

Leading from the Middle Webinar – Additional Questions

CJ – CJ Healey, Tumuaki Principal, Long Bay College

DH – Dan Huggins, Chief Executive, BNZ.

1. I'd be interested in methods taken to build trust with new leaders.

CJ – Communication and understanding, the why and how of the vision. Collaboration and consultation are always key as is healthy debate and ensuring that the other party/ies feel heard whilst appreciating that consultation sometimes informs but does not necessarily dictate outcomes and direction. Also adopting the 'we' rather than 'I' stance as a leader and ensuring that contributions are always highlighted during times of success but as the leader, taking the hit when things do not succeed. Showing a genuine interest in them and their work is useful too.

Our scheduled meetings are rarely about administration, instead they are probably 80% about direction, support, understanding and a focus on the theory of leadership. We focus on the how, the end point and the steps that need to be taken in the interim (there is transparency in what we do). Rather than task completion, it is explicit and communicated, but it is a framework of support. Our plans iterate across years rather than in 12-month blocks. The work we do with our middle leaders is directly supportive of the work that they do with their teams and how they could go about affecting change. We have common goals, a common structure and a framework to guide us to agreed end points that the completion of can then be celebrated...then we trust to know their role in the team and then to go out and paint!

DH - Building trust starts with transparency, authenticity and inclusion when working and communicating with new leaders. Setting goals and supporting them with coaching and feedback is critical. Also, responding appropriately and with encouragement and even more coaching when expectations, goals or targets aren't met builds trust very quickly.

2. Further to the previous question, how can leaders navigate with middle leaders the diversity found among them? And at times, their varying understandings of their role?

CJ – Collaboration is again key. The more time spent with a focus on coaching/training as a group, the more time working in similar ways, sharing ideas, highlighting successful methods and also to the contrary, unsuccessful methods, the more uniformity (positively) you will have in the way leaders operate. Understanding the diversity, promoting it and learning from it is helpful in a culture of continuous improvement through continuous learning.

DH - I think there are a number of skills, attributes and attitudes at play here. I'd guide you back to the Success Triangle that I discussed in our session. If our middle leaders are Clear, Capable and Motivated they'll also have the capability to consider how to best utilise the diversity that exists in their team and beyond. I also think a key element here is how the leader

leads by example. If middle leaders get to see how the senior leader navigates diversity – they should have a great guide to follow.

3. Interested in the thoughts of 'servant leader', there to serve your team and stakeholders (some of the themes Simon Sinek raises in Leaders eat last).

CJ - I believe in the education sector you would find most leaders operating, at least some of the time, under this model. Humility is an incredibly significant part of this outlook and realising that you are one part of an entity that is much greater than yourself is key. I think in my presentation I may have outlined some aspects of leadership that lend themselves to this, such as investing in your teams, supporting them and then letting them go and paint their blank canvas, whilst at the same time building a culture whereby experimentation and making mistakes is part of learning and is to be encouraged.....but attempting to make it better and improve outcomes at the first available opportunity (I used the terms distributed and transformational leadership). To support this, knowing your people is crucial and scale can be a detrimental factor to the success of this. Characteristics that are important are empathy, humility and a genuine interest in people. Of course, as with anything there are downsides to this way of operating and for a leader that is getting sucked into the day to day, minute operational tasks and not being up and above directing and leading as is the job. A skilled leader will be able to combine both so that they can support their teams but also ensure the realisation of the vision and goals.

DH - The “servant leader” approach is really brought to life for me when I consider the purpose of the organisations I’ve had the privilege of leading. The purpose of my current organisation is to “serve our customers brilliantly”. Leaders who understand intrinsically what serving our customers brilliantly looks like – are critical to our organisation. Invariable these sorts of leaders, lead as servants themselves.

