“How Is Your Day Going?”

We get asked this question many times a day and our response can determine not only how others view us, but can even impact the frame of mind of the person who asked it. If you say, “Things are great! How about you?” you have sent a positive message. But if you respond, “Not so great. That Jimmy Wallace is getting on my nerves!” you have sent a completely different message.

Effective principals understand that they are the filters for many of the things that occur in their schools every day. How they react to something will very often establish a tone for the entire school. This requires a certain amount of political skill. For example, if a second grader asks if you think her scribbled drawing is a good picture, what do you tell her? It is up to us to determine what gets through our filters and what does not.

The Angry Parent

When I was a principal, I occasionally had to deal with an irate parent. Once that parent—let’s call her Mrs. Jones—had left, I had some filtering choices to make. If a teacher innocently asked how my day was going, I had to choose which filter to use. If I said, “Things are great! How about with you?” the teacher would feel good and that feeling would carry on to the classroom.

But if I responded with, “Oh, I just dealt with that wacko Mrs. Jones. What a temper! I hope I never have to meet with her again,” what have I accomplished? For one, I have made that teacher terrified of Mrs. Jones. And if I continue to tell enough people about Mrs. Jones, every teacher in the school will have some degree of concern. In demonizing Mrs. Jones, I have shifted their time and energy to unproductive worrying and away from confidently approaching their students. I have made them more likely to hesitate when calling parents (especially with the surname Jones) because I have raised their level of concern. By protecting others from unnecessary bad news, we provide a more productive environment.

It’s Up to Us

We are very fortunate to work in education, although sometimes we forget how blessed we are. By consistently being the filter and sharing positive perspectives with our faculty and staff, we can create a much more successful educational setting. Consciously or unconsciously, we determine the tone of our organization.

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If you’re leading a diverse school community, shouldn’t your membership organization give you broad perspectives on school leadership?

The best schools are characterized by school leadership practices that build a shared sense of purpose and foster a commitment to excellence among all staff members. So it makes sense that the most useful perspectives on school leadership come from a source that is as broad and diverse as your school community. More than 60,000 principals and assistant principals and 27,000 district administrators choose ASCD as their membership organization, an education organization that also includes classroom teachers, school specialists, consultants, policymakers, school board members, parents, and others.

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- What leadership strategies develop your school’s leadership capacity so that all staff members take ownership of improvement efforts

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