Teachers in 21st century schools face myriad challenges. High expectations for students to grow academically, socially, and developmentally are at the forefront, and there is increased pressure for accountability from multiple stakeholders. From comparatively low salaries to the lack of funding for classroom supplies and enhancements that can easily lead to educator burnout. Given these challenges, how can administrators keep teachers in their schools?

Job satisfaction is not a new concept in the field of education. But Brad Johnson, author of *Putting Teachers First*, posits that there is more that school leaders can do to help teachers cope with and combat the challenges they face. With teachers leaving the classroom at alarming rates, leaders must employ creative methods to make teachers want to stay in classrooms and continue to educate youth. The stakes are high, because the quality of students’ experiences depends on the teachers who stay in the profession and continue to develop their craft in effective and relevant ways.

The author says teachers want to be valued and recognized, and that they are more likely to go the extra mile when they feel their efforts are noticed. Teachers want to have input on decisions that affect what they do and have their voices heard.

Time is also at the top of teacher “wants” lists—time to plan and “be human.” They want all of their time to be valued, protected, and respected, and finding the most effective communication vehicle for each situation is often the mark of an effective leader. For instance, administrators should call meetings only when necessary; if it can be handled in an email, send an email. If the situation is more sensitive, talk in person and address individual teachers’ situations as needed.

Administrators should inspire teachers and help them find and strengthen their purpose in the classroom and in life. Supportive administrators know how to coach and assist teachers, as well as provide meaningful feedback for improvement. The author offers multiple tips on communicating and connecting with staff members in Chapter 7, as summarized below:

- **Evaluate yourself.** Think about the ways in which you already communicate, and analyze your communication skills through reflection.
- **Get feedback.** Ask your teachers how you are doing. Collect data formally or informally from teachers, and reflect on the feedback.
- **Connect for buy-in.** Solicit teacher input when you can. Teachers want to have voice in matters that affect them directly. A trusted connection between teachers and administrators will strengthen when teacher input is solicited and used in decision-making.
- **Be trustworthy.** Keep your word. Communicate the school’s vision regularly, and provide consistent support to teachers to help them achieve the vision.
- **Stay positive.** Focus on staying positive in interactions even when
they might be uncomfortable. Be a model of positivity for teachers and students.

- **Give praise.** Recognize specific efforts of teachers as frequently as possible.
- **Show you care.** Recognize teachers’ birthdays as well as staffers’ personal milestones and accomplishments.
- **Use humor.** Use humor in a positive way to lift others up. Humor can turn the whole day around for someone who might be going through a personal or professional struggle.
- **Be the lead communicator and chief storyteller for your school.** Portray the school in a positive light through words, actions, and social media posts. Take pictures of interesting activities in classrooms and share them with the community. Tell the story about all of the great things going on in your school.

While the author provides ways to boost morale, he admits there are hurdles to overcome when implementing them. One of the most obvious is the financial aspect of offering opportunities to boost morale though efforts such as turning a teachers’ lounge into a wellness space. Administrators need to be creative in finding solutions to these financial hurdles, including soliciting parent support and working closely with businesses in the community to support such experiences. Another hurdle might be a change-resistant mindset among some staff members. Challenge these teachers to resist the “that’s the way we’ve always done it” argument.

If you can make a continuous, concerted effort to support teachers, communicate effectively, and model excellence in the field, *Putting Teachers First* says, your teachers will be more likely to continue the vital work of educating the next generation.

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