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Publisher **Trevor Shirtliff**

CAP Editor **Terry MacIsaac**

Art Direction & Design **Jessica Wolfe**

Production Coordinator **Frances Brady**

Contributing Writers **Doug Chedkley, Andrew Collins, Jerome Cranston, Chan Cusson, Polina Denisova, Tory Handford, Jeffrey MacCormack, Carmen Mombourquette, Nicola Pesta, Gary Swain, Erin Dionne Woodford**

Advertising Sales **Donna Billey, Natalie Lessard**

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Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3B 0S1
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What is Balance in the Work-Life Balance Equation?

Greetings From the President



Maxine Geller

President, Canadian Association of Principals

Work-life balance...what an odd idea that we should have to pay attention to creating the balance. The problem is when we get off balance and work or home life becomes more important or all-consuming then we can develop poor wellbeing. The challenge for school leaders is the tremendous responsibility we have for our schools, staff, students and community. We are solely and legally responsible for everything that takes place in our buildings and we care about what we do, so we are committed to doing our best at all times. We often become so involved in our work lives that our home lives can become impacted, so finding balance is crucial. We need to advocate for policies and practices that support work-life balance and wellbeing.

Our 2017 CAP Winter Journal theme, on Work Life Balance, should spark your interest and provide tremendous opportunity to check on how you are managing your work life balance and how you can support your staffs to ensure all our wellbeing in your learning community. The articles presented should support your learning, and understanding of this important topic.

At this time, our CAP Executive and Board of Directors would like to thank the 2017 CAP Saskatchewan organizing committee for planning our upcoming 35th Annual CAP conference. The conference will be held in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan on May 23 – 26, 2017, Growing Together Cultivating Change! We look forward to seeing you there.

In closing I would like to thank our CAP Executive, National Directors, and CAP members for giving me the opportunity to be your leader as the CAP President. It has been an honour and privilege to serve you in this capacity with exceptional learning opportunities for me and our organization. Providing a National voice for school leaders across our great country brings a tremendous sense of pride for the work we do as educators in Canada. Keep up the great work for all who benefit in our education system. Looking forward to seeing many of you in Saskatoon!

All the Best!!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maxine Geller". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Maxine Geller
CAP President 2016-2017





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Editor's Comments



Terry MacIsaac
Editor, CAP Journal

Hello everyone. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Terry MacIsaac, and I am the Eastern Vice President of CAP and the editor of your *CAP Journal*. It has been a pleasure to connect with contributors from across Canada who have written articles about our winter journal topic, “Work- Life Balance.”

Work-life balance is a topic we can all relate to in the field of administration. We are continually being asked to do more in our schools, while not relinquishing any of our current duties. This leads to our professional lives infringing on our lives outside of our buildings. The ability to balance our life inside and outside of work is critical to avoiding administrator burnout and will help improve retention of new members to this profession.

