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Things can go better when a skilled management team is in place.

# I Want To Be Alone, But Not When It's Time to Make Decisions!

by Herman R. Goldberg

## Come with Me to the Board Room!

Come with me to the board conference room at the Education Building in one of the nation's largest school districts. An urban superintendent of schools is being interviewed by the school board for a similar position in this city. After about two hours of grilling the candidate in the areas of administration, instruction, finance, procurement, staff relationships, personnel, and federal-state-local relationships, the president of the board surprised the candidate with the final question of the interview.

"How soon can you come and how many of your administrative team will you bring with you?" The candidate was aghast. He had not yet decided that that was the position he wanted and was taken aback by what seemed to be a genuine offer tied to a strong suggestion that his administrative team quit as a unit and join him in the new district. To the candidate, the board president's questions presupposed that the administrative team in the hiring school district was about to face a housecleaning. The candidate replied that he was not sure of when or if he could come but, speaking rather sharply to the board said, "Your second question bothers me. Why would an incoming superintendent be willing to be party to sweeping out the existing team before he becomes acquainted with them, assessed their skills and strengths, and their working relationships with the schools, the community, and the board?"

Upon reflection, it was clear that the board was talking about their strong belief in administrative team management even at the expense of local chaos and upheaval. That was more than a decade ago. The superintendent did not accept the offer.

## Still Alive and Well

The concept of the administrative team first emerged in the late '60s when there was a great deal of study and discussion about shared decision-making. While it wasn't called team management at that time, the concept grew rapidly. Administrative staff and groups of teachers and principals were going through some type of process of sharing in

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decision-making about the procedures and operation of a school system. After an early spurt leading to mixed results and varying degrees of acceptance, it went into limbo for a few years. The concept reappeared in education under the banner "team management," after it hit in industry. Articles about team management in the automobile industry, in other manufacturing and business enterprises appeared regularly. Bringing people in, listening to and sharing their ideas and eventual decisions formed a solid basis for developing a real team concept.

Some say that the rise of collective bargaining by teacher groups, whereby they sought opportunity for input in decision-making in many areas had an off-shoot influence on the development of the administrative team management concept.

A number of superintendents have faced a situation where a group of central office supervisory and administrative staff formed a bargaining unit, just as teachers and principals had previously done. After relying on these people a great deal for information, and loyal, yet independent, professional advice, the superintendents' teams were being divided. While some feelings of betrayal initially set in, superintendents persisted in getting the very best thinking from their central office staffs and principals by skillful personnel handling and strengthening two-way trust.

This trust developed more firmly when the superintendent demonstrated a willingness to let go and to delegate certain responsibilities and roles. It seems that no matter what kind of climate is present or team ideas are generated, it gets down to the degree to which the superintendent seeks genuine input from the team or behaves in a way that overshadows the thoughts and contributions of the members of the team.

Since superintendents hold the ultimate responsibility for the administration of a school district, they may be reluctant to give up the last opportunity to check out a group decision and decide whether they can go with it or not. While valuing the opinions of all team members, some superintendents get into hot water because their loyalty to the team is so strong that they cannot make the final judgment of deciding against a team decision when hunches, intuition, or impressions suggest a different course of action. Some superintendents have been dismissed when they failed to recognize that the advice being given was not good or that the timing for implementation was just plain bad. Some major decisions can shatter the serenity of a district and a community if they go wrong. Yet administrative team management is alive and well, although new labels have appeared describing the process and serving as new models of executive power and leadership. The process has become more sophisticated, and broad-based community members have been added as have representatives of business and industry, additional central office staff, principals, and teachers. The concept is still there although the terminology and the lineup may have changed in some locations. Some other words have been used to describe this newer process: e.g., Two Heads Are Better Than One, Collaborative Team Management, Keeping Your Management Team on the Right Track, Increasing Executive Power Through Shared Leadership, The Administrative Grid For Management Teams, King Arthur and the Round Table, Are You Tired Carrying The World on Your Shoulders: Try Team Management, and We All Have Our Say If Not Always Our Way.

As boards of education observe team management operations, they still have as their basic question, Are the Chil-

dren Learning? They want assurance that better productivity by staff and students in teaching and learning are resulting from the new group administrative process. Team management, based on the psychological principle about how people learn and grow in and about the workplace, how people feel about their workplace, and when they are the most productive, usually brings the best results. Studies on school climate revealed that one of the factors that came out very strong was that people were more apt to put themselves out and make a commitment to a decision if they had some say in that decision.

