School Administrators Accomplishing Results

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Abstract

School administrators need to produce effective results for the goals comprising the span of responsibility for which they are accountable. Through the process of selectivity, school administrators can identify the most important goals, the tasks necessary to successfully accomplish them, and pursue these tasks with a laser focus. School administrators manage themselves and their work by learning on the job how to maximize performance for successfully accomplishing results. They understand and apply energy in order so that their effectiveness for accomplishing results is maximized. School administrators realize that working smarter—not necessarily longer and harder—are key to successfully accomplishing results.

Keywords: school administrators, accomplishing results, selectivity, mindset, focus, energy

1.0 Introduction

What it takes to be an effective school administrator is: (1) identifying needed results (goals) and accomplish them, and (2) building relationships that influence stakeholders to support and help accomplish the needed results. This assumes that school administrators' character and ethics keep them out of trouble with their employer, the law, and government agencies. They do need the personal capabilities (e.g., energy, acumen, and interpersonal skills) to effectuate their two leadership factors. Image, reputation, and dealing effectively with internal and external politics can also be crucial. This article addresses the accomplishing results aspect of being an effective school administrator with the understanding that building relationships with others are a key ingredient to effectively accomplish results.

2.0 Identify Needed Results (Goals)

Accomplishing results can be complex and challenging. The core values, mission, and vision of a district or schoolare good places to start. Core values or *we believe* statements are essential to establishing a culture for accomplishing and truly being driven by maximizing learning for each child. Mission and vision are fine, but sometimes are so general that they only minimally establish core values or furnish specific goals that need to be accomplished. A recent Gallup poll conducted in the private sector found that only 27 percent of employees believed in their company's stated core values, with even fewer knowing how to integrate these values into their jobs (Fridman, 2017). It is not uncommon for teachers to be unfamiliar with their building's vision or mission, as is sometimes the case regarding principals' familiarity with their district's vision and mission.

2.1 Establishing Macro Goals (the big ones)

Strategic planning is a process often used to establish district goals for the short-term (one year) and long-term(two to five years). Once the district goals are in place, it is necessary to determine which goals apply to central office unitsif the district is big enough to have such units. Goals are also attached to individual schools initially by levels—PreK-elementary, middle, and high school—in order that schools at each level have a core set of common goals. Each school also identifies goals unique to its needs to maximize student learning through the school improvement process for short-term and long-term goals.

The strategic planning process can be incorporated into a building's school improvement process but should occur after the results of the district's strategic plan are available for incorporation.

Keeping the strategic planning process straightforward and moving quickly is crucial to success. Too often strategic planning gets "bogged down" in details, thereby prolonging or preventing the completion of a high-quality process. In consultation with the superintendent, the school board should determine which stakeholders to involve. If manageable, a broad base of participation is advantageous to the development of a meaningful strategic plan and the support needed to successfully implement the plan's goals. It is also wise to have methods for input from the public at large—such as public forums—in addition to those methods included in the strategic planning process. Remember, keep the strategic planning process manageable and moving!

2.2 Embedding Tasks Needed to Accomplish

Goals into the Activities of Staff

Establishing goals has minimal impact unless the goals are "broken down" into the tasks and activities needed to accomplish them. People accomplish goals, not the goal setting process or the goals, themselves. Management By Objectives (MBO) is a systematic process that breaks a goal down into manageable objectives, the tasks needed to accomplish them, and establishes accountability for effective completion.

The Management By Objectives process includes assigning responsibility to specific staff members for implementing the tasks needed to achieve objectives for a goal and holds them accountable for doing so (Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2013). Staff should have flexibility regarding how to achieve the tasks for an objective, but not for determining if they will pursue the objective. A timeline should be established for achieving the objectives' tasks and the goal to which they are attached. Accountability regarding staff members' success in accomplishing the goal must be established through both formative and summative evaluation. And, of course, there must be an evaluation designed to assess the overall effectiveness of the strategic plan.