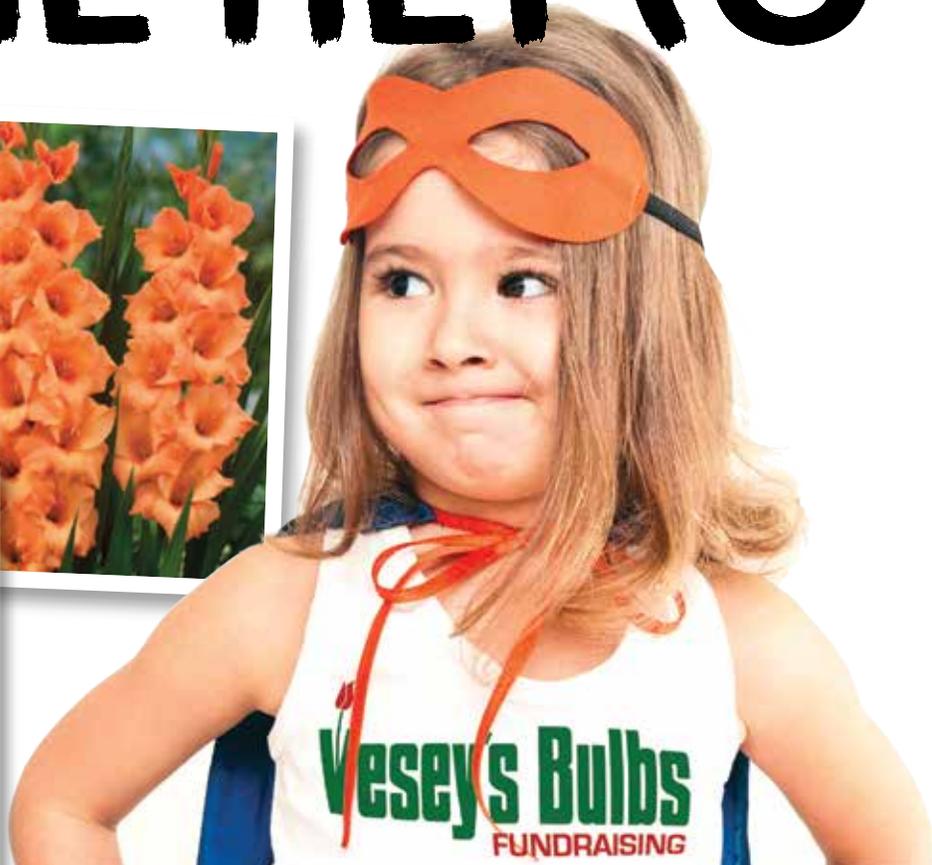
2017 promises to be a busy and exciting year for CAP. We will continue to focus on the research of relevant topics for administrators and anxiously await the results of the last survey on the impacts of changing technology (i.e. email, social media) on the work-life balance of school leaders. We all know this is a major component of our work now and the data from this survey can be used in future conversations with our governments.

I would also like to thank Canadian administrators and contributors to the *CAP Journal* for sharing their stories and providing advice on work-life balance. It has been a pleasure to help compile this journal.

Sincerely,
Terry MacIsaac

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Work-Life Balance and the Princip

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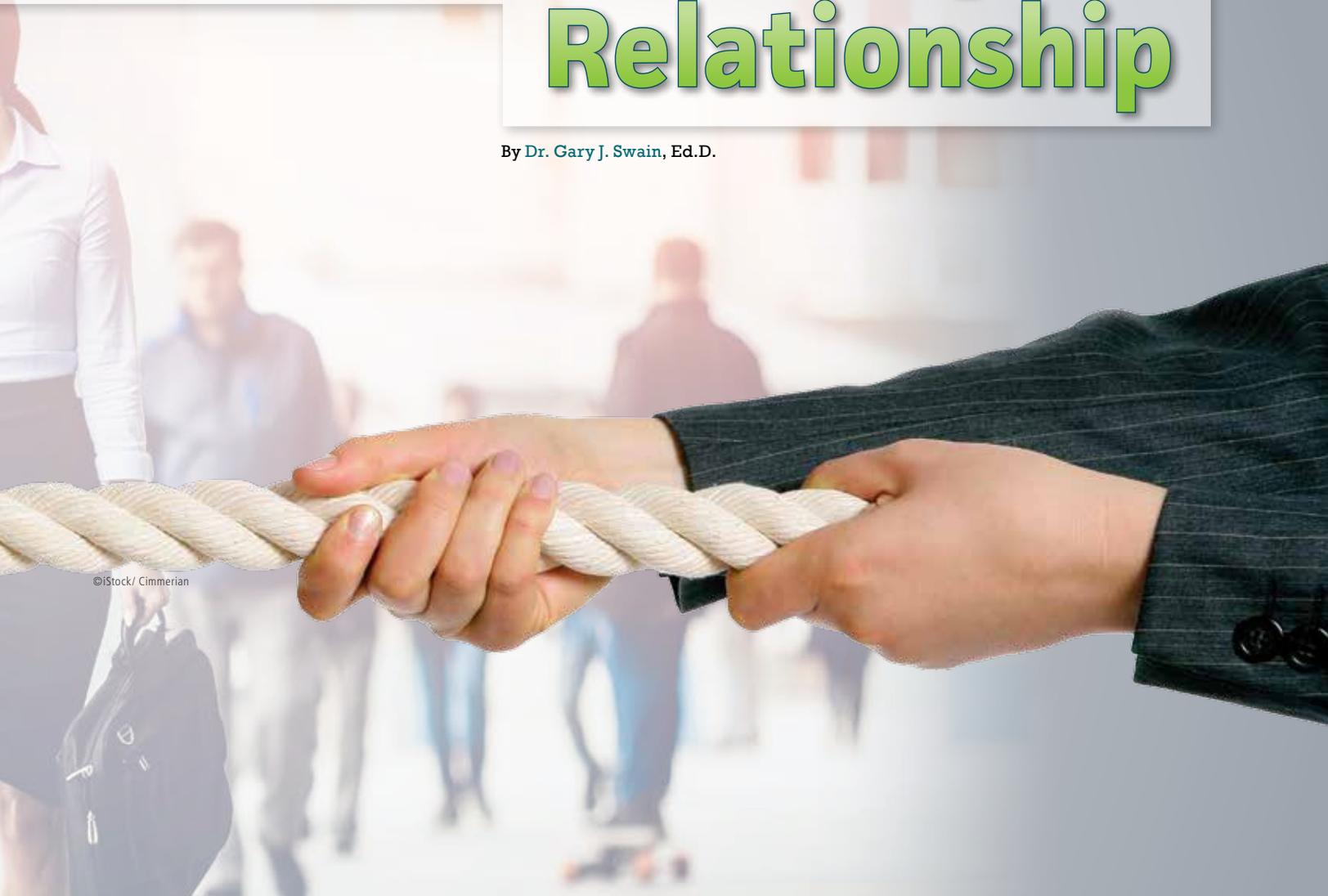
Work-Life Balance:

