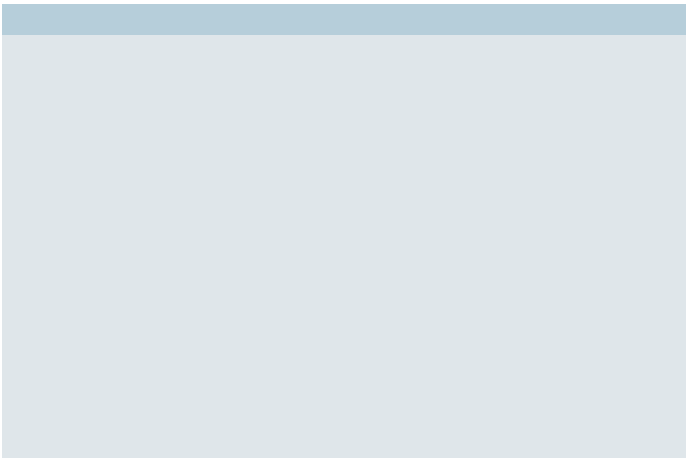


in conversation



Steve Marshall
Deputy Minister



that when things do go wrong, you learn

If, for example, a person walks into a room and creates a negative energy simply by being present – whether through verbal or non-verbal behaviour and whether it's intentional or not – the impact on others is to lower the morale of the group.

The challenge, when you are in a group and confronted by negative energy, is to demonstrate resilience and discipline so that it doesn't have an impact on you. It requires you to be more a light than a judge and to live the behaviour that will energize the group and overcome the negativity of others.

Some people may try to wrap their emotions around you and attempt to strangle you emotionally. This has to be resisted. All of us need to distance ourselves from becoming entrapped by other people's problems and negative emotions. We need to maintain our energy and our commitment, remembering that what we do is so important for the students in our schools.

Synergy: using our collective

Leadership must recognize the importance of synergy and the contributions of others. The attributes of a true leader are revealed through processes and behaviour.

A leader needs to have energy and commitment and strong planning, interpersonal and communication skills, and the capacity to live in uncertain times. Along with these attributes, there is also the need to place leadership within a moral framework. Results, while important, can be used for the wrong purposes. We can all think of leaders who were able to generate great commitment and obtain an enthusiastic response, but for destructive purposes, and so I would not judge them to have been good leaders.

Leadership for me is a combination of obtaining outstanding results and achieving those results for the right reasons. In that sense, there has to be a moral underpinning and an ethical set of principles and behaviours behind what leaders do.

Behaving ethically

This brings me to the issue of personal ethics, which is fundamentally about being true to your inner self and knowing that your ethics manifest themselves in the

“Your ethics manifest themselves in the work you do ...”

work you do and how you conduct yourself.

There are ethics attached to individual values, such

as ensuring that what you do is not just in your own best interest, but also in the best interest of others. Ethics also have an impact on organizational behaviour – ensuring that you keep your promises

DIGGING DEEPER

Robert J. Starratt

Robert J. Starratt, in *Ethical Leadership* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. – 2004), points out that, “in reality, leaders do not start their day by asking, ‘How can I enact my core ethical principles today?’ Rather ethical principles are kept in a supply closet in one of the backrooms of our consciousness. They are maps that we consult only when the familiar terrain we are traversing becomes a tangle of underbrush with barely discernible and uncertain trails...that is when the leader goes back to his or her supply closet to consult the codes of ethics for guidance.”

both to the organization and the people in it, and that you manage resources in a way that is transparent and ethical. It means that you treat people with respect and dignity. Sometimes that means being tough, but when you are transparent and have the right moral reason, such action is justified.

Highly effective educational leaders also need to develop trusting relationships in which people trust each other to do the right thing. Stephen Covey talks about trust as having two dimensions – character and competence. Character has to do with integrity and ethics. When people experience others acting with integrity they see the link between motivation and action and when they also believe that the person will treat others fairly and ethically, trust is built.

But having the right character is not enough. For example, in order to trust a surgeon, you need assurance that the surgeon knows what to do and is able to deliver a high-quality result. This leads to another aspect of trust,

INSIGHT

A critical friend

"A critical friend can be defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person's work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work." Costa, A. and Kallick, B. (1993), Through the Lens of a Critical Friend, *Educational Leadership* 51(2).

difficult, but it is necessary if we are to identify what we have done well and also which areas of performance need some priority attention.

Then comes the most difficult part – improvement planning. Most of us have experienced identifying the same problem time and time again, but being unable to make much progress in finding solutions.

However, I believe that solutions to what have been intractable problems in education can be found if we act collectively and interdependently. Someone once said that the solutions to our problems are out

there somewhere; we simply need to find them. While this may be an over-simplification, I do believe that the solutions to these intractable problems can be found within the collective wisdom and experience that exists within our education community.

"Solutions... can be found if we act collectively and interdependently."

The future

Choosing to be optimistic, and bringing to our various roles our individual energy and willingness to share and contribute to designing the future, will develop an organization in which people – at the school, board and ministry level – choose to be interdependent and deeply connected.

Likewise we can, and should, choose to create one of the most effective education systems in the world. I value the leadership each of you brings to improving opportunities for our students through more effective teaching and learning. It is a challenge I thoroughly enjoy sharing with you.

What are your thoughts on the ideas presented in this issue of *In Conversation*? Email your comments and insights to InConversation@ontario.ca

by January 30, 2009. We will review them and share them with the community on the [In Conversation page](#) of the ministry website (www.ontario.ca/eduleadership).