3.0 Being Productive at Accomplishing Results

"The fundamentals of becoming more productive are setting goals and maintaining energy and focus. No goals, no focus, no energy—and you're dead in the water" (Burchard, 2017,p. 177).

3.1 Selectivity

It seems that some equally hardworking and talented school administrators are more productive regarding time efficiency, quality of work, and quantity of the most important tasks achieved than others. The logical question is, "What is it that the more productive school administrator does differently?" Hansen (2018a) advocates that the more productive school administrators are experts at *selectivity*—excellent at identifying the most important goals and prioritizing the tasks to get them completed. Hirschhorn (2009) emphasizes that identifying goals to be accomplished are just words until a school administrator *takes actions* to accomplish them and makes oneself accountable for accomplishing them. "You can set all the goals you want, but if you don't do anything to achieve them, nothing is going to change" (Hirschhorn, 2009, p. 93).

The most productive school administrators determine which tasks to "let go"—not worth pursuing because of low-level importance or delegating them to others. Peter Drucker (as cited in Burchard, 2017) observed, "Nothing is less productive than to make efficient what should not be done at all" (p. 187) Davis (2017) poses a question that is apropos to the importance of selectivity and the school administrator's allocation of prioritizing time to identified tasks: "Do you ever reach the end of the day and feel as though nothing *of real value* has been accomplished" (p. 61)? Davis stresses that school administrators take time at the end of each work day to *reflect* on how well their time allocation matches the importance of tasks addressed. Reflection should include *retrieval* (What did I do? How well did it work?) and *generation* (How could I do it better next time?) (Brown, Roediger III,& McDaniel, 2014, p. 222).

The effective school administrator intensely pursues selected goals and related tasks with a laser focus. Haden (2018) observes that "We all have our sweet spot—yet most of us spend a fraction of our day actually working in our sweet spot. The key is to find ways to delegate or streamline all of the tasks that distract you from doing what you do best" (p. 237).   Haden also suggests the need to assess *personal commitments* a school administrator might make that take time away from addressing important tasks and goals at work. A personal commitment might be a re-occurring activity that a school administrator does weekly out of habit—such as attending a meeting for mainly a *ceremonial* purpose that is inconsequential.

The desired outcome of selectivity is not to work harder (e.g., put in more time on the job), but to actually cut back on the quantity of work. High-performing school administrators adhere to the *Occam's [Ockham's]Razor* axiom that advocates the best course of action is the simplest one (Hansen, 2018b). For a goal and related tasks, this means identifying the fewest steps to complete it, fewest meetings needed associated with it, and the shortest amount of time to attain a high-quality work product. In identifying the steps to complete the tasks for a goal and the resources needed to accomplish them, the French writer Antoine de' Saint-Exupery (as cited in Hansen, 2018b) formulated that "Perfection is finally attained <u>not</u> when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away" (p. 30).