“signifies the extent to which an employee experiences feeling fulfilled and having his or her needs met in both work and non-work facets of life”

As an elementary school principal, I know that finding work-life balance in the administrative role is difficult. Parts of the problem are some unwritten, cultural norms of the work that can undermine finding equilibrium between our work and non-work lives. The principalship comes with some negative, tacitly held ideals of practice - including long work hours, selfless service, and a sense of steadfast, unfaltering leadership that supports perfectionism. This tension is particularly pronounced for newly promoted vice-principals who often lack the experience, skills, and networks to navigate the complex challenges of the work. Bessier et al. (2014) note that vice-principals new to the job are more likely to experience high levels of stress. Further, they participate less in emotional, social, familial, or organizational strategies to diminish high stress levels. Finding ways of supporting and engaging these new formal leaders in schools seems like a healthy first step in more clearly delineating the roles of vice-principals (and principals) and challenging unproductive ideals of the principalship.

Principal /Vice-Principal Relationship

By Dr. Gary J. Swain, Ed.D.



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The “Principal Workload Study” (Leithwood & Azah, 2014) provides some important insights into the work lives of school principals and vice-principals in Ontario. The research begins to unveil the too often unacknowledged challenges and stressors in the daily work of administrators. Results indicate a workload for elementary school principals, for example, that is sometimes perceived as “unmanageable” and described by school administrators as frequently “stressful” and “frustrating”. A particularly dire piece of the research points to the inability of principals to effectively and consistently use “coping” strategies (related to family, organization, peer support, and physical/emotional health) to balance their demanding workloads.

Work-life balance “signifies the extent to which an employee experiences feeling fulfilled and having his or her needs met in both work and non-work facets of life” (Rife & Hall, 2014, p. 4). The definition extends beyond the more popular idea of delineating our work and non-work life as separate spheres of our lives. It proposes that our work lives should at once be valuable, meaningful, and enjoyable and provide ample time for regenerative and meaningful experiences with family, friends, and in our own unique life pursuits.



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“*Supportive principals foster better, more confident leaders. A positive, perhaps unintended, offshoot to these practices is that high levels of leadership self-confidence (or efficacy) increase the abilities of principals to deal with work stress and their facility to find balance in their personal lives.*”

Work-life balance practices might include provisions for the care of elderly parents, flexible work hour options, opportunities to work from home, support groups and networks, or work leaves - all practices potentially amendable to the school environment. Work-life balance policies have been shown to increase job satisfaction and produce lower levels of stress for employees and, from the employer's perspective, lower absenteeism, attract and retain high quality employees, and indirectly influence greater worker productivity (Rife & Hall, 2014).

Despite the work-life balance practices offered within specific workplaces, the research confirms that organizational support, most notably from direct supervisors, is essential in establishing workplaces supportive of work-life balance. Without a culture expressly sympathetic to work-life balance practices, strategies are under-utilized by employees. Kossek et al. (2010) view this as a disconnect between policy and culture. For example, they note how an employee adopting a work-life balance strategy offered by their employer may, in fact, limit their opportunities for advancement because the practice conflicts with the implicitly accepted “ideal” of the worker within that work environment. The policy is clearly not entrenched in the culture of the organization.

