

# Flipping the Script With Staff

**H**ow do the “best of the best” administrators retain the “best of the best” educators over the long haul? What innovative methods are used to keep staff motivated, and what is the school environment like? Do administrators just happen upon a great staff, or do they purposefully build one?

To really delve into these questions, we examine the culture surrounding staff meetings in a middle school in western Wisconsin that has flipped traditional meetings to fulfill a new level of professional development expectations.

## Go from Good to Great

It is not a secret that *good* administrators really know their staff and take the time to talk to them as people—daily. These talks could be a conversation about their families or what they did on their weekend. It could be a brief commentary about a favorite TV show or a joke about the latest workout trend. Whatever the conversation, the connection is genuine and shared freely.

*Great* administrators take relationship-building to the next level by using their knowledge of each educator to fortify the system. For instance, if after getting to know Lily Lee, a recent charter school hire, one determines that she has a knack for presenting innovative ideas in front of staff, by all means utilize her talent to enhance staff while providing Lily with a growth opportunity.

Or, if one finds that Calvin Grand, who just completed his administrative license while working as a sixth-grade teacher, wants to become a principal, acknowledge this and aid him in his endeavors by asking him to substitute as a principal whenever the current administrators are out of the building.

Daniel Pink, in his book *Drive*, states, “Human beings have an innate inner drive to be autonomous, self-determined and connected to one another. And when that drive is liberated, people achieve more and live richer lives.” Administrators who use their relationships with their staff to fuel that innate inner drive ultimately empower their educators to become teacher-leaders in the school.

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## Get Out of the Chairs

To further the goal of developing teacher leaders, staff meetings at the school in Wisconsin have been radically altered to represent current staff dynamics. No longer are there 75 minutes of a “sit and get” monologue as administrators spew out the upcoming weekly activities or latest district mandates (all of which could be relayed in an email).

Instead, a group of educators, along with administration, decided on a new structure, something the 21st century educator would *want* to attend. The meeting begins with a relationship-building strategy. One might get to see a staff member try to take a cookie and move it from her forehead to her mouth while her colleagues cheer her on. During another meeting, groups of teachers might form a “Fairy Tale Freeze

Frame” as other staff members guess what fairy tale they are depicting. Rather than filling time, these activities are part of teaching strategies that are immediately usable in classrooms.

Next, staff members are presented with data points that are directly related to a school goal. Feedback is sought from each person and provided electronically to a master document. These suggestions are then inputted into the school’s yearly goals.

Finally, the meetings culminate with “Academic Share Out” sessions. These sessions are led by any member of the staff, from an administrator to a classroom teacher, instructional coach, or specialist. All have knowledge to share. Topics for these “Share Out” sessions are taken from informal surveys that seek input from educators on sessions they want to learn about or are willing to speak on, all aligned to current school goals.

Academically, the school’s goals center on both literacy and mathematics, which led to sessions on developing a mathematical mindset, and to technology integration to enhance reading skills. Behaviorally, classroom management, student motivation through growth mindset, and mental health encompass the school goals. Sessions have been offered on classroom structures that work, building the tools to work with difficult students, and mindfulness and yoga. At staff meetings, several session topics are offered, allowing staff to choose what best meets their classroom or individual interests.

In *Start With Why*, Simon Sinek recognizes, “The role of a leader is not to come up with all the great ideas. The role of a leader is to create an environment in which great ideas can happen.” In a flipped staff meeting, the principal is not the center of staff conversation. Instead, it is a collegiate atmosphere in which innovative ideas are shared by educators. This enhances their role as leaders

and has a positive influence on student outcomes.

### Take the First Step

Think about how many meetings you have sat through at a table where you barely knew the colleagues around you. How productive were those meetings? How invested were you in the outcome? Now, imagine that same meeting after you have worked with that same group to get a hula hoop around a circle of linked hands, or you have played vocabulary hopscotch using a shower curtain filled with letters spread out on the carpet. The bonds formed through relationship-building activities such as these translate not only into laughter during the game, but also a shared experience that ensures lasting collegiality.

This time, think about how often you notice the same team of teachers sitting together at the same table, meeting after meeting after meeting, rarely interacting with teachers from other grade levels, or specialists or teacher aides. In the flipped staff meeting, these educators have found common ground by choosing to attend similar "Share Out" sessions centered on school goals, recognizing that they have a passion for technology or for determining which reading strategies lead to the greatest learning. Their relationships with each other develop to the point that they are able to listen to others' suggestions for the betterment of all students.

The flipped staff meeting has created dynamic relationships between staff members who used to interact infrequently, moving the school culture toward a more unified team of educators. They all experience what we hope our students experience: Connections and choice leading to learning. 

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