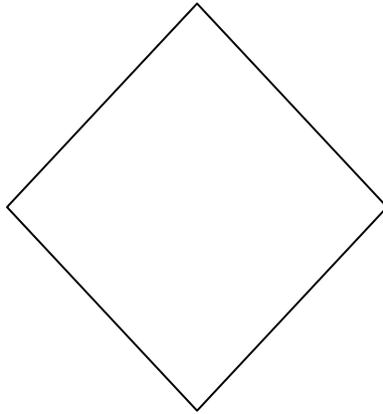


# What Great Educators Do *Differently*



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*Teaching Is  
The Profession  
That Makes  
All Other  
Professions  
Possible*

# What Great Educators Do *Differently*

Why Look at Great? –

It's People Not Programs –

10 Days Out of 10 –

Don't Have To Repair – Always Do Repair -

High Expectations For Students?

Make Every Decision Based On Our Best People –

Revenge v. Prevention –

Have A Great Ability To Ignore –

Roll Of The Dice?

Great Teachers Make It Cool To Care –

Understand Who Is The Variable -

Accept Responsibility –

Understand They Are The Filter –

Focus On Behavior, Then Focus On Beliefs –

In Every Situation Ask Who Is Most Comfortable  
and Who Is Least Comfortable -

**What Is The Purpose?**

**Will This  
Actually Accomplish  
The Purpose?**

**How Will  
The Most Positive And  
Productive People  
Feel About This?**

**Raise  
The  
Praise**

**Minimize  
The  
Criticize**

**5 Things That  
Help Praise Work**

**Authentic**

**Specific**

**Immediate**

**Clean**

**Private**

## **PASSING THE BUCK DOWN THE LINE**

Adapted by Todd Whitaker

Said the college professor,  
“Such rawness in the student is a shame,  
Lack of preparation in high school  
Is to blame.”

Said the high school teacher,  
“Good heavens, that boy’s a fool.  
The fault, of course, is with the  
Junior High School.

The junior high teacher noted,  
“It’s so hopeless and sad  
Thanks to those elementary clowns,  
They can’t subtract or add.”

The grammar school teacher said,  
“From such stupidity  
May I be spared.  
They sent him up to me so unprepared.”

The primary teacher huffed,  
“Kindergarten blockheads all.  
They call that preparation?  
Why, it’s worse than none at all.”

The kindergarten teacher said,  
“Such lack of training never did I see.  
What kind of parents  
must those kid’s parents be?”

This responsibility to teach  
is something that we all share,  
but somehow the grass is  
always greener over there.

So rather than hand down  
these grumbles and groans,  
Let’s remember about glass houses,  
and the throwing of stones.

The answer of course,  
It is not chance or luck  
but what we do in our own classes,  
so let’s not pass the buck.

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# Setting the Tone

Todd Whitaker

Reprinted from *Leadership magazine*, January/February 2004

Great principals treat all people with respect every day. They also understand that it's not possible to give too much praise, as long as the praise is authentic.

One of the hallmarks of effective principals is how they treat people. Like effective teachers, effective principals treat people with respect. Now, it's not difficult to treat some people with respect, or even to treat most people with respect. It's even possible to treat all people with respect quite a bit of the time. The real challenge is to treat everyone with respect every day--and great principals do.

## How is your day going?

As principals we get asked the question, "How is your day going?" many times a day. Our response can determine not only how others view us, but can also impact the frame of mind of the person who asked us this.

If a teacher says, "How's it going?" you have many choices in how to respond. If you say, "Things are great! How about with you?" you have given her a positive perception of the school.

If you respond, "That Jimmy Wallace is getting on my nerves!" you have sent a completely different message. All of a sudden Jimmy Wallace is getting on that teacher's nerves too, and she does not even know who Jimmy Wallace is.

Now some of you may be thinking that you could never lie. That is interesting. So, when the developmentally disabled second grader asks if you think she drew a good picture, what do you tell her? It is always up to us to determine what gets through our filters and what does not. Each of us has to decide, but the most effective principals are well aware that they are the filter that will set the tone for many things in their school.

## The angry parent

Here are two ways to filter the same scenario. Let's examine what happens under each. When I was a principal, every once in a while I would deal with irate parents in my office behind closed doors. And, like so often happens, they are really irate at the world--I just happened to be the one sitting there at the time of their venting. Once the irate parent has left and I walk out of the office, I have some filtering choices that I have to make.