### The Successful Team

Dr. I. Carl Candoli, superintendent of the Fort Worth, Texas, Independent School District, has developed a format in which he predicts how a management team can be successful. He calls for a merging of administrative strength with personal leadership qualities in concert with a well formulated organizational scheme based upon the needs and goals of the school system.

Technical proficiency of the team specialists without the personal traits that must accompany the administrative skills may mean failure of the team effort. These personal traits include the ability to understand the human behavior of others, not to be impatient, not to belittle, not to stereotype, not to jump to conclusions, and not to diminish the importance of the ideas of the other members of the team. "True cooperation among members of an administrative management team is possible only if a mutual-influence system prevails," Dr. Candoli points out. If a climate exists that rewards cooperation, and if people are helped to appreciate the benefits of collaboration, the ways in which cooperation is attained may turn out to be more important than the decision reached. According to Dr. Candoli, empathy means thinking with people, not for or about them; feeling with people, not becoming emotionally involved; moving with people, not rushing ahead or lagging behind; working with people, not doing things for them; accepting people, not judging or evaluating them; and seeing situations from other people's viewpoints, not merely from one's own.

Thus, it becomes apparent that the superintendent-leader of the management team, in order to be successful, must avoid paternalistic, bureaucratic, autocratic, and authoritative style, attitude, and performance in working with the team. If such traits persist, the management team doesn't really function in the proper fashion but may merely go through the steps, which gives the appearance of a team in action, but which in reality turns out to be a group of administrators accepting, in a sort of dependency and subordinate fashion, whatever directives or subtle manipulation is forthcoming from the leader.

### The Team Stabilizer: The Superintendent

When superintendents of schools change jobs frequently, the management team loses its power. Hit and run superintendents can destroy a management team. Superintendents should hit hard, but not run! The charged atmosphere in which superintendents live and work is stridently calling for continuing and increasing change. Change, for some, is interpreted as movement—from plan to plan, peak to peak, job to job. Almost lost in the prevailing tendency to equate relocation with progress is the greater potential for growth and development which comes from continuity of service, stability, and cooperative efforts of a strong man-

agement team leading to action-packed performance within a school system.

In most cases, the advanced training of a superintendent begins in his/her university. If the major role of the university is the pursuit of truth, then is the practice of the university to program such administrative personnel during their training to plan to work for a relatively short time in one district, e.g., two to four years, consistent with that basic goal? The formulation of a rigidly pre-determined career plan by a superintendent and/or his or her mentors that charts how many districts should be his or her place of employment—of what size and for how many years—is questionable practice. Such a plan leaves insufficient time for developing a smoothly functioning district team. While the furtherance of an individual career may be enhanced by such a timetable, delays along the way may bring impatient superintendents and disappointed staff and school boards into conflict. A board, sensing that it has hired a transient superintendent, may understandably be extremely cautious in offering the superintendent the degree of support to which a superintendent and the administrative team are entitled.

Since the superintendent, in the most effective arrangement, does not operate alone but frequently as a member of the management team, stability is important to the team. Through continuity of service, the superintendent gets to know the really productive workers on the staff and sees to it that their services are properly recognized, utilized and rewarded. On the other hand, the staff of a peripatetic superintendent soon senses frustration. The board feels insecure. Teachers, students, parents, the entire community feel short-changed.

There are those who argue that a place-bound superintendent becomes an easy victim to traditional procedures and lacks the skills and temperament of a change agent. When objectives are properly set and supported by a staff team with skill and a board with insight, then the superintendent who stays in one district for a reasonable portion of his or her career can be an effective change agent as well as a stabilizer. In contrast, there are those who say that a career-bound superintendent who assumes responsibilities in new districts at frequent intervals, highlights a district's need for a change agent. Yet, in many cases, the best a change-agent-in-a-hurry can do is to set up a small prototype of an idea. Like a salesman packing up his sample case, he may be off wooing the next district before proving that a change was feasible, both instructionally and financially, and worthy of adoption by the entire school system.

Admittedly, the superintendency is a high-risk post. At times, reality dictates change. Professional separation and divorce may be the forerunner of a more *simpatico* environment for both the community and the superintendent. In many businesses and in industry, stability seems to have paid consistently high dividends in those instances where corporate management through consistent team leadership has enjoyed a long tenure. Familiarity not only with the overt power structure, but more importantly, the covert structure of a community, does not come on hurried demand; the solid skipper earns his/her passage. The hit-and-run superintendent cannot relate to effective, long-range planning. Such a superintendent does not stay long enough either to see projects through or to leave the right kinds of patterns for others.