School principals have a great deal of influence in the lives of their vice-principals. In Ontario, the responsibilities of vice-principals' are broadly defined in the Education Act as “duties as assigned” by the school principal. As such, principals play a pivotal role in the work life and leadership development of their vice-principals. My own research (Swain, 2016) identifies the elementary principal as a vital player in developing the leadership self-efficacy (or leadership self-confidence) of vice-principals. By assigning increasingly complex leadership tasks, modeling effective leadership, providing constructive feedback on leadership performance, and taking account of the physiological and emotional demands of the job, principals can have a significant influence on the overall leadership performance of their vice-principals. The research also suggests that principals who are highly supportive of their vice-principal's leadership self-efficacy are more prone to construct

a work environment that honours autonomy, trust, and a workplace where errors are seen as supporting learning and growth.

Despite the significance of the influence of principals on the work life and leadership efficacy of vice-principals, the relationship between these two (or more) key formal leaders often has little structure in districts beyond formal work appraisals and annual growth plans. Districts, however, can and should find ways of formally structuring principal/vice-principal relationships that prioritize the leadership development of vice-principals. Matching the right principal with the right vice-principal (or vice-principals) can have positive leadership implications for districts. Supportive principals (using the strategies noted above) foster better, more confident leaders. A positive, perhaps unintended, offshoot to these practices is that high levels of leadership self-confidence (or efficacy) increase the abilities of principals to deal with work stress and their facility to find balance in their personal lives (Beycioglu et al., 2012).

Although these positive consequences of increased self-efficacy may be indirect, principals can also play a more direct role in defining work-life balance for their vice-principals. First, by advocating for and modeling the effective use of work-life balance practices in their districts, principals can have a positive influence on the formation of a healthy work-life balance for vice-principals. Although these practices may vary from district to district - such things as accessing time-in-lieu days, professional learning funds, using personal illness days when necessary, or promoting work-at-home options where appropriate - provide a release from the daily stresses of the work. The immediate supervisor, as noted, plays a critical role in affirming the acceptance of a particular workplace work-life balance strategy. Additionally, principals can model a reasonable work day, especially difficult in a job where the work day is not prescribed and long hours worked are often viewed as a badge of honour and, ironically, martyrdom. The work-life balance research confirms that the time/principal effectiveness correlation so often assumed in our work is a fallacy. Finally, principals can demonstrate and discuss their approaches to finding balance in their work and non-work lives with their vice-principals; first, by

recognizing the limits of their efforts. While research confirms the importance of principals' work, it also supports the collaborative nature of school improvement with the convergence of formal and informal leadership. Principals are better off acknowledging their additive or catalytic role rather than living with the false assumption that leadership begins and ends with them.

Finding work-life balance in our challenging profession is ultimately unique to individuals. Sadly, it is often the hard data of broken relationships, poor health, mental fatigue, or failed aspirations that

point to the imbalance in our lives. Principals can play a pivotal role in confirming a healthy and productive life of leadership for their vice-principals. By supporting their vice-principals in their daily work, principals influence their vice-principal's leadership self-efficacy with the positive consequences of providing them with abilities to handle the stress of the work and find priority in their lives. Additionally, principals can adopt strategies directly that confirm the importance of work-life practices in their districts and, at the same time, unmask unhealthy idealizations of the job that undermine that very balance. ■

AUTHOR BIO

Gary Swain is an elementary school principal in the Toronto Catholic District School Board. His doctoral work focused on the relationship between elementary principals and vice-principals, an interest developed during 8 years of facilitating the Principal Qualification Program.

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Waiting Until The Danger of Emailing D



Have you ever been in this situation? It happened while I was checking the time on my phone, wondering how long we had been waiting for our meals. In retrospect, I wish I hadn't clicked it, but the notification tag for my email app was very red and very demanding. Just a tap on the screen and the email loaded, about 200 words of anger, frustration, and pleading. My wife turned to me—seeing my face, now ashen—and asked, “what happened?” She wasn't sure what was different, but I was suddenly somewhere else. I shook my head, gently dismissing her concern, and put my phone away, but the damage was done. I was no longer enjoying a meal out with my family. I was still there, waiting for my pulled-pork pizza, but in mind and in heart, I was wrestling through the email I received, and the complex problem it represented.