4. How do you resource middle leadership while trying to balance the books and manage increasing costs?

CJ - We are fortunate in that we have a significant International Student programme that assists us, but it is something we would do regardless. In terms of planning, it has to be a deliberate and strategic focus when it comes to the direction of the school. As part of this process determining the gap between what is needed to resource the programme and the resources available to you is huge. From this point if there is a gap it’s then how do you close it and there are ways and means. What I would say is that in terms of delivering a strategic plan, developing future and current middle leaders would be non-negotiable.

DH – Again, I’d come back to the Success Triangle - when we look at whether or not our middle leaders are Capable this means ensuring people’s skills are at the level required to execute successfully. But it is also about ensuring people have access to the tools and technology they need. It’s our responsibility that our middle managers are resourced for success so they can contribute more effectively. Recognise their role as critical to the organisation, empower them to make decisions and maximise their impact without increasing costs through focusing on collaboration and value add activities, rather than routine administrative tasks.

Motivation

5. What would you do if they are not motivated?.

CJ - Motivate them! This is not a glib answer rather as a leader it is your job to communicate, with clarity the vision of the organisation. Understanding their part in this and how they can contribute is key, no matter your colleagues' role or their standing or pay bracket. For success, it helps if everybody contributes their potential. Understanding them and their reasons for a lack of connection and motivation is also key – it may not be professional but personal, it may not be personal but professional.

DH - We all need to ensure that all of our middle leaders are crystal clear on what's expected of them and what success looks like. Motivation needs to be managed continuously and consistently for maximum effectiveness. If they're not motivated then they won't succeed. A strong set of regularly visited tools like a quarterly plan will provide a great framework to help identify early if a middle leader is on / off track. If the lack of motivation is because the middle leader doesn't have the capability or the clarity to succeed, then the senior leader needs to address this. But if it's for other reasons – then the next course of action or actions will depend on the why there's an issue with motivation and as a leader you will need to identify what that is a build that into your leadership activities.

6. How have you helped to maintain a 'fresh' approach to leadership when you've been in the role for + 5 years?

CJ - Seeking Personal Growth and Challenge. I always aspire to be a better leader than I am, one year to the next. I take enormous satisfaction in successful completion of strategic goals and am always looking for the next challenge and the next area of the organisation that we can grow, develop and improve. There are also opportunities outside your direct role that with time and experience, you are able to fill and contribute towards. Seeking out these opportunities so that your role becomes more diverse and your skill sets and experiences, developed, is helpful.

DH - Watching the teams I have the privilege to lead be successful, deliver on the projects and initiatives they in turn lead keeps me motivated to continually evolve my leadership. I learn from my team every day. I also learn from our customers who give me plenty of feedback on what we are doing that's working and what's not.

Alignment to values, mission and purpose

7. How do you work with and assist a ML to learn when they are following the school values, etc. but are a lone wolf – very much about spotting what is not being done rather than following the 'meandering river' and working alongside the team? Very black and white.

CJ – Emphasising and communicating the values, strategic direction and what is on top, regularly and with clarity, to the whole staff, are supportive ways that you can less directly support your lone wolf. Leaders spending time in that area of the school to visibly support the middle leader is also important and supporting them in delivering the why and having others understand the why is also key. Promoting healthy and robust debate is also not a negative

and can be useful. Ultimately backing the leader, if they are the right person (and their 'fit' here is crucial to meeting the objectives), importantly meeting the needs of the learners, their families and the school, doing everything you can to give the middle leader the tools, knowledge and understanding to bring the lone wolves onside.

DH - Be clear and specific about your expectations. Do they know what is expected of them and what outcomes they need to achieve? A good leader will recognise the value a 'lone wolf' brings in terms of traits while emphasising collaboration, cohesion and teamwork.

8. How do you manage an environment that has a new senior leader, developing a new strategic plan with middle leaders that are connected to an older school direction therefore there is a lack of motivation?