3.2 Managing Oneself and Work

School administrators need to be *innovators* of work—changing how they do their jobs by knowing when to *say no* and effectively applying the selectivity of work principles. Maxwell's (2018) philosophy advocates the key to effective leadership is having priorities and using Hansen's selectivity approach (p. 27). Maxwell opines that being a wise school administrator means *knowing what to overlook*. He also points out that, in reality, no one can manage time—it keeps moving on regardless of what a school administrator pursues. *Howtimeis spent* is the critical issue. Thus, *prioritizing work* is crucial in that time is a known limited quantity. The worst scenario is the school administrator who tries to make everything priority number one. Schwantes (2017) notes that "The secret to retaining the highest level of productivity over the span of a workday is *notworking longer* but *working smarter* with frequent breaks" (p. 2-1). Regarding the *frequent breaks* approach, she advocates applying the *52 and 17 Rule* which means working with an intense focus for about 52 minutes followed by an approximate break from the task at hand for 17 minutes of relaxing and clearing the mind (p. 2-1). As Burchard (2017) observes, "Your brain also needs more downtime than you probably think—to process information, recover, and deal with life so that you can be more productive" (p. 184). In the context of the 17 minutes of relaxing and clearing the mind, Pink (2018) advocates that a short nap expands the brain's capacity to learn and improves performance. Some tasks for which a school administrator is responsible are "re-occurring"—they appear month after month, year after year. Learning from prior experiences with the task and becoming more proficient over time are crucial for top performance. Repeating how the re-occurring task was previously addressed is unfruitful unless perfection has been achieved. When perfection is still absent, *deliberate practice* through consciously focusing on improvement is needed (Ericsson & Pool, 2016). The *quality* of learning is much more important to performance improvement than merely increasing the time spent attempting to improve the performance of a re-occurring task (Hansen, 2018b). Hyatt (2018) advocates the use of *activation triggers* that "are simple statements of actions that streamline the process of reaching our goals [and tasks] by anticipating whatever contingencies or obstacles we might face" (p. 207). The activation trigger concept helps school administrators make better decisions in advance for re-occurring tasks and anticipating obstacles.

3.3 Learning to Get Better at Tasks

Hansen (2018b) advocates the *learning loop* approach to performance enhancement for school administrators concerning a task. He identifies six highly effective tactics composing a learning loop based on: (1) striving to make changes in an effort to improve, (2) trying out new approaches, (3) learning from failures, (4) demonstrating curiosity, (5) not assuming she/he "knows best," and (6) experimenting a lot with continuous improvement as the focus (p. 67-68). Hyatt (2018) advocates school administrators willing to be innovative and open to a variety of perspectives regarding accomplishing goals, which aligns with several of Hansen's highly effective tactics. Other basics of the learning loop approach to improving performance of a task are: Do →Measures →Obtain Feedback →Make Needed Modifications →Redo (try again).

1. Do**:** Identify a new approach to completing the task based on well-thought-out logic and experience.
2. Measures**:** Identify and apply effective metrics to assess the effectiveness of the new approach.
3. Obtain Feedback: Solicit information from staff involved in developing and implementing the new approach to accomplishing the task with an emphasis on causation (If it worked, why? If it did not work, why not? What needs to be changed?)
4. Make Needed Modifications: Make the identified needed adjustments to the approach for addressing thetask.
5. Re-do: Implement the modified approach and complete the cycle again, at least through measures (Step 2).

It is not unusual for a school administrator to encounter a *stall point* when striving for the optimal completion of an important task.

A stall point occurs when the school administrator is making good progress toward task attainment and feels satisfaction for the effort and progress, accompanied with the feeling that what has been accomplished is *good enough*. In reality the school administrator knows that improvement of accomplishing the task at the highest performance level has not been achieved and the present progress is good enough. Hence, a sense of satisfaction regarding effort sets in. As John and Paisner (2018) note, "When things start to get good, we all have a tendency to get a little complacent. We lose whatever it was that pushed us to act in the first place, that feeling that we can do anything" (p. 28). The school administrator must recommit to excellence, "plow through" this stall point and achieve the best (not just good enough) performance in completing the task at the highest possible level (Hansen, 2018b). In specific situations, though, good enough may suffice because the task being performed significantly decrease in importance over time.

Marston's and Marston's (2018) concept of *transformative resilience* (Type R Mindset) is apropos to school administrators working through the stall point.   This concept advocates that school administrators adapt to circumstances and grow in the face of challenges. Marston and Marston (2018) opine that the Type R Mindset encompasses *psychographics*—core values and beliefs—that do not allow school administrators to be defined by adversity in the form of a stall point,but move forward to the highest possible level of performance. These psychographics motivate the school administrator to work through the stall point and attain excellence in accomplishing the task.

