she chooses. In addition to the leadership styles, Principal Mader always considers the ethics applicable to her decisions, the process and the implementation. Ultimately, after considering the impact from all three leadership styles, Principal Mader decided the command and control fit the problem and the solution the best.

Wilmot Union High School is a fictional rural school with 802 students in the County of Riverside, California. The school has a diverse population of students who predominately live on farms or within ten miles of the school. Students arrive and depart schools on busses. There is not a lot of turnover of students. Almost all students start as freshmen and continue their high school studies at Wilmot without moving out of the district. Consequently, the administration, the teachers and the staff become familiar with families, parents and siblings of the students at school. The school has a culture of inclusion and family values. School sports, plays, and

concerts are well attended as there are few other recreational activities in this rural area of the state.

As this issue is one of profound impact on the students, the community, the parents and the teachers, the Principal must, as always, act ethically. A Principal can adhere to one or more of the four ethical frameworks during the decision-making process and throughout implementation. For example, if the Principal were to follow the ethics of justice, the Principal would follow the laws in place at the time. The Principal would need to ask the questions: is there a law; should the law be enforced; and should we make a law if there isn't one? (Shapiro and Stevkovich, 2016, p. 11-13). For the Principal following the ethics of critique, decisions and implementation would follow a line of thinking regarding inequities in societies and schools. This Principal digs deeper than the Principal following the ethics of justice. This Principal asks questions such as who makes the laws, who benefits from the laws, who has the power, are there silenced voices? This Principal needs options to enable all children to grow and achieve. (Shapiro and Stevkovich, 2016, p. 13-15).

The remaining two types of ethics the Principal may follow are the ethics of care and the ethics of the profession. For the ethics of care, the Principal would be focused on loyalty, trust, empowerment and social justice. (Shapiro and Stevkovich, 2016, p. 15-18). The Principal would know the first job of schools is to care for our children. (Shapiro and Stevkovich, 2016, p 16). The Principal would ask very different questions from the Principal following the ethics of justice or the ethics of critique. Who will benefit from my decision? Who will be hurt by my actions? What are the long-term effects of a decision that I make today? Somewhat closely tied to the ethics of care, the ethics of the profession could also guide the Principal. The ethics of the profession are unique to the educator. As educators are working with children, educators need an

even more stringent standard of ethics. There are certain moral aspects an educator may embrace. The educator must, "prepare children to assume the roles and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society." (Shapiro and Stevkovich, 2016, p. 19). The three Rs of the profession of ethics are "rights, responsibility and respect." (Shapiro and Stevkovich, 2016 p. 27). The Principal in an ethics of profession situation asks the following questions. What would the profession expect me to do? What does the community expect me to do? What should be done that is in the best interests of the students, considering students are diverse in their composition and needs? (Shapiro and Stevkovich, 2016, p. 18-27).

In solving the problem of chronic absences at the high school, one leadership style the Principal considered is the transformational leader. Transformational leaders may motivate people by connecting with the person's "attitudes, beliefs and values." (Rafferty 330). Transformational leaders, (hereinafter referred to as TL), can get people to change their minds as opposed to just do the work or follow the mandates. A follower of a TL will want to do the assigned task. It takes a special person to be a transformational leader. This leadership style cannot be learned. It requires innate abilities of the leader.

As the TL has such a profound impact on another person, the ethical implications of using his authority to bend the desires of the followers are rampant. The most likely code of ethics the TL will follow is the ethics of care. The TL can impose her will on the followers and motivate them to want to succeed. She emphasizes loyalty as she makes a personal connection to the followers. The followers seek social justice along with the TL because they feel empowered. They are all concerned with solving the problem and making lasting changes for the long term. Regarding the specifics of the TL, there are five attributes which are necessary for a leader to be considered a TL. The first, vision, is emblematic of the Principal and invaluable in solving the