A superintendent is believable when he/she suggests, initiates, develops, nurtures, evaluates, and extends new ideas with the help of the administrative management team

including principals, teachers, parents, and students. Our country is demanding that we find out how best to improve our schools and to provide a higher level of excellence and to find out what works and then to disseminate it. Dissemination of sensible, mature, and tested programs, most often the product of successfully run management teams, will help our nation more than the spread of program changes coming from spurts and promises. Frenetic activism, even when designed by a bright, articulate administrator, may attract more attention from the media, but sequential successful steps based on a coherent team plan are more likely to produce the constructive changes a school system so desperately needs.

### Team Time

One of the most difficult problems in operating an administrative team is scheduling time for the team members to meet frequently enough to work on the issues and options that they are to consider. Since each member of the team has to meet time-consuming day-to-day responsibilities, the full team may not always be available to give full attention to the team's agenda.

For undertaking major issues, one-shot meetings lead to team frustration. If an extensive overhaul and reorganization of a system is on the agenda, sufficient time must be allotted to do the overhaul. Frustration sets in when there is not sufficient time to deal with such important matters. Here I'd like to coin a new word—frustility—a combination of frustration and hostility. These feelings can develop when progress is delayed because the agenda is too heavy for the time allotted.

Problem-solving through collaboration requires the leaders to relate to and communicate honestly and openly with members of the team. The quality of the solutions coming from the team will vary depending upon the quality of the collaborative reflection and work effort, bringing a sense of family working together for common goals.

When the members of a team begin to perceive that a consensus is being reached, there is an optimistic view that successful outcomes will emerge. Decisions are more potent when the group is involved in the formulation of the changes rather than making the leader personally responsible for the final decisions.

### Count the Principal and the Teacher In

To the general public, there are three people who are important in the progress of students at school. These three form sort of a tripod for student support. They are the child's teacher, the principal of the school the child attends, and the superintendent of the district. While the superintendent gets most of the publicity and attention from the media, there is broad agreement that the teacher and the principal are the keys to the excellence of the educational program. The leadership ability of building principals and effective teachers is needed along with central office specialists when the administrative management team is being selected.

### Don't Forget Listening

In the monograph published by the Educational Research Service, Inc. titled, **School Management Teams: Their Structure, Function and Operation**, Kenneth A. Erickson and Walter H. Gmelch list these essential characteristics that they believe management team members must have in order to form an effective team:

1. Be able to invest significant amounts of time,
2. Be able to work cooperatively rather than competitively toward common goals or purposes,
3. Have open and clear lines of communication,
4. Have trust in the integrity of their colleagues,
5. Encourage and work to understand the full explanation of minority opinions, and
6. Have an acute skill in listening (versus hearing) to the opinions of others.

And picking up on the sixth characteristic, listening is really the composite process by which oral language is received and interpreted in terms of past personal experience and expectation for the future. One of the most frustrating parts of discussions in team management situations is the failure to recognize that a common weakness of many administrators is their belief that talking is equal in importance to listening. When this happens, some team members become reticent to contribute, and good ideas can sometimes be submerged or lost.

### Arriving at a Decision

There are several different types of action which can result from a team management experience. The first is when the team leader makes decisions without consultation, second, with consultation, third, when it is predetermined that the decision shall be by majority vote, and fourth, when it is planned to seek a consensus decision by the team. Consensus decision-making, Erickson and Gmelch point out, does not mean that all team members must agree before action may be taken. It is, however, a process by which all team members collaboratively participate in reaching the final decision. In order to implement this type of decision, team members should have certain skills. They must learn to cope with conflict, give and receive feedback, check the perceptions of others, and be ever ready to communicate without rancor when major differences of opinion emerge.

### The Educational Impact Statement

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has for many years called for the development of an educational impact statement when administrative changes are under consideration. This is advice which reveals to the decision-makers the probable consequences of the decision about to be recommended. AASA also believes that boards of education should require that educational impact statements be presented to them when changes in policy are proposed.

Dr. Paul Salmon, executive director emeritus of AASA, has said that, "For a long time some superintendents and boards have sought ways to involve principals and other middle managers in the development of policies and regulations. They sought some sort of adhesive that would hold the administrative team together.