If a teacher says innocently, "How is your day going?" I can choose which filter to kick in. If I say, "Things are great, how about with you?" that teacher feels good about the world and moves on to face his students. Even if he is concerned about

something, I have not added to his worries. But, if I respond to "How is your day going?" by saying, "Oh, I just dealt with that whacko parent, Mrs. Smith. Man, she has some temper! I hope I never have to meet with her again. Yikes!"

Now, what have I accomplished? Well, I have made that teacher terrified of Mrs. Smith. And, pretty soon, if I tell enough people about Mrs. Smith, every teacher in the school will have some degree of concern about potentially meeting with this evil demon. And, to varying degrees, many teachers will be less confident about potentially working with all students whose last name is Smith just in case that demon happens to be their mom.

I have shifted the teachers' time and energy to unproductive worrying and away from confidently approaching their students. Additionally, my teachers will now be hesitant to contact parents (especially named Smith) because I have raised their level of concern.

My response as a filter impacts the school one way or the other. By protecting others from unnecessary bad news, we can create a much more productive environment. Not only does this apply to working with people

outside of the school district, the same thing applies to filtering those within.

### **Unpleasant memories**

All of us can remember at least one occasion in our professional lives where we were treated inappropriately by someone in a leadership role. And, no matter how long ago it was or how often that person has treated us well, we remember.

The same thing is true of everyone in our school. The one day a month or year we choose to be sarcastic or cutting to a student or staff member will be etched in stone in their memory bank. Though they may pretend to have forgotten, they never will. And if this happened in any kind of a public setting, it probably will not slip out of the memories of others who witnessed it.

### **Take a positive approach each day**

One of the most critical responsibilities of an effective leader is to consistently and continually take a positive approach each day of the year. There are so many things that potentially bring teachers down. It can be an upset parent, a troubled student, or working with not enough resources. These are facts of the job and of life. Our role as leaders is to continually take a positive approach. Understanding the impact and power of praise is essential.

### **Why People Don't Praise More**

When I work with educators I often ask them why we as people do not praise more. After all, we determine how much we praise, and every time we praise someone, at least two people feel better--and one of them is us. With this in mind, why is it principals and teachers are so hesitant to praise? Here are some of the most common responses I get from principals and teachers.

#### **Reason: If I praise someone, he or she will stop working.**

**Response:** If a student says how much she enjoys your class, do you automatically show a video the next day? No, you try even harder. If you have just finished mowing your lawn and a neighbor compliments you on how nice it looks, do you mow it less carefully next time? Quite the opposite. Next time you might even trim! If you question whether praise works, why don't you come over to my house and look at my neighbor's lawn.

What is it that keeps you on a diet more? Is it when people mention how good you look, or is it when people say, "It's about time." As long as it is authentic, praise is a very powerful reinforcer and motivator.

#### **Reason: If I praise people, I might miss someone and hurt their feelings.**

**Response:** I guess it is better to never praise anyone. That way you miss everyone and you can make sure you hurt their feelings--and everyone else's, while you're at it. Ironically, it might not be their feelings we are worried about. It could easily be that we don't want to feel bad because we miss someone or because we might be afraid of their response so we don't take a chance on any type of acknowledgement.

The biggest reason people resent others being praised is because they do not feel valued themselves. The solution to this is not to praise less, but to be much more inclusive and effusive in your efforts to recognize and praise others.

#### **Reason: I don't have the time.**

**Response:** After all, we barely have time to get in all the griping, whining and complaining we need to do, don't we? Name the three teachers in your school that you praise the most. Now, name the three best teachers in your school. Is there any overlap there? By setting a positive tone, the principal can help direct the interactions of everyone in the school. Making sure we do this, even when we least feel like it, is essential.

The other thing to keep in mind is that it is fun to praise and very rejuvenating. By focusing on all of the positive things in our [schools](#), and there are many, we can have more drive and energy to help get us through some of the less positive times. If we do not set this tone, it is very unlikely that it will get set. And, maybe even more importantly, if this productive focus does not become intrinsic in the school, then the voices of the nay-sayers are likely to become even more dominant.

-- Todd Whitaker

### **Techniques for effective praising**

In books, I have outlined some of the techniques used in effective praising (Whitaker, Whitaker and Lumpa, 2000). One concept that is essential to praise is the fact that praise must be authentic. It is also important to understand that the word is "authentic"--not world-record. It just has to be true, that is all.

None of us mind hearing praise. As a matter of fact, if we praise correctly it is impossible to praise too much. And if you question this, ask yourself, "Have I ever been praised too much?" Of course not. You may have been falsely flattered by someone you knew was not genuine, but if it was authentic then you could not be praised too much.