A unique approach available to school administrators for identifying solutions (sequence of tasks) to solve a problem and more effectively accomplish results is *human-centered design*, which "is a more responsive modality for work and problem solving" (Miller & Sheikh, 2018, p. 40). Miller and Sheikh (2018) explain this approach as: Some of the main tenets of human-centered design involve bringing multiple shareholders into the conversation early on to create a diverse pool of opinions surrounding a problem, prototyping multiple solutions at once to see which are the most successful options, and embedding robust feedback mechanisms into solutions so that quick adaptation is possible (p. 38).

New tasks for a school administrator to accomplish are opportunities to learn, grow, and gain recognition for staff members and self. In the context of solving problems on the job through identifying the new tasks to be accomplished, the school administrator must create an environment in which staff can be creative, innovative, and intrinsically motivated to identify the approaches most likely to successfully complete the tasks (Bass & Bass, 2008). The same holds true for the school administrator—the need to often think "outside the box" to identify effective approaches in accomplishing tasks to solve new problems. It is imperative for school administrators to initially have a clear picture of the problem in orderto accomplish the effective resolution of it (Maxwell, 2018). School administrators need to avoid assuming that they truly understand the problem without seeking answers to questions focused on providing clarity of the problem—especially in regard to purpose and why the problem is even an issue. This includes a sound comprehension of the *context* in which the problem exists and its relationship to other issues.

Meetings often represent a task in and of themselves. In preparation for any meeting, the school administrator must identify desired outcomes to be accomplished. Preparation and laying the proper foundation with the participants prior to the meeting greatly increases the likelihood of success. An agenda is a must, accompanied with estimated times for each item. Having no agenda or timeline allows a meeting to take on a life of its own and last much longer than necessary. Further, a smile and open, positive body language can go a long way in helping accomplish a meeting's outcomes (Shellenbarger, 2018). Preparation for many meetings is re-occurring, such as a superintendent getting ready for a board meeting or a principal preparing for a monthlystaff meeting. Getting the preparation down to an effective ongoing process for these types of meetings is crucial for success and time efficiency.

4.0 Mindset[2]

The Arbinger Institute's (2016) <u>Outward Mindset: Seeing Beyond Ourselves</u> describes mindset as being *inward or outward*.   A school administrator's mindset is paramount to enjoying the job and performing tasks exceptionally well to accomplish results.   According to the Arbinger Institute, mindset is how a school administrator views oneself, staff, and others. With the inward mindset, school administrators are generally self-centered and often pay little attention to the needs and wants of staff and others regarding what should be changed and improved in the work settings to accomplish goals and, thus, the desired results (Bartz, 2017).

School administrators with an outward mindset see staff and others as similar to themselves—whose efforts and work matter to everyone and are paramount to attaining goals.

With the outward mindset the approach to establish and meet job goals—and tasks related to them—is viewed as a collaborative effort that considers the creative and innovative ideas of all staff involved and causes an environment in which staff eagerly share ideas. Table 1 provides specific comparisons of the inward and outward mindsets for school administrators in the context of working with staff and others.

Table 1Comparing Inward and Outward Mindsets for School Administrators Toward Staff and Others