"The educational impact statement is a concept which promises to provide the glue that will hold the administrative team together. The impact statement is an instrument which reveals to the decision-maker the probable consequences of the decision under consideration. Since policies impact different elements of a school district in different ways, it is important that every administrator in the district be involved in the development of an impact statement. When such information has been gathered, collated and synthesized, the decision-maker is in a position to

make a much better decision than could be made without the process.

"In gathering material for the impact statement, all administrators in the district must have an opportunity to know precisely what the proposed policy change is. They must also have sufficient time to study the matter and to record their judgment about the probable impact on their school or department."

AASA and the National School Boards Association (NSBA) have jointly published a series on the administrative team which offers many helpful suggestions to those contemplating such an effort.

### Fluidity of Structure

I think that there needs to be in any team management situation the fluidity of structure in the organization that will allow members of the team to generate information, to give advice, and to help make certain decisions. From time to time, some school leaders conclude, "I am not sure I want to get involved with a team. I don't have time. I worked long and hard to get the power that I have today, and I am not going to give it up now. And, what's more, I am concerned that if I bring a team together they may not agree with my conclusions."

But most superintendents have sufficient confidence in themselves and enough confidence left over to start a team and to be sure to treat with respect the contributions made by other members of the team, allowing all viewpoints to be aired.

One additional factor to be guarded against is that team sessions sometimes provide a forum for vocal "ax grinders" who dominate the discussions and try to dominate the decisions and "put down" other members of the team.

### House Rules

Administrative teams need to settle on certain "house rules" which would include place of the meeting, the recording function, and how agendas are developed and priorities established. At times, team members may be asked to assume some responsibility to prepare for the meeting, and to be assigned some responsibilities during and after the meeting. These would include carrying out whatever assignments each group member may be given by the group or the leader and honoring a call for confidentiality when required. There is no ideal team structure. Each local school system must form the team in a way that best fits the needs of the district. The team, after gathering information and proposing solutions, may sense the need for a task force from the team to do further work on an issue and report at the next session of the full team. Sometimes, a task force from without the team or an outside consultant is needed to clarify the issue.

To be successful, team members must bring their personal enthusiasm and loyalty to sessions so that no longer can they point their fingers at those "up in the central office as the cause of it all." Cooperative team work really begins when each member of the team accepts decisions that were made as a result of the process, whether he/she is in full agreement with them or not and tries sincerely to make them work. Dr. James E. Cole, director of secondary education for the Anoke-Hennepin School District, Coon Rapids, Minn., discusses, in his paper published in the *Executive Educator* in July 1983, the role principals and assistant principals need to play. Dr. Cole indicates that the management

team concept does not work when individual members resort to "bad mouthing" because they disagree with the decision, whether it's a group decision or a decision by the superintendent. Dr. Cole points out that some principals at times can torpedo the work of the management team when, in conveying the team decision to teachers on the school staff, introduce it by saying, "I don't agree with this, but the superintendent wants us to . . ." This type of action erodes both the effectiveness of the superintendent as the leader and the effectiveness of the management team. Dr. Cole concludes by stating, "The management team can be a magnificent machine or a miserable flop. It can have something in it for everyone, or little in it for anyone, its destiny rests with each member's willingness to work for the welfare of every other team member as well as for the goals of the entire school system."

### "Calling An Audible"

No matter how successful the deliberations of an administrative management team may be and how clearly right the decisions of the team seem to be as they conclude their deliberations on a single or a series of issues, the superintendent remains in his or her office alone after deliberations have been completed. However, the antennae of the superintendent remain in place, reaching out to all segments of the community, and signals come to the superintendent which the complete management team may not be party to, either because of the timing of these signals or the fact that it is not possible for the team to be reassembled on short notice. This is somewhat like the quarterback on a football team who has been calling the plays in the huddle and offering encouragement to his team. But then, there are times when the quarterback reads the formation of the defense and concludes that he needs to change strategy and switch signals.

There is a fair analogy here to the superintendent who, having reached a conclusion with the management team, must now switch strategy because of late-breaking developments and a last-minute reappraisal of the probably negative impact of the previously-arrived-at decision.

### Concluding Comment

In the final analysis, it is not the purpose of the administrative management team to alter the formal power structure of a district. The school board remains the primary policy making and governing body of the district. The superintendent remains the single person responsible to the board for the proper functioning of the district and has the authority for making administrative decisions. Principals retain the function of managing their schools. There are, nevertheless, some changes that do take place in the informal nature of the relationship among the superintendent, central office administrators, and building principals in the matter of sharing their powers as a result of an administrative team management process.

Things can go better when a skilled management team is in place.

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