

Managing Technology

The principalship has changed in a variety of ways and the infusion of technology into our schools ranks near the top of the list. When we were children, the principal needed only an inbox, index cards, and folders to receive and store information. Today's principal still has an inbox, but also must deal with a steady flow of e-mail, telephone, and cell phone messages while computers churn out data of every conceivable kind.

Managing technology is a skill today's principals must practice and constantly hone. Technology is here to stay, and we must either learn how to manage it or find ourselves being managed by it.

When Less Is More

I am amazed and often amused by the very specialized nature of some of today's software. My approach has always been to get by with as few pieces of software as I possibly can, but to use them to their full potential. A Microsoft Office suite, plus a school administrative package, gives me virtually all I need.

From "In" to "Empty"

For all too many of us, our computer stores every e-mail message it has received since the day it came out of the box. I prefer to handle my e-mail the same way I handle the contents of the mailbox in front of my house—empty it at the end of every day.

"What do I need to do with this e-mail?" is what I ask myself as I go from top to bottom in one sitting. Outlook's "drag and drop" feature lets me turn an e-mail into an appointment on my calendar, a "to-do" on my task list, or a piece of reference material in the Notes module.

Seek and Ye Shall Find

The ability to find information instantly is a tremendous benefit of technology. Our administrative software can supply a student's phone number and a list of all students grading below a "C" in math for the last grading period. We may seek and find a PowerPoint presentation

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that is perfect for next week's lessons, composed and shared by a teacher halfway around the world. An Internet search can yield anything from the latest research on reading fluency to the movie schedules of every theater in the area.

The Internet has changed my approach to collecting information. No longer is my focus on gathering and storing information that I might need someday. Instead, my focus is on improving my ability to find information that is already out there and free for the asking. When a new problem presents itself and I don't have an immediate answer, my first reflex is to fire up a Google search. I cannot begin to count the times when what I thought would be a stab in the dark has returned Google hits that were right on point.

The Power to Interrupt

Unfortunately, technology has the potential to interrupt our train of thought at the worst possible moments. The "ding" of the e-mail alert and the ringing of a cell phone give the impression of importance and demand urgent attention.

But while technology has the power to interrupt, it also has enormous power to prevent interruptions. For example, my e-mail gathers the day's messages into one place where I can handle them when I am ready. Similarly, my voice mail holds all of those requests for my attention and presents them when I am ready.

Teaching our young people to manage technology and to use it as a time-saver rather than a time-waster is critical. If our students are to learn it, we must rely on our teachers to teach it. And if our teachers are to teach it, they must first see it being practiced by their school leaders.

Managing technology goes deeper than simply being more productive. It also serves as a model for those we lead and for the leaders of tomorrow who sit in our classrooms today.

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