Inward Mindset	Outward Mindset
1. Strives to control people 2. Often blames others when things go wrong 3. Is narcissistic 4. Consistently defends one's position 5. Has interactions with staff and others that focus on protecting oneself 6. Uses behaviors that sometimes try to manipulate staff and others in an attempt to improve one's own image 7. Shows minimal regard for how to Create "collective results" among staff and others 8. Views staff and others in a context as to how they can help oneself achieve goals	1. Strives to cause staff and others to be fully responsible and engaged in work 2. Takes responsibility for actions of oneself and staff in the work environment 3. Displays modesty toward staff and others 4. Works collaboratively with staff to solicit their opinions and collectively develop the best solutions for problems 5. Has interactions with staff and others that focus on building positive relationships with and among people 6. Strives to facilitate "committed behaviors" collectively with staff and others to improve work produced and achieve goals 7. Is motivated about how to work with staff and others collaboratively and for others to collaborate with each other and oneself 8. Focuses on the needs and challenges of staff and others to create a work environment that prompts individual and team cooperation
Inward Mindset	**Outward Mindset**
9. Assumes that to simply change one's behavior is the best way to enhance the work productivity of staff and others 10. Focuses on how to make oneself "look good" for work produced, even at the expense of staff and others 11. Often creates competition between staff and causes them to work independently of each other 12. Focuses mainly on the job responsibilities of oneself 13. Focuses on getting the work "out the door" with little concern for its benefits 14. Is inclined to step in, take over, and direct the work of staff and others when not pleased 15. Creates conflict that keeps staff Embattled with each other (divide an**d** conquer for control)	9. Understands that changing how oneself views staff and others are equally beneficial to everyone in comparison to merely focusing on changing behaviors toward staff and others 10. Sees, thinks, and works on how to improve job performance through collaboration with staff and others that incorporates their needs and wants, and gains recognition for them 11. Focuses on the staff as an entity which has collective belief of working with each other for the common good of the work unit and organization 12. Assists staff and others in identifying their interests and being motivated to successfully achieve what they need for the betterment of the work unit and organization 13. Focuses on the meaning and purposefulness of the work and the positive impact it can have on the work unit and organization 14. Helps staff and others understand what they need to do; provides developmental training, when needed; and furnishes the necessary resources to accomplish the goals of the work unit 15. Focuses on preventing and resolving conflict among staff and others
Inward Mindset	**Outward Mindset**

16. Focuses on personal and professional goals and behaviors to protect and advance oneself 17. Advances one's own agenda at the expense of staff 18. Identifies what can be taken from others to achieve objectives for oneself 19. Oftentimes tries to control the behavior of staff and others for self-benefit through power, authority, and fear	16. Focuses on the goals of the work unit and organization, and objectives and behaviors that take staff and others into consideration 17. Focuses on working together with staff and others for collective results to benefit the work unit and organization 18. Identifies what can be given to help staff and others successfully achieve their work objectives 19. Relinquishes power and authority to empower staff's and others' abilities to be responsible and accountable for their work (Bartz, Thompson, & Rice, 2017)

5.0 Managing Energy[3]

"We should realize we have limited energy and devote it only to things that really matter" (Stulberg & Magness, 2017, p. 144). The more tasks we think really matter, the less energy we have to devote to any one of them. Only by becoming a _minimalist_ can we become a _maximalist_ regarding accomplishing results. This means minimizing distractions and activities that are extraneous to work. It also means avoiding office politics, gossip, and discussions unrelated to work to the extent possible (Stulberg & Magness, 2017). The most essential part about adopting the minimalist-to-be-a-maximalist strategy is figuring out what really matters and devoting _maximum_ time and effort to these tasks, while allocating _minimal_ energy to everything else (Stulberg & Magness, 2017, p. 146).

"Most of us respond to rising demands in the workplace by putting in longer hours, which inevitably takes a toll on us physically, mentally, and emotionally" (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2010, p. 61). School administrators often try to _outwork_ increased job demands, which results in an energy drain. In the long run, putting in more time is not the answer to effectively addressing an increased workload. School administrators need to calculate "the right amount of effort [energy] necessary to achieve a goal" (Cardone, 2011, p. xi). The bottom line is that school administrators must allocate their energy so that it is not depleted and consciously focus on how best to use it for maximizing productivity. As Kogon, Merrill, and Rinne (2015) note, "Extraordinary productive people consistently _recharge_ [their energy]" (p. 15).

