

Readers' Corner: April 29, 2022

The PLD team selects short articles, podcasts, YouTube links, blog posts to highlight every two weeks. We will also include a strategy you might use to process the piece with your group in this document.

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The top 4 advantages of being a principal / vice principal — plus tips to leverage them for wellness

Being a principal or vice-principal (P/VP) can be so demanding that you might sometimes forget about the perks that come with your position. In a recent report, *The Manager Experience*, Gallup identified the top benefits of being a leader based on a study of more than 50,000 people leaders.

Are you taking full advantage of these perks? We've added tips to help.



1. Voice and involvement in decision-making.

While it may not always feel like you influence your school district, leaders in Gallup's study nonetheless reported that having a say in what happens at work is a top leader's perk. If you feel like strategic decisions get dumped on you from above, you may be overly focused on Ministry of Education - and School District - level decisions (for which you're only one voice among many competing to be heard) and under focused on the influence you have with your school and peers. You may also want to revisit how you share with higher-ups to strengthen your voice.

To leverage this perk:

- **Develop and advocate for your admin team and staff.** Your decisions about your admin team or staff — to give them stretch responsibilities, encourage them to continue learning, or recommend them for a promotion or new role — can change their careers and lives. As one staff member shared with us: "My principal encouraged me constantly to strive to learn more and take myself to a higher level within my school. I've been promoted twice because of her push." For specifics on helping staff develop growth plans and raising their visibility in your school or school district, don't hesitate to contact us directly (nick@bcpvpa.bc.ca).
- **Build influence with your admin team and other senior management.** In addition to practicing fundamentals, like understanding what's essential to higher-ups and framing your message in terms of those priorities, consider how you might emphasize your and your team's or department's unique contributions. What are you and your team's or department's experts at doing? Consider how you might highlight this expertise, for example, in-district meetings or school-based weekly meetings update to the group that explains what your team is learning and doing to impact students and school and district goals.
- **Strengthen your colleague network.** Which colleagues have a stronger voice of influence than you do? They can be valuable sources of information — and they may be interested in your input, too. Which peers share your goals or concerns? Consider teaming up with them to turn your voice into a chorus.



2. Autonomy and control over your work.

Respondents in Gallup's study reported having plenty of say in how work gets done, even if higher-ups may determine what you work on. (If your admin team insists that you seek approval for every action, let us know, and we will send you an article on what to do if you are being micromanaged.)

To leverage this perk:

- **Plan with your admin team how you'll reach your goals.** How does each goal break down in terms of projects and tasks? Who will do what? What's reasonable for a check-in cadence and milestone deadlines? While ultimately, these are your decisions, your staff will perform better and feel more engaged if you involve them and seek their input every step of the way.
- **Add a strategic learning goal for your admin team.** While you don't always want to add a goal to your admin team's load — especially if they're swamped — you can help your admin team do better in the long run by setting an improvement goal that your admin team controls. For example, imagine the impact on your admin team's productivity if they met a goal to streamline a cumbersome process, so it took only half the time. Or the competitive advantage you might gain if your admin team devised a system to ask staff a few non-invasive questions whenever they mentioned students or parents, then tracked and discussed what you learned about those relationships.
- **Selectively fulfill and decline requests of your and your admin team's time.** You may say yes to a request that contributes to an extra meeting that requires your team's commitments, making your team look good, and/or building goodwill with essential colleagues. But for nonessential requests, consider the option of saying no or at least negotiating to lessen your team's sacrifice.

3. Collaborative work environment.

According to Gallup, leaders said that they work with others about five hours per day on average. Even though not all of these interactions are enjoyable (think useless meetings or giving harsh feedback), engaging with others offers valuable opportunities, like knowing the latest information, giving and receiving feedback to improve work, and raising your visibility throughout the school or school district.

To leverage this perk:

- **Gather and communicate information to help you and your admin team.** You gain bits of big-picture context in your everyday interactions and meetings with peers, district leaders, and contacts outside your school or district. Wise leaders ask questions and take notes with their admin teams in mind, aware that sharing information they receive can help their admin team do their jobs better. And, when it makes sense, they encourage direct communication between their team and others.



- **Coach and give feedback to your admin team & staff.** When done well, helping your admin team succeed is a collaborative effort. For example, do not contradict your admin team openly. Instead of offering up a solution when a colleague comes to you with a problem, say that you will check with the admin team.
- **Seek input from diverse perspectives to improve your and your admin team's work.** Doing so may foster the kind of school where people get excited to share ideas and become more effective at problem-solving and innovating. Look for colleagues who push your thinking or come from different parts of your school district or province and seek their input on project plans and draft work. Or invite stakeholders to implementation postmortem to discuss what went well and what could improve next time.
- **Become more visible in your school or school district.** You don't have to be a braggart to have others notice the value you and your admin team bring. Often, raising your profile is a matter of communicating your team's progress, achievements, and potential to other team leaders and executives. For best results, stay focused on outcomes and impact rather than tasks completed (e.g., *"We increased student engagement by 10 percent" rather than "We spent three days tracking student engagement."*)

4. Opportunities for your own development and career advancement.

Many school districts understand the importance of helping school leaders grow. Most leaders reported being part of a professional development program in Gallup's study. If your school district doesn't have a formal program or you're an ambitious leader who wants more, BCPVPA has plenty of ways to build your skills, identify your career goals, and work toward them.

To leverage this perk:

- **Learn from your best peers.** When it comes to improving as a P/VP, you have the expertise to tap from peers facing similar situations. To raise your game, engage in what experts call veracious learning, first by noticing your peers' skills, then approaching them for help (e.g., *"I notice you're good at getting our VP to take your concerns seriously. I want to improve how I communicate with her. Could I buy you coffee and ask you a few questions about it?"*). Then, dig into how the person thinks about and practices the skill.
- **Determine how you want to be known as a leader.** You have to know where you want to go if you hope to get there. If you find it challenging to articulate career goals, start by identifying the reputation you'd like to build as a leader. Then determine what habits and skills you need to develop to get there. Then talk about your development goals with your leader, who can provide feedback and help you stay on track. You may want to look at the self-assessment survey on our BCPVPA Connects website. You may want to do this self-assessment and share it with your leader. Then you can start a personal growth plan and a formal professional learning and development program.



- **Make time for your own growth.** Just about every leader is self-aware enough to know what they should work on improving as a leader, but who has the time? It turns out you can weave your development into your daily schedule pretty quickly. Research suggests that you can improve your performance with 15 minutes of daily reflection on your own behaviours. And you can make requests for feedback in your regular 1-on-1s with your leader – try asking for "advice" rather than "feedback" to make the conversation less awkward and potentially more helpful.

Also, check out BCPVPA's professional learning and development offerings. Including coaching and essential school administration skills.

Discussion Guide

Discussion Tips:

- Ready to take the next step?
- For specifics on helping staff develop growth plans and raising their visibility in your school or school district, don't hesitate to contact us directly (nick@bcpvpa.bc.ca).

Prompt Questions:

- What are you and your team's or department's experts at doing that you can share?
- Which colleagues have a stronger voice of influence than you do? Which peers share your goals or concerns?
- How do you learn from your best peers?
- Do you know how you want to be known as a leader?