As educational leaders and administrators, our work lives tend to be difficult to leave in the office. Spot a principal in the grocery store, jogging in the park, or in traffic and you can be pretty sure that you are seeing someone who is thinking about work. While there is nothing wrong with choosing to think about work while you exercise or get some errands done, it can be problematic when a work email yanks us out of personal or familial time and into work-mode.

For many of us, our technological connection to our email exasperates the problem of taking work home with us. In her book *Alone Together*, Sherry Turkle describes our connection to technology as a tether. According to Turkle, we are bound psychologically to our devices, as an extension of our emotional selves. In her words: “a technology-enabled social contract demands continual...presence.”

Monday: uring Downtime

By Dr. Jeffrey MacCormack & Doug Checkley

“The pressure for us to be available by email at all times has decreased the amount of downtime we have. Downtime is more than just doing work at the kitchen table rather than our office desk; we need genuine downtime so that we can recharge for our emotional and intellectually hardscrabble career.”



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Turkle was writing about how adolescents use their devices to outsource the regulation and processing of emotions, but she might as well have been talking about the increased pressure on school administrators to be continuously accessible. The pressure for us to be available by email at all times has decreased the amount of downtime we have. Downtime is more than just doing work at the kitchen table rather than our office desk; we need genuine downtime so that we can recharge for our emotional and intellectually hardscrabble career.

Loss of restorative downtime is not the only drawback of checking email out of the office. We should also avoid out-of-office emails because we are often poorly equipped to respond at home or waiting for pulled-pork pizza. It was over the winter break that I was notified, via email, of a tragic death of a former student. I had no access to the systems and records that I needed to send my condolences to the family. After that emotional explosion and unable to respond appropriately, I spent Christmas Eve dinner completely absorbed in my feelings of guilt and powerlessness.

The emotional burden that comes with never disconnecting from work can also adversely affect our personal relationships. In a study on the after-hour use of communication technology, Boswell and Olson-Buchanan (2007) found that, beyond the stress related to working from home, people who accessed after-hour communication technology tended to conflict with their significant others more than those that did not. This finding may not be surprising for us; after all, most of us can think of a time when an unhappy surprise in the inbox affected a spouse or a family member. Setting up boundaries is not just for our own benefit. Our loved ones rely on us to be present and healthy.

Sounds easier said than done? The following strategies may provide the first steps to benefiting from your downtime and creating healthier boundaries around email.

1 SMALL OBSTACLES

The first strategy to consider is unlinking your phone from your work email. You can still access email, as needed, but the task of logging into your webmail through the tiny browser may be enough of an obstacle so that you are not doing it mindlessly. Purposeful in-boxing will make it easier to limit clicking your inbox to those times when you have the time, resources, and privacy to respond effectively.

2 “JOIN THE GREY SIDE, LUKE”

If you decide to keep your phone directly linked to your work email, you may want to consider changing the colour. For many of us, ignoring the red notification flag is nearly impossible. The contrast of red against the background is like a blaring siren. To reduce the visual intensity of the notification, you can change your phone to grayscale. It is remarkable how much easier it is to leave an email for later when your phone is in grayscale, than in colour. Don't believe us? Try it.

For iOS users: Settings > General > Accessibility > Display Accommodations > Colour Filters > Grayscale

3 OUT OF SIGHT...

It also may help you to ignore notifications if you move your mail icons away from your home screen. When we open our phone, we tend to scan the first screen we see for notifications. By adding a tiny obstacle (sliding to the left), we reduce the likelihood that we will find ourselves responding to emails when we wanted to change the song on our playlist.

For iOS users: Hold the icon down until it dances > Move it to another screen > Hide it in a subfolder

4 BUILDING A CULTURE OF TALKERS

Avoiding unwanted emails during downtime may require more than small adjustments to your device. What about having an honest discussion with the staff that builds a school culture of setting healthy boundaries. It is important to remind everyone that emails are often poorly suited modes of communication. We have complex jobs that often require more than text-based queries. By reminding the staff of the efficiency of face-to-face conversations, we can enrich our dialogue and better respond to nuanced challenges.