### **Too much nice?**

I know that everyone reading this has a multitude of demands

they face. And the pressures continue to grow. We need special education, alternative education, drug-free education, sex education, and--oh my--we cannot forget the new state standards. All of these things have some effect on our schools and an impact on our responsibilities. Each of these may even be essential. Whether we have enough of one or too much of another is an endless debate. But there is one thing that I am sure about. We never have too much nice.

Effective principals always have to understand that the most important thing teachers can do is model appropriate ways to interact with students. And with all of the challenges we face in school and so many of us face at home, nice may seem trivial. Yet, if our schools and classrooms can have that as a foundation, many of the other things can be accomplished with much less resistance.

As principals, consistently modeling the expectations that we have for how people should be treated is a valuable gift we can give our school. And in a short period of time we will find that it is a gift that everyone in the school will also give each other.

If everyone in your school is treated with respect and dignity, you may still have nothing special. However, if everyone in your school is not treated with respect and dignity, you will never have anything special. Of that, I am sure.

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# SHARPENING YOUR PEOPLE SKILLS

## TEMPERAMENT SURVEY

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Circle one word in each row that you feel describes you best. This is a forced-choice inventory.
2. When completed, circle the letter in each row on page 2 that corresponds to the letter of the word you circled on the inventory.
3. Total the number of circled letters in each column on page 2. Record the total at the bottom of each column.

#	A	B	C	D
1	Restrained	Forceful	Careful	Expressive
2	Pioneering	Correct	Emotional	Satisfied
3	Willing	Animated	Bold	Precise
4	Stubborn	Bashful	Indecisive	Unpredictable
5	Respectful	Outgoing	Patient	Determined
6	Persuasive	Self-reliant	Cooperative	Gentle
7	Cautious	Even-tempered	Decisive	Life-of-the-party
8	Popular	Assertive	Perfectionist	Generous
9	Unpredictable	Bashful	Indecisive	Argumentative
10	Agreeable	Optimistic	Persistent	Accommodating
11	Positive	Humble	Neighborly	Talkative
12	Friendly	Obliging	Playful	Strong-willed
13	Charming	Adventurous	Disciplined	Consistent
14	Soft-spoken	Dry-Humor	Aggressive	Attractive
15	Enthusiastic	Analytical	Sympathetic	Determined
16	Bossy	Inconsistent	Slow	Critical
17	Sensitive	Force-of-character	Spirited	Laid-back
18	Influential	Kind	Independent	Orderly
19	Idealistic	Popular	Cheerful	Out-spoken
20	Impatient	Mood	Aimless	Show-off
21	Competitive	Spontaneous	Loyal	Thoughtful
22	Self-sacrificing	Considerate	Convincing	Courageous
23	Fearful	Changeable	Pessimistic	Tactless
24	Tolerant	Conventional	Stimulating	Resourceful

## SCORING SHEET

#				
1	B	D	A	C
2	A	C	D	B
3	C	B	A	D
4	A	D	C	B
5	D	B	C	A
6	B	A	D	C
7	C	D	B	A
8	B	A	D	C
9	D	A	C	B
10	C	B	D	A
11	A	D	C	B
12	D	C	A	B
13	B	A	D	C
14	C	D	B	A
15	D	A	C	B
16	A	B	C	D
17	B	C	D	A
18	C	A	B	D
19	D	B	C	A
20	A	D	C	B
21	A	B	C	D
22	D	C	B	A
23	D	B	A	C
24	D	C	A	B

# “THE DOER”

## Strengths

### Tendencies include:

- Getting immediate results
- Making quick decisions
- Persistence
- Solving problems
- Taking change
- Self-reliance

### The ideal environment includes:

- Many new and varied activities
- Opportunity to get things done
- Continual Challenges
- Difficult assignment
- Freedom to act
- Control over situations

## Weaknesses

### Tendencies may include:

- Insensitivity to others
- Impatience
- Overlooks risks and cautions
- Inflexibility and unyielding
- Taking on too much
- Being inattentive to detail
- Resenting restrictions
- Being too demanding of others

### Need others to provide:

- Sensitivity to needs of others
- Caution
- Details and facts

### Life Development areas:

- Greater patience
- Sensitivity to the needs of others
- Being more flexible

# “THE INFLUENCER”

## Strengths

### Tendencies include:

- \_\_\_ Optimism
- \_\_\_ Enthusiasm
- \_\_\_ Being Personable
- \_\_\_ Making a good impression
- \_\_\_ Being verbally articulate
- \_\_\_ A desire to help others
- \_\_\_ Creating an entertaining climate

