



Middle

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS *Serving All Elementary and Middle Level Principals*

The online resource for principals with students aged 10 to 14

Matters

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The Middle Man – October 2008

Are You a Good Person?

Mark Terry, NAESP's Board of Directors, Middle-level Foundation Member

Recently, I attended the funeral of a parent whose death was a shock to his family, the school, and the community. Many of his friends, relatives, co-workers, and acquaintances also attended and several were invited to share their thoughts of the deceased.

We expect to hear only the best characteristics of the bereaved at such occasions, but some of the comments caught my ear, and one especially caused me to think about my own life. Over and over the expression, "He was a good man," was used to describe him as a good father, a good friend to the community, and a good supporter of the schools. He also was a good man in his church and a good man with his family.

This good man had a positive impact on the lives of a great number of people with whom he had come into contact. Those asked to speak shared stories of how acts of kindness and words of encouragement had impacted their lives or the lives of others.

Have you ever thought about what people think of you? When that middle-level student is in your office—again—what is the impact you have on him or her at that moment? As you interact with students in the hallways and classrooms, you make a difference with those students. It can be a positive experience or it can be a negative one. In my opinion, your actions or words toward a student are never neutral. Even whether you choose to speak or not speak to a student means something.

As a principal, I hope that your words and actions will lead people to say of you, "He/she was a good man/woman." My own prayer is that folks will say that I made a positive difference in their lives. Those small things that I do, or the comments that I make to students and parents each day, should be to build them up, to make them feel worthwhile. I want someone to stand up and say that I complimented them at just the time affirmation was needed, that the pat on the back cheered them up when they were depressed and in need of an act of kindness.

As a principal, especially as a middle-level principal, you are in a key position to save the lives of children. That is not a melodramatic statement. You, of all people, realize the tremendous mood swings middle-level students experience. You see them go from great emotional highs with preteen bravado to times of tremendous depression that too often lead to harmful acts against themselves or others. Each and every day you say things to kids that keep them going in life. Just a smile or a nod of acknowledgement can make a huge difference in their lives.

Some of my greatest compliments have come from kids who went through schools in which I was a principal. It gives me a lump in my throat when one of these kids (many who have kids of their own now) tell me about a time I stopped them in the hall to compliment them on their behavior or a play they made at a football game, or that I noticed their new haircut. I have teared up when told by one of those former students that she still has the card I gave her congratulating her on an accomplishment—even if it was just getting to school—15 years ago! Can you imagine? Honestly, nothing I have ever written deserves to be saved for 15 years, but the honest, caring comments or actions all of us give every day have long-term impact.

My prayer for you this year is that you display the actions and words of encouragement that lead people to consider you a good man or woman. My hope—my expectation—is that you change the lives of students as you go about your day, and that those changes are of a positive nature.

I'd love to hear about some of the ways you have changed the lives of those middle-level kids in your school.

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