problem of chronic absences. Both characteristics are present in the Principal of Wilmot High School. Charisma or vision "involves an extraordinarily gifted person, a social crisis, a set of ideas providing a radical solution to a problem, a set of followers who are attracted to the exceptional person... and the validation of the leader's extraordinary gifts through repeated success." (Rafferty 331). The chronic absences at Wilmot High School are indeed a social crisis. For example, at least fifty students miss at least one day a week, on average. This is twenty percent of their educational time. In addition to the social crisis, the vision of the Principal is evident in the radical solution proposed. The Principal intends to hire outside security to drive to the students' homes and pick them up and take the students to school. If the students are not available for the ride to class, the sheriff will be summoned, and an immediate truancy ticket will be issued. The vision is also observed as the faculty, parents and community believe in the Principal even though the solution is quite extreme. Parents want their children in school, teachers want the students in class and the community wants the kids off the streets and not walking around the community during the day without adult supervision. Finally, the Principal has had many successes in the school. This repeated validation of the Principal's efforts and ideas lead to a sound, straightforward vision that others can follow.

        In addition to vision, the transformational leader must utilize inspirational communication. This is defined by Rafferty as, "The expression of positive and encouraging messages about the organization, and statements that build motivation and confidence." The leader uses "oral communication to motivate and arouse followers' emotions.… and appeals and emotion-laden statements to arouse followers' emotions and motivation.…" (Rafferty 332). The Principal is a former soccer coach. Her coaching and cheering of the teachers and staff is positive, vibrant and upbeat. Many faculty meetings are started with laughs and affirmations of

success, however small or trivial. Each and every teacher feels valued and respected. This results in the teachers working to please the Principal. The teachers become emotionally involved in the Principal's ideas and solutions to problems. Everyone wants a win. When Principal Mader informs the staff of the new absence policy and implementation of consequences, the Principal will be confident of the teachers' receptivity to the idea. Mader's inspirational communication over the years will allow her to lead the teachers and staff to her resolution.

The third attribute of the TL is being able to intellectually stimulate the followers. The Principal at Wilmot High School conducts faculty meetings in an open, yet rigorous manner. For instance, the Principal will often turn the meeting over to a faculty member who will conduct a lesson on the issue of the day. The lesson is pedagogically sound so that critical thinking, analysis and effective communication are experienced. The lesson enhances the teachers' "interest in, and awareness of problems, and increasing their ability to think about problems in new ways." (Rafferty 333). The faculty also has time for reflection and a metacognitive activity to really get the brain cells exercised. Ideas are valued by the Principal. Thinking outside of the box is the norm. Excitement about the task at hand is shared. The Principal is able to add this aspect of intellectual activity to the followers, the teachers. As the Principal's solution of sending security to the student's home is an "out of the box" idea, the Principal is assured the teachers and staff will be open to the idea as this intellectual curiosity and stimulation was incorporated throughout the various problems and issues throughout the Principal's time at the school.

Being able to personally connect with the teachers at Wilmot is a gift of the Principal. No matter how small the life event, the Principal acknowledges the teacher. Teachers know the Principal is "concerned with [their] feelings and needs." (Rafferty 333). However, it is not just the personal insight into the teachers that leads the Principal to success. The Principal has a

knack for knowing what motivates each teacher. What works on one, does not work on all. Some teachers want to have a say in their classes. Others want a specific room location. A few are interested in after school opportunities. The Principal garners the exact reward to achieve the intended result. Since the Principal took the time to investigate the desires of the staff and followed through on rewarding according the individual wants, the staff tend to feel further emotionally tied to the Principal. Furthermore, the staff receive specific praise for tasks. The idea of growth mindset is apparent in the Principal's positive response to staff actions. The Principal rounds out the five attributes with personal connection and specific praise and rewards. The transformational leadership style could prove to be successful to solve the absence issue. However, the Principal needs to be certain and therefore considered other leadership styles.

The next leadership style the Principal considered in solving the chronic absence problem is the command and control leadership style of Frederick Taylor. This Tayloristic leader is not concerned with anyone. This leader is only concerned with the result and how the result will benefit him or her. This leader is not of service to anyone but him or herself. Anyone or anything that gets in the way is discarded and a better means to the end is found. There is no team, there is no service, there is no collaboration or transformation. It is the leader's way or no way. If Principal Mader were to follow the command and control style of leadership, Mader would take the teacher's choice out of the work. (Braverman 77). Mader would first collect all the information. As Braverman explained, the labor process "is to depend not at all upon the abilities of workers, but entirely upon the practices of management." (78). Next, Principal Mader will take all thought from the workers, the employees of the school. What Principal Mader decides to do regarding the chronic absence issue is for Principal Mader to decide. All employees will simply follow the instructions. The worker will only receive "simplified instructions which it is

henceforth their duty to follow unthinkingly and without comprehension of the underlying technical reasoning or data." (Braverman 81).