### The ideal environment includes:

- \_\_\_ A friendly atmosphere
- \_\_\_ Freedom from control and detail
- \_\_\_ Opportunity to influence others
- \_\_\_ Public recognition of ability
- \_\_\_ Opportunity to verbalize
- \_\_\_ Positive reinforcement and praise
- \_\_\_ Enthusiastic responses to ideas

## Weaknesses

### Tendencies may include:

- \_\_\_ Lack of follow-through
- \_\_\_ Overselling
- \_\_\_ Overestimating anticipated results
- \_\_\_ Misjudging capabilities
- \_\_\_ Talking too much
- \_\_\_ Acting impulsively
- \_\_\_ Jumping to conclusions
- \_\_\_ Over-committing

### Need others to provide:

- \_\_\_ Follow-through on detail
- \_\_\_ A logical approach
- \_\_\_ Concentration on the task

### Life Development areas:

- \_\_\_ Better control of time
- \_\_\_ Objectivity in decision making
- \_\_\_ Pausing before acting

# “THE RELATER”

## Strengths

### Tendencies include:

- Being Supportive
- Being agreeable
- Loyalty
- Self-control
- Consistency
- Being a good listener
- Performing established work patterns

### The ideal environment includes:

- Sincere appreciation
- Minimal conflict
- Security
- Acknowledgement of work
- Limited territory
- Traditional way of doing things
- Opportunity to develop relationships

## Weaknesses

### Tendencies may include:

- Resisting change
- Trouble meeting deadlines
- Being overly lenient
- Procrastinating
- Being indecisive
- Holding a grudge
- Being overly possessive
- Lack of initiative

### Need others to provide:

- Stretch toward new challenges
- Help in solving difficult problems
- Initiative and change

### Life Development areas:

- Facing confrontation
- Initiating more
- Increasing pace

# “THE THINKER”

## Strengths

### Tendencies include:

- Orderliness
- Conscientiousness
- Discipline
- Preciseness
- Thoroughness
- Being diplomatic with people
- Being analytical

### The ideal environment includes:

- Being able to concentrate on detail
- Opportunities to critique
- Stable surrounding
- An exact job description
- Opportunities for careful planning
- Time to do things right

## Weaknesses

### Tendencies may include:

- Indecisiveness
- Getting bogged down in detail
- Rigidity on the how-to's
- Avoiding controversy
- Low self-esteem
- Being hesitant to try new things
- Sensitivity to criticism
- Pessimism

### Need others to provide:

- Quick decision making
- Reassurance
- Stretching of capabilities

### Life Development areas:

- Being more open
- Developing self-confidence
- Being more optimistic

# Predicting the Future of Education

*Todd Whitaker*

*Reprinted from Principal Leadership magazine, March 2005*

Preview: Despite constant search for reform solutions, the future of school improvement depends on people, not programs. Schools must hire excellent teachers and strive to make all teachers as good as the best teacher in the school. Outstanding principals know that their primary role is to teach teachers how to provide a high-quality education for students.

**R**ecently, I was asked to speak on the topic of futurism at an upcoming leadership conference. When I asked for some specifics about what they wanted me to do, I was told to talk about what is needed to be successful in education for upcoming generations. My first response was "I don't know anything about the future." Then, after hesitating only briefly, I added, "Well, on second thought, the only thing that I know for sure about the future I learned in elementary school many years ago. I learned that any day now we are going metric and we have to be prepared. Other than that, I do not know anything for sure about the future."

The fate of the metric system in the U.S., despite my teacher's promises in fourth grade, makes me hesitant to make predictions, but I did begin to reflect seriously about our ability to have schools that can develop students for the 21st century and I think having good teachers is the key.

## **Teaching Skills for the 21st Century**

We do not need all of our teachers to reach some mystical level. We just need all of our teachers to be like

our best teachers. In my mind, that is what we need to have a great school. What do you think? Would it improve your school if all of your teachers were as good as your very best staff members? If so, how can we do it?

**So when are we going metric?**

## **It's People, Not Programs**

When I speak to teachers and principals, I often ask whether anyone has ever been in a poor-lecturer's class room. Routinely, every hand in the audience is raised. Then I ask the group, "Which of those three words is the problem: poor, lecturer's, or classroom?" And to help out, I always eliminate door number three: classroom. So basically, I ask what the real problem with a poor-lecturer's classroom is, and the answer is consistently a resounding "lecture"! Although the overwhelming response is lecture, it is also overwhelmingly wrong. The answer is poor! Have you ever been in a good lecturer's classroom? Of course, we all have. That should tell us that the answer is not lecture. Yet, we all repeat the chant that lecture

is bad basically because someone told us that it is. Realistically, every teacher in a school uses lecture some of the time. It is just that some of them are effective with it and others are not. However, instead of understanding and acknowledging those differences in effectiveness, we tend to latch onto the issue being the instructional practice rather than the person.

