When Wells tried to organize a student council, parents and students were enthusiastic but faculty reaction was mixed. At a planning meeting, a teacher complained that council elections would create student rivalries, jealousies, and competition, and would damage the “fragile egos” of children who might run for office and lose.

Although many of the younger teachers supported their principal, a powerful bloc of senior teachers continued to undermine his efforts. Confronted with opposition to many of his proposals, Wells sought counsel from the superintendent, who said he had heard from several teachers who complained that Wells was ignorant of the school’s traditions and culture, and that he was too quick to institute change. But the superintendent also said he had heard from parents who approved of Wells’ commitment to long-overdue change and advised him to continue on that road.

After several more months of hard work and little progress, Wells decided to again discuss his concerns with the superintendent. This time, however, the superintendent was vague and noncommittal in his support for Wells’ initiatives. “You know how slow change comes,” he said. Shocked by the lack of support, Wells considered quitting.

Q&A

**Should the principal resign?** It would be premature to consider resigning. The issues that Wells faces—change, conflict, faculty involvement, and questionable support—are typical issues that principals must address. He should see these challenges as an opportunity to build and increase his leadership skills as he navigates through them.

**What could he have done differently to gain teacher support?** Wells should have realized that he could not easily replicate the success he enjoyed at his earlier school. Each school possesses its own traditions, values, culture, and willingness to accept change. There is no universal model of school reform that will work in all settings.

In seeking to alter some deep-rooted faculty beliefs, Wells failed to...
consider the impact his changes might have on the people most affected by them. He needed to maintain the stable operations that had helped the school achieve a high level of student success while working to introduce innovations.

_How can Wells help his staff cope with the changes he seeks?_ His first strategy might be to open a dialogue with his staff in order to orient them to his plans for change and the rationale behind them. Wells might want to create an advisory team of teachers to guide the changes. This approach will increase participation and minimize resistance.

He should identify and support those directly involved in implementing his ideas while maintaining regular communication with others, listening to their concerns, mediating conflicts, building confidence, and avoiding the appearance of top-down management.

The following approaches might be useful in creating a climate of openness to change:

- A collaborative leadership style;
- Support for faculty initiatives;
- Tolerance of differences;
- A nonjudgmental attitude;
- Sensitivity for faculty feelings and values; and
- A win-win philosophy about conflict.

_How will Wells know if his staff is responding to change?_ If teachers assume some initiative during the planning process, display a sense of humor throughout the process, are willing to admit errors, suggest alternatives, and commit to spending additional time, Wells will know that they are at least open to change.

On the other hand, any of the following indicators should be warnings to slow down the pace of change and adjust accordingly:

- Continued apathy;
- Procrastination;
- Subtle sabotage;
- Unwillingness to cooperate; and
- Open conflict within the faculty.

Any change process implies the need for risk-taking by participants. Although teachers are notoriously reluctant to embrace risks, they must be assured that mistakes or failure are acceptable when trying new ideas, different opinions will be respected, and major decisions will be made in a collaborative manner. Their risk-taking should be rewarded by giving them recognition, professional development, and advancement opportunities.

By doing these things, Wells can make his new school a better place for his teachers, students, parents, and himself.  

*A fictitious name for a real principal.*

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