5 USING EMAIL FOR EMAIL

We often use emails as our to-do list, which is why we send emails at odd hours. Better to send off a quick email—we reason to ourselves—than forget to mention it on Monday. Instead of zooming of an email at 9:30 at night, by setting a timed notification on the phone, we won't forget the issue and we can avoid filling someone else's inbox. In fact, as a staff, you may decide to eliminate weekend emails entirely.

6 JUST BREATHE

If all else fails, we can do our best to control our reactions to surprising emails through meditative practice. When experiencing moments of stress, breathe deeply through your nose and slowly exhale over a ten count, and repeat as needed. This can slow your heart rate and allow you to refocus on being present. A moment of calm is better than an hour of anxiety. Here's a fun idea: melt a piece of chocolate on your tongue while you focus on your breathing. It can be a delicious way to realign yourself to the task at hand.

In sum, building partitions between our work and home lives is important for our balance and well-being. Checking email is like playing the emotional lottery; we have little control over what waits for us behind the click of the mouse. Opening an inbox is something we should do only when we are able to react to challenges and also prepared to deal with the emotional repercussions. In the end, we are not so different from the students in our schools. Like them, we also need regular breaks. If we want to be healthy and capable professionals, we can't skip our own recess breaks. ■

AUTHOR BIO

Dr. Jeffrey MacCormack is an assistant professor of Educational Psychology and Inclusion at the Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge. Before starting his PhD, he worked as a teacher for 10 years, in general and special education classrooms. Additionally, he has over 4 years of experience teaching preservice teachers and practicing teachers. His research explores on the intersection of play and development, with particular interest in technology and well-being.

AUTHOR BIO

Doug Checkley is currently pursuing his PhD at the Faculty of Education, University of Lethbridge. Before starting his PhD, Doug earned a MEd in Science Education. He taught physics for 8 years before moving into a position as a high school administrator for 4 years. His research is focused on refugee education in science.

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A Journey to **Work-Life Balance**

By Chan Cusson



Work-Life Balance?

Is this a nice little extra thing we do or is it a vital component of a school work life?

Every day our school is sprawling with middle schoolers with hormones raging, zits exploding and often some with serious B.O. And, you'll hear things like, "I forgot my lunch, I need to call home, NOW!!" Or learn that someone was crying in the bathroom last night at the dance. And then asked, "Can you please help Johnny, he doesn't seem to have any friends?" Every day, we see our students go from complete egocentricity, "I'm the centre of the universe" and "You are a mean principal" to "Oh, can I help you carry those tables to the gym?" "How was your weekend?" and "Yes, I'd love to help out."



©iStock/ pe-art

Every day, teachers are standing in front of classrooms full of someone's precious jewels. They are charged with helping, healing, teaching, and caring for these rambunctious, smelly, and tenacious little humans. Twenty-nine of us staff members need to be at their finest every day.

Our staff: we work with a range of people - single moms, persons with brain trauma, someone who lost a spouse to illness, parents with younger children, folks working multiple jobs to make ends meet, people trying to kick addictions, and a group of people often sandwiched between children and aging parents.

Recently, two staff members had experienced a critical illness. Staff transitions, hiring, and more hiring, new staff orientation, balancing

with trying to settle the students and easing the parents' minds of yet another change in staff - these are just a few of the balancing acts. We need to be at our finest every day.

Does a healthy workplace mean healthy staff? What is a work-life balance? I am not sure if healthy workplace means higher job satisfaction and thus retention? Will staff absences improve? How do we ensure a high level of staff performance? Does this high level of performance translate into increased academic achievement by students? Will we create a better culture and climate in the school for parents and students? I have more questions than answers. This is my second year at this school as the principal. Where do I start? What is my role pertaining to staff workplace wellness?

Every day I keep telling myself, "baby steps". Our school staff wellness program is designed to support staff members' physical, mental and emotional well being, and we believe it is important enough to make it a goal in our school education plan. We have designated two staff members to share the leadership of school wellness - one coordinator for student wellness and one for staff wellness. Our goal is to ensure our wellness program offers choice and creates a culture of health and wellness to:

- Improve physical and mental health
- Provide coping skills dealing with stress
- Reduce out of pocket expense for staff
- Have a safe and supportive work environment

Our staff leaders start small, every month at a staff meeting, we take time to celebrate staff birthdays and we all sing. It seems so trivial, but the smiles on their faces give us tremendous delight. At staff meetings and PD days, we have switched from cake and muffins to platters of fruit and veggies or meat and cheese trays. Occasionally, we indulge in chocolate!!