The issue with ineffective teachers is almost always the person, not the practice or program. I was working with a principal recently who was struggling with one of his least effective teachers. He was concerned about the teacher's professional appearance. I acknowledged that professional appearance is something that was quite important to me, but that it seldom was the cause of a person's effectiveness or lack thereof. I asked the principal, "If this teacher started dressing better, would that change the dynamic in the classroom?" The principal reflected for a moment and then answered sadly, "No. If he wore a tuxedo to class every day, he still would not be able to engage the students." Exactly. There is no reason to focus on something that is

a peripheral issue when the heart of the issue is the ineffectiveness of a staff member.

Another principal shared a concern about a teacher who arrived late to school on a regular basis. When I asked him what the problem was, he responded that the teacher was arriving late to school.

So, I asked more specifically: Is the problem that other teachers are upset? Is the problem that promptness is important to you? Is the problem that a parent complained? What is the real problem? The principal then answered, "The problem is that students are left unsupervised." I said, "That is the problem! If you get her to school on time but she lingers too long in the teachers lounge, you have addressed a problem, but not the problem."

Many times we think that programs are the problem or that programs are the solution. That is one reason we are so quick to jump on new ideas – open classrooms, whole language, block scheduling, etc. None of these ideas are wrong, and none of them are right. It all depends on the effectiveness of the staff members who are implementing them. The only reason to implement a program is to refine or enhance the skills of our staff members. The program itself is never the solution or the problem.

### **Two Ways to Improve Our Schools**

Although we look at myriad changes, there are only two

ways to improve our schools. Hire better teachers or improve the ones we have.

These are the only two things we can do. There have never been other solutions, nor will there ever be. Effective principals are quite aware of these being the key elements to school improvement, and we cannot choose one or the other. To be a great school we have to do both.

**We need all of our teachers to be like our best teachers.**

There is no question that the most important people in the school are the students. Obviously, they are the focus of everything that takes place in a school. However, one thing that truly outstanding principals are aware of is that their primary role is to teach the teachers. As a principal, the best way to have an exceptional learning environment for students is to have outstanding teachers working with them in the classroom. It is not the students who are the primary focus of outstanding principals. It is the teachers.

An opening in his or her teaching staff is the single most precious commodity a principal can ever have, and the quickest way to improve your school is to hire great teachers every time you get an opening. Just as the only way to improve your average grade in a class is to have your grade on your next assignment be better than your average grade, the most significant way to have rapid improvement in a

school is to add teachers who are better than the ones that left. Although all principals have occasion to employ new staff members, the kind of staff members that great principals hire and the way and diligence by which they do it are what make our most effective peers different in the employer arena.

By nurturing the talents of newcomers and increasing the skills of veteran staff members, a principal has the recipe to continually make their school better. Without having a clear focus on these elements, other areas of attempted improvement will continue to be limited in their effectiveness.

### **What Is The Future?**

Now that we have put aside our meter sticks because the revolution may not be quite so near after all, what do we do? The first thing we must do is realize the power we have to affect our schools by improving our teachers. Within every school's walls, there are role models who can help everyone be more effective. Rather than feel the need to reinvent the wheel, let's work on refining the ones we have. If the goal is to help all teachers be as good as our best teachers, a logical place to start is by giving everyone a chance to observe and learn from quality. Use the positive role models you have to help others maximize their talents. Many people have never seen great teaching, and they may not even know what it looks like or that it even exists. There is little chance to reach a new level if you cannot visualize what it

would look like if you got there.

One of the great joys of being a principal is observing your best teachers. Expand the wealth throughout your school by having everyone participate. You will raise the level of respect that other staff members have for your very best teachers.

If teachers do not have a chance to regularly observe in the classrooms of peers, they may not have any idea

how good your best teacher is or how poor your worst might be. There is no chance that two ineffective teachers can help a new staff member be effective. If they knew how, they would be effective themselves. However, when we do have an opportunity to infuse new talent into our schools by adding a new teacher, one of the best things we can do is give them a chance to regularly interact with and observe our current top staff members. A wise man once told me, "You

have to put your mules in horse races so at least they can see how fast four legged creatures can run." I guess this is true whether or not they are running kilometers.  
**PL**

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