



Leaders, It's Time to Listen to Your Teachers' Feedback about You

By Educator Barnes – December 8, 2020

If you want to see the true measure of a leader, look at how the person operates in a crisis and under pressure. This school year, many leaders showed their true colors, some for better and some for worse.

Currently, I am a middle school academic dean. My role was created by my school last school year. In my role, I supervise teachers. My principal supervises the deans. Last year, my principal had the teachers complete a direct supervisor survey, and the deans completed one for the principal. The survey took place in both the fall and spring. Last year, they were mandatory, but this year, they were optional.

I, along with some of the other deans, chose to have the survey completed even though they were optional. I believe feedback is a gift. It is a way to learn areas of growth. Once those areas are known, then you can address them. This year, school is happening during a pandemic. Some needs are different. It was important to know if I needed to make adjustments because of an area I blindly overlooked.

My entire team completed the survey. Last year, in the spring, my survey was issued twice because less than 50% of my team completed it. During the second time eight of nine teachers completed it. Overall, I'm pleased with the feedback. Eight of the nine teachers I supervise marked me as outstanding or meets standards for all 12 questions. Only one member of my team marked me as needs improvement for five questions and wrote a critical comment.

One of the most important components of survey data is actually doing something with it. After having two conversations with my principal, I made a plan. First, I had a one-on-one meeting with the person who marked me as needs improvement on some questions. Based on the comment and which questions were marked, I knew who the person was despite the survey being anonymous. When I asked the person, the person confirmed my belief. It was a needed conversation. It allowed the person to share perspectives the person had, and it allowed me to provide context to the times where the person felt I miscommunicated. I also addressed the comparison of me to another administrator in the school.

Never fear critical feedback. It allows you to grow, and it gives you opportunities to address concerns. If I hadn't done this survey, this needed conversation would not have taken place.

The second action step was to share the data with my team, and to share the steps I would be taking second semester to maintain what I had been doing and to improve more. The area I want to improve in is question eleven which states, "My supervisor supports me and helps me achieve results." This was the question where the fewest people marked me as outstanding. I want to strive to increase this because if I am pushing my teachers to achieve results, then our students will achieve results. As a leader, decisions should be driven by students outcomes.

Seven out of nine people on my team marked me as outstanding on two questions:

- Question 6 – My supervisor is open to different perspectives and is willing to change her position when presented with compelling information
- Question 12 – My supervisor deals with issues that needs to be addressed.

It is important that teachers are heard. I take great stride to ensure they are heard. That moves beyond an open-door policy. Listening with no actions is not seen as actually listening to teachers. My team will collectively say I'm nice, but I mean business. We don't have time to lose. If there is an issue, I will address it head-on even if the conversation is uncomfortable for the person and even if I have to share information the person doesn't want to hear. Transparency, honesty, and directness is key.

I encourage all school administrators, whether they are the principal or an administrator under the principal, to survey the staff they supervise. Even though I see improvement over time being an administrator, I know I can continue to grow. However, I can't grow unless I am willing to receive feedback.