In the weekly staff memo, we offer mental health tips on how to balance work and life, how to de-stress, and how to find time for self. The wellness coordinators are given time at every staff meeting to promote health and wellness events. We celebrate small things and we celebrate often. Staff are offered walking/running groups after school and weekly fitness classes called Cize it Up! This fitness class offers dance and exercise that promote physical health. These programs increase morale and awareness of health. There are often little things we can make provisions for to support the staff in the effort to balance work and personal life. For example, when a staff member has a child that is performing at another school, he/she is encouraged to attend during school time. Sometimes, their family has to come first. The school covers most of the expenses we incur for staff wellness activity.

I find that any school I have been at, there are always staff that haven't participated in wellness programs. Some offer the reason that they have young families, there is lack of time, and some don't enjoy physical activities. Some may even feel that their health is none of my business. My assistant

principal and I know that we have to stay persistent and continue to support the wellness initiatives with the staff who are passionate and are willing participants.

As the year progresses, our administrative team continues to collaborate with our wellness coordinators to come up with the ideas for providing activities that work towards our health goals. Sometimes, we offer incentives. We noticed that when each person sets his or her individual health goals, we have more than 70% participation rate. This appears to be more successful than 20-30% participation rate in other group type activities.

This year, we created a draft blueprint to track our wellness program. This tracking measures activities on a weekly and monthly basis. This blueprint links to our wellness goal in the education plan explains each activity and tracks the number of participants. We are hoping this will provide us with insight into the diverse needs of our staff. We are also hoping this will become a foundation in the future years.

What do all these effort mean? What kind of impact do they have on the staff? Several staff members have shared the impact the wellness program has on them. One staff member who often puts work and others before herself says that the program motivates her to stay focused on her health. It has given her incentive to take a walk every day, and managed to lose ten pounds along the way. She continues to set her goals long after an event is over; to strive for a more balanced work and personal life. Some staff just likes to take the opportunity to socialize at an event. For others, it is a learning process to set a personal goal that they can attain, like completing 20,000 steps per day etc. As for me, with 19 years of parenting under my belt, now both kids going off to university, with 20 odd years of being an educator, and now charged with the responsibility of creating a staff wellness plan, I am reflecting on my personal wellbeing and how I balance my work and my life; eating right, regular physical activity, carving time in the evening for family and setting future goals to reconnect with my husband and my children in meaningful adult ways. Most importantly, I am carving out a time for myself and my hobbies - reading, working on my puzzles, photography, and - when the snow is gone - golfing. ■

There are often little things we can make provisions for to support the staff in the effort to balance work and personal life...



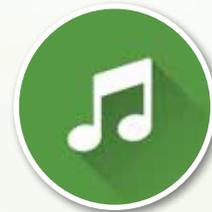
We offer mental health tips on how to balance work and life, how to de-stress, and how to find time for self.



When a staff member has a child that is performing at another school, he/she is encouraged to attend during school time.



Staff are offered walking/running groups after school and weekly fitness classes.



Every month at a staff meeting, we take time to celebrate staff birthdays and we all sing.

AUTHOR BIO

Chan Cusson, Principal Cold Lake Middle School, NLS D #69



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STORIES FROM THE FIELD COMPETENCY FOUR:

Developing and Facilitating Leadership



By Dr. Carmen Mombourquette



In the last edition of the *CAP Journal* we shared insights about the instructional leadership core professional competency for principals which emerged during our research about highly effective school leaders in Alberta. In this edition, we continue to share our research findings on the evolution of the Alberta Education standards of practice for school leaders with the fifth of seven competencies, developing and facilitating leadership in others. Read on to discover why and how this essential competency, which when practiced by education leaders will ensure optimum learning and development for all students.



“The principal promotes the development of leadership capacity within the school community: students, teachers and other staff, parents, and school council for the overall benefit of the school community and education system.”