 The capacity for work energy comes from four sources: (1) body, (2) emotions, (3) mind, and (4) spirit. For each of these factors, energy can be expanded and renewed with _intentional practice_ (Goleman, 1995). A resurgence in energy can be enhanced physically by school administrators having proper diets, exercise, and sleep. Meditation, which creates relaxation, can also play an important role in regenerating energy. Energy regeneration can also be addressed by taking periodic breaks throughout the work day to rest their minds.
School administrators must condition themselves to relax in order to regenerate energy (Kogon, Merrill, & Rinne, 2015). Reducing interruptions by others and those created by school administrators themselves (e.g., hyperpaced tech-enabled activities such as emails, cell phone calls, texts, and tweets) are crucial to controlling depletion of energy (Kogon, Merrill, & Rinne, 2015). Expressing appreciation to others and receiving positive feedback from board members, teachers, staff, and groups with whom a school administrator works are excellent sources for regenerating energy. The bottom line is that school administrators must use their energy wisely to accomplish results for the important goals.

6.0 Focus[4]

Bad news for self-proclaimed multitaskers: While some research continues to keep up the myth that you can productively do more than one task at a time, the human brain simply isn't designed to function this way. Attempting to divide your focus increases stress and decreases performance (Grenny, 2017).

Focus is concentrated attention—the ability to zero in on a goal and see related tasks through to completion. As Zahariades (2017) observes, "Focus allows you to ignore distractions and stay on task. You're thus better able to achieve a _flow state_, where your attention is completely absorbed by the task in front of you. Working in a _flow state_ leads to higher productivity" (p. 27).Flow state is represented by school administrators having a clear understanding of what they want to accomplish and how to do so.

Focus gives school administrators *drive* (Dalio, 2017). Linking drive with ambition, and even impatience at times, can propel school administrators to higher levels of focus and goal accomplishment (Charan, Willigan, & Giffen, 2017). Focused school administrators are not in a reactive mode to every issue that comes their way and not sidetracked by less important issues. They resist being distracted from crucial goals that truly require their attention and concentrated effort (Bruch & Ghoshal, 2002). Borrowing from the *Conscious Communications* philosophy, when school administrators intensely focus on tasks, their ability to accurately "hone in" on what needs to be done sharpens (Shores, 2017). The focused school administrator understands that an *interference dilemma* exists because of obstacles such as attempting to multitask or allowing irrelevant information to enter the mind (Gazzaley & Rosen, 2016).

Distractions, in the form of interruptions, are a major enemy of the school administrator striving to effectively apply focus. "Persistent interruptions become especially insidious when we are unaware of the peripheral role our surroundings play in shaping our thoughts, moods, and choices" (Grenny, 2017, p. 106). Scott and Davenport (2017) opine that "Our cellphones, laptops, and tablets have become weapons of *mass distraction*" (p. 10).School administrators can greatly enhance their ability to focus by structuring their immediate surroundings and general work environment to intentionally minimize interruptions and other forms of distractions. This can be difficult, though, because of the expectations of others to have untethered access to them.

7.0 Concluding Thoughts

To be successful, school administrators need to accomplish results for job goals through effectively identifying and fulfilling their related tasks. This requires identifying critical job goals, prioritizing them, and pursuing the accomplishment of the related tasks with a laser focus that minimizes distractions and maximizes efforts of the school administrators and those with whom they work. Understanding how to apply the outward mindset and effectively use and regenerate energy are keys to accomplishing the results for which school administrators are responsible and held accountable.

8.0 Footnotes

[1]Portions of this article, in part, are contained in Bartz, D.E., Karnes, C., &Bartz, D.T. (2018). Leaders Accomplishing Results (in press).

[2]This section is based in part on Bartz, D., Thompson, K., & Rice, P. (2017). Principals managing and developing their human capital. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, 34(4), 1-9.

[3]This section is based in part on Bartz, D.E. (2017, September). Applying positive psychology to school administrators. *International Journal of Education and Social Science,* 4(8), 1-11.

[4]This section is based in part on Bartz, D.E. & Bartz, C.E.A. (2017, September). The resilient and focused manager. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 8(9), 1-7.

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