The third area Principal Mader will analyze in determining if the Command and Control method is the best leadership style for the situation is that management must pre-plan and control all aspects of the workers day. (Braverman 82). Is this possible in solving the chronic absence problem? The Principal must get her workers (the security team responsible for absences) to follow her directions to the letter. Will the workers stray from the specific instructions? If Principal Mader takes ALL decision making away from the security team and provides the team with no information as to why they must carry out the rather dramatic solution to the absence problem, the workers may not follow through.

The security team may consider the ethical implications of calling the sheriff on both the student and the parent. The ethics of care would require the team to dig deeper into the problem. What is happening at home that the students are not going to school? However, the ethics of justice would result in the security team following the law. If a student is not in school, the student is truant. If there is a chronic truancy issue, the legal authorities should be contacted. Given the ethical implications, the security team may devise their own response and solution to the problem. Furthermore, the team may not consider the problem chronic as they do not have all the information. Consequently, the Command and Control is not likely to be successful in this situation. There are too many areas in which the security team could fail to follow through on the Principal's demands. Also, the ethical issues could easily deter the team from the Principal's mission.

Another leadership style Mader could utilize is the collaborative leadership style. The collaborative leader is the most people person of the leaders. This leader surveys interests,

networks, does his or her homework, cultivates relationships, communicates, coordinates, is thick skinned and has faith in his or her own agency. (Wepner 124). In the team collaboration, the leader and the team are the focus. Mader would have to work "cooperatively and collegially with others" and "use communication and trust to build a climate that enables others to have a shared vision." (Wepner 124-125). In addition, Mader's workers would be inspired to commit and act. There would be "peer problem solving" and "broad-based" involvement. (Wepner 125). Principal Mader and her team would work together to solve the problem of chronic absences. Although the team works to solve the problem, Mader would need to embody eight characteristics for the team collaboration leadership model to be successful. The eight characteristics are: knowledge, vision, interpersonal skills, entrepreneurial skills, negotiation skills, managerial skills, work ethic and confidence. (Wepner 127). Although Principal Mader could incorporate these characteristics into her leadership, this style may not be as effective as the transformational leadership style because it opens the team to being able to make decisions on the solution. The team collaborates, discusses, analyzes and solves the problem. The team would also consider the ethical implications of all possible solutions. For example, if the team chose to expel students with chronic absences, the team would be avoiding the ethic of care. The team would not be thinking in the student's best interests, just in what is the easiest way to rid the school of this problem. The ethic of critique application by the team may result in changing the rules of the school absence policy. Should some students be able to work at home and have a modified schedule? This may be the best solution and would take into consideration both the ethic of care and the ethic of critique.

However, if Mader wants her solution of sending out the security team to the absent student's home instituted, the team work collaboration style would not be the most successful.

There are too many variables and the opportunities for the team to make decisions which are different from Mader's. In addition, the command and control would work better than the collaboration style, but this style could have problems. For example, in the command and control, the security team, the parents and the Sheriff all have to work together to make Mader's solution a success. Without allegiance to Mader, the team members may not carry out the plan. The team still needs to make decisions in the field without specific instructions from Mader. The team cannot simply blindly follow directions. The command and control requires too much control that is not available for the solution Mader demands.

Mader needs to stick to a transformational model. She needs to get the security team and the employees of the school to transform their thinking and want to do what she desires. Her solution is dramatic and extreme. It will most likely upset many of the parents. Her team must be fully supportive. Simply carrying out instructions is not enough. The team must want to to the work and also understand the need for this solution. The transformational model of leadership will be the most successful in resolving the chronic absence problem at Wilmot High School. A team which has been transformed to meet the demands of the Principal will be effective. This is not a leadership model that can be implemented overnight. However, Mader has been working on this leadership style since she started at Wilmot and her success will be certain.

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