**Effective principals use high quality communication and influencing skills.**

Introduction and Rationale:

“Certainly, a leader needs a clear vision, but a vision is of little value unless it is shared in a way so as to generate enthusiasm and commitment. Leadership and communication are inseparable.” Claude I. Taylor

Many of the most important aspects of a school’s work require the skill and wisdom of diverse individuals and teams with varied skills and experiences. This type of work design holds at once great promise for high-performance and great probability for misunderstanding, misconception, misdirection, and unneeded conflict.

In fact, given the complexities involved in sending and receiving even simple messages, it is astounding that communication occurs at all. It is all the more astounding that it can and does occur with clarity and positive effect.

Think of all the steps involved in the one-way communication of a single, simple, spoken message.

1. The sender forms, from trillions of possible neural connections, a thought to be communicated.
2. The sender translates the thought into language by choosing words and combining those words in such a way as to represent the thought.
3. The sender augments the words with tone, pace, pitch, volume, and inflection to further clarify the expression of the thought.
4. The sender adds non-verbal cues to the message to add even more meaning- eye contact, facial expression, gestures, posture, and movement.
5. The receiver’s eyes, ears, and other senses then receive the flood of incoming information (the words + the verbal cues + the nonverbal cues) and sends it on to the receiver’s brain for interpretation.
6. The receiver’s brain extracts meaning from the incoming information by de-coding the words and interpreting the added non-verbal information.
7. The receiver’s brain then adds in assumptions, values, beliefs, past experiences, and current context in order to construct additional layers of meaning from the communication.

Note that, at each step of the communication process, there is an opportunity for a break in the chain. If we also factor in the speed at which the back and forth of conversation occurs, the added complexity of multiple communicators, and the occasional layer of extra-emotional content, it seems a small wonder that the chain ever holds together.

Education leaders can become more effective communicators by simply being more aware of the links in the chain, appreciating some of the complexity involved, and developing their skills. Many of the skills involved in effective communication are simple and straightforward. A few are more advanced and require more time and effort to develop.

Everyone can learn to be a more effective communicator and a more influential person. Effective school principals work to improve their public speaking, becoming adept writers, skilled listeners, memorable storytellers, precise questioners, expert non-verbal communicators, skilled interviewers and interviewees, and more powerful influencers.