



JUDITH CASHMORE-JAMES ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Q I have recently been promoted to the position of head teacher in the school where I have worked for 15 years, the last four of these as deputy head. Obviously, I am already well known amongst staff, students and parents – and I am very familiar with current systems, policies etc. It's a solidly 'good' school, and as shifts in role go, this move has the potential to be very comfortable for me. However, my task is to move us to 'outstanding', and for this to happen, I am going to have to make some changes that may surprise and even displease my former peers, who are, I think, expecting things to carry on as before. How can I develop myself as a leader with the ability to drive improvement, without losing the support of the school community?

A You have your building blocks in place (your organisational knowledge) and have clearly been recognised by the governors as someone they trust to lead the school forward to even greater success.

So a good place to start in developing yourself as a leader is with some honest self analysis/reflection. You can do this in a number of ways. You could simply ask those whose judgement you trust to give you their view; you could complete a psychometric test or undertake a more formal 360 feedback review. You could look back at your successes and failures to gain some insight about your strengths and areas where you may need to develop. Gathering insightful information from your own and others' observations can really help you create a meaningful plan of development.

Keeping the support of your team is as you rightly identify, critical to your road to success. Leaders who transform organisations 'walk their talk', they 'model' great attitudes and



ABOUT THE EXPERT



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behaviours, they are living examples of the changes they seek. So developing excellence in every thing you do and inspiring your leadership team to do the same will send out a powerful message to the whole school. It generates a sense of possibility, a sense of excitement about the future. There is nothing worse than a leader who lacks commitment to the goal!

Successful leaders 'aim for the heart', connecting their vision with the values of their team. My advice, therefore, is to look inward first and then you will be truly ready to lead your team to 'outstanding'.

Q I am head of maths in a large academy serving a rural area with a higher than average level of deprivation. This year, my department has taken on three young and enthusiastic NQTs, who are already showing signs of struggling with the wide ability mix they are facing in their classes. I would like to support their development, but find myself criticising more often than I am praising. What is the best way to raise the standard of their classroom teaching, without destroying their confidence and passion for the job?

A Giving employees appropriate and timely feedback can be challenging. Confidence,

experience and workload can get in the way meaning we can let things go when we shouldn't. Balance is essential if it is to be effective – too hard and the employee becomes resistant or fearful; too soft and the message is muted and can be missed.

Try the following structure to help you to get your message right:

Timing

Give feedback as soon as possible – don't leave it – things will not magically improve if left unattended (unlike a good Stilton...)

Preparation

Prepare your message and how and where you want to deliver it – we can seem more critical if we haven't thought through the intent and the impact. Delivering difficult feedback publicly, for example, can have a devastating effect on the individual and those around them. Shame and fear travel fast.

Focus

Seek an understanding of how staff members think they are doing; if they feel supported and not criticised they are more likely to be open about what help they do need. Be clear about the changes or improvements you are seeking, and tell them what you will do to support them. Language is important, saying "I notice" or "I see" is more powerful than "I have been told..." The key is to really want to help each individual improve.

Review

Afterwards, review how you handled the interaction – the more skilled you are, the easier it will be to give fair and objective feedback to support improvement. Ensure they know the next steps and follow through, every time.