

## 4 Things Great Principals Don't Do

By [Teacher-Leader Contributor from the National Network of State Teachers of the Year](#) on October 4, 2017 9:58 AM



By Monica Washington

It's National Principals Month and I'm reflecting on some of the best administrators I've had the pleasure of knowing throughout my career. One principal had a deep level of respect for students and the entire staff. He could often be seen sweeping the floor because he'd told the custodian to sit down and rest her feet. He would pass my classroom door, look around, and give a thumbs

up before walking away. Another principal was so loved that students often went out of their way to get a "hello" from him and have him acknowledge their lives outside of school. "How are you? How's your mom doing since that surgery? You sure are looking sharp in that new shirt!" Another principal has been an encourager and cheerleader for all that I've done or tried to do in my career. I watched for years as he made students the number one priority and praised teachers for their efforts in helping students be their best selves.

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Great principals have the ability to know exactly what teachers and students need to be successful, and they often set the mood of the school.

Usually where there is strong

leadership, there is high morale. The

true beauty in leadership, though, is being able to discern when to pull back and not give

teachers things they don't need. There is a balance that great principals learn, and because of

that balance, they generally have happy teachers in their classrooms. My favorite principals have intentionally **held back** four things that I never wanted or needed.

**The true beauty in teacher leadership, though, is being able to discern when to pull back and not give teachers what they don't need.**

**The Reminder.** Great principals know not to give teachers that reminder that "We're here for the kids." Ineffective leaders often use that condescending line when something they propose is met with questions or a lack of enthusiasm. *Of course teachers are there for the kids.* If one isn't, then that's the job of the principal to remove that person from the position. Blanket statements

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like that just leave good teachers thinking, "Well, duh." In a meeting once, teachers had questions about a new policy, and when the principal really couldn't engage with us as

professionals and explain the benefit, we were insulted with "Don't forget that you're here for the kids." Translation: "Because I said so." Teachers and principals are partners in this work, and that line is disrespectful and belittles the complex work that teachers do for students.

**Another Task.** Like principals, teachers' plates, desks really, are over-run with things to complete. There have been times that I ended the day feeling exhausted and disappointed that I didn't get to do all the things my students needed me to do. When I reflected on why, it was usually because of that "one more thing" that someone asked teachers to do. Great principals realize that when they ask teachers to do just "one more thing that you are already sort of doing" they should take one other thing off teachers' desks.

**Blurred Lines.** Teaching doesn't have an on-off switch. Getting in the car at the end of the day doesn't make the lesson in fourth period fade from a teacher's memory. The drive home often brings more thoughts about tomorrow's lessons, tomorrow's tasks, a parent we need to call. A billboard can trigger an idea for a lesson, but slowly we try to put aside the day to be present for our families at home. Effective

principals recognize the need for that fading into family time and refrain from sending school emails or other messages after hours and on weekends. Just one email notification

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that could have waited can put teachers right back in the school building at a time they really want to focus on family. Good principals draw a line and protect teachers' home time just as fiercely as they protect their class time.

**The Magnifying Glass.** Educators are often frustrated that people outside the profession fail to see teaching as a true profession. The irony is that sometimes school leaders also fail to see teachers as trusted and valued professionals. Sometimes principals say that they want to encourage teacher leadership, but they don't trust those teacher leaders enough to step back and

allow them to accomplish the task. Micromanagement is the enemy of teacher leadership; teacher leaders never thrive under the magnifying glass.

To all great principals, thank you. Thank you for realizing that your teachers are there for students. Through your leadership, we are there to help you with the complex work of creating beautiful school experiences for students.

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