CJ - Quite simply consultation, collaboration and communication. One of my favourite sayings is that as people we love change (think new house, new hairstyle, new clothes, new car etc) but we hate being changed or having change done to us. Clarity of message, input from all parties and an understanding of the why is critical. As I've already stated, professional, robust debate is also incredibly healthy and if you can justify your why then you have licence to progress. If you can get people on board with the vision that is great but the 80/20 principle suggests you will not always succeed in gaining everybody's buy-in but you should always seek the critical mass.

DH - Middle leaders that are disaffected, disinterested or fearful and therefore resistant to change can derail any new strategy. The critical thing here is in communicating to the middle leaders that the new senior leader has the support of not just the CEO (or Principal in this case) but the entire senior leadership team. The collective responsibility that the senior leadership team carries will inevitably define whether a new strategic plan is successfully implanted or not. It shows the culture of a united team - focussed on a common goal.

Growth, training and mentoring opportunities for Middle Leaders

9. Kia ora, As an experienced middle leader who has successfully 'grown' more leaders, I am keen to learn more about further growth/training opportunities for myself. Is mentoring available for middle leaders from beyond the school setting? I have completed formal studies in educational leadership and mentoring, and am feeling hungry again! Ngaa mihi mahana.

Springboard Trust – Our [Springboard Coaching for Leadership](#) programme is accessible to school leaders at all levels and is an opportunity to seek feedback from your colleagues, and identify strengths and opportunities for development with the support of a 1:1 coach from outside of the education sector. Follow the link above to learn more and to express interest.

10. What do you mean by 'scale' Dan?

DH - In the context here - scale means the ability I have to deliver exponentially more for the business than I would ever be able to deliver myself. There are simply not enough hours in the day to achieve the things you need to achieve alone. By ensuring that your leadership teams, centred around your strategic ambition are clear, capable and motivated you have just multiplied by X fold the number of objectives and initiatives that can be achieved.

11. This seems to be about advice for senior leaders in how to deal with middle leaders. I am a middle leader and want tips for my role.

CJ - From my perspective the discussion was about leadership in general and what applies to senior leaders applies to middle leaders. I think the best thing you can do is ensure that you contribute to the planning of the direction, vision and goals of the school, so that you can commit to them and then ascertain how does your area of responsibility feed into the whole school direction – which of your bricks contribute to building the structure. Then galvanise your team with expertise, enthusiasm and some licence to go out and deliver.

DH - The best tips I can give middle leaders is to demand of your senior leaders that they provide you with the things you need to be successful. Make sure they are delivering what's required to set you up for success in terms clarity of expectations, that you have the time and tools to do the job and that they inspire you with a purpose that helps drive your motivation. Make sure that you have an agreed plan - Quarterly or 90 Day Plans are great – that you meet regularly to ensure your heading for success and give them the opportunity to coach and guide you when things get tough, or tricky.

12. Is motivation intrinsic or external or a combination of both?

CJ - I believe it depends on the individual. The best outcomes are delivered by those who are in roles because they believe they can make a difference and they get great pleasure in doing so. If this can be harnessed with a buy-in and commitment to the direction of the organisation, if they believe in the work they are being asked to do, then you have an incredibly powerful combination. But like in any walk of life, motivation comes and it goes. This is where I believe that discipline can potentially be more important – working towards achieving goals even when life throws its occasional curve balls and you may not be the best version of your usually motivated self.

Likewise, the question can be asked as to whether or not middle leadership is a destination or a stepping stone towards becoming a principal or in Dan's case a CEO? Here it depends on the capability, capacity, motivation and aspirations of the leader. Some are born leaders, some learn leadership and others, for a variety of reasons are very happy with 'their sphere of influence' and are happy to remain where they are. There are also others who find that their ability to influence and bring about change becomes more limited the greater the size of the audience to their message becomes, and that is ok too. I would imagine that a great leader is able to determine what strengths individuals have and how to eek those out to support the leader themselves but also importantly the advancement of the organisation.

DH - I think motivation it's absolutely a combination of both. But that question may be better answer by a psychologist! [Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation: What's the Difference? \(verywellmind.com\)](http://verywellmind.com)