This competency speaks to the community effort involved in the leadership responsibilities commonly thought to fall within the principal's role. Active involvement in ethical decision making by school stakeholders complements the principal's own development and facilitation of leadership in others. It is the principal's responsibility to act as a gatekeeper in collective decision making, ensuring that proposed practices serve the interests of all students and parents equally (Frick, Faircloth, & Little, 2013). By role modelling the key aspects in decision making and being available to teachers seeking professional guidance, the principal influences the decision making process (Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010).

Several implications of a distributed leadership model have been outlined by Harris (2012), including how the principal's role is impacted as leadership is shared within the school. Furthermore, as power is distributed across teachers and away from positional leadership, a high degree of reciprocal trust is built. Finally, student learning improves through a distributed leadership model. Sackney and Walker (2006) suggest that principals can foster leadership skills in others through the development of a learning community where trust, collaboration, reflection, risk taking, shared leadership, and data-based decision making are norms.

Youngs (2007) speaks to the importance of teacher mentorship. Principals can promote school cultures whereby experienced teachers are actively involved in the development of newer teachers. This work also leads to the empowerment of others and their development as leaders.

HOW ARE PRINCIPALS MEASURING UP?

Developing and facilitating leadership requires principals to embrace the notion of distributed leadership and actively participate in the creation of structures that will bring this concept alive within the school community. Some areas where teacher leadership was encouraged by the 10 principals we interviewed included grade level teams, subject area teams, PLCs, and mentorship of other teachers. Other staff members involved with formal distributed leadership included vice-principals, associate principals, lead teachers, instructional coaches, and department heads.

Themes of how leaders are identified and their potential developed emerged during our interviews. An initial strategy identified by many of the principals was to get to know their staff and team members as quickly as possible. When individuals' strengths and desires were recognized, the principals could not only identify and place potential leaders, but also grow and empower them with increased responsibilities. A few of our interviewed principals invited certain individuals to take on leadership roles, while others allowed their team members to appoint their own leaders. These positions of shared responsibility included having teachers form committees and creating student learning and behaviour programs.

At times, our principals took on mentorship roles themselves, teaching leadership skills to the teachers whom they had invited into leadership positions. They were creative in their teaching strategies, some worked closely with individual teachers helping them build upon their areas for development, while others formed smaller groups to whom leadership skills could be modelled or taught through mapping out courses of action.

INTERVIEW CONCLUSIONS

Developing and facilitating leadership took several forms in our sample of schools. Principals often identified the admin team, with vice-principals and sometimes teacher leaders, as the primary locus for developing leadership. Individuals would also be invited to the admin team, and to serve as chairs of committees and teams.

Moolenaar, Daly, and Slegers (2010) highlighted how often teachers seek out principals for advice as being an important indicator for innovative change. All our principals had an open door policy, were visible daily in halls and classrooms, developed trusting relationships, and engaged in “tough conversations” when necessary to ensure that teachers and teacher assistants were brought into the decision-making loop when appropriate. Transparency of decision-making, on an ethically-sound basis was a characteristic held in high regard by our principals.

The Challenge Of A Work-Life Balance For The Rural Administrator

By Andrew J. Collins



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There is much to be said for the life of the rural principal. The close-knit community environment benefits the school, the staff, and certainly the students in multiple ways. From the generosity of local sponsors to the public pride in school accomplishments, the school is one of the most important hubs of the communities' life. With this comes a role of prominence for the man or woman sitting in the admin's chair. A spotlight of public awareness that seems all the brighter in a smaller scale setting. In this environment, the principal's knowledge reaches beyond the classroom and school hallways. It extends to family histories, local student employment, and all other aspects of small-town life. There is, however, a challenge for the rural administrator when it comes to fostering a healthy work-life balance. The scales are tipped and the work may well encroach upon the life. While the principal may benefit from his or her connections to the community, the catch is that the principals' family history, prior employment, and extracurricular activities are just as accessible for public perusal.

As a profession we have accepted that we are educators beyond the borders of the school. Our social media accounts are objects of scrutiny as is our public persona. We are expected to be role models exemplifying the positive characteristics we work to foster in the youth of today. We strive to be the best version of ourselves possible. We know to bite our tongues and think before speaking when necessary and to share only when appropriate and to respect privacy with discretion more often. Those in large urban centers, however, are afforded a small degree of anonymity in their day-to-day interactions that the rural educator can only envy.

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For the urban educator a trip to the mall might well mean encountering a student or parent, but a day of errands results in at least some moments of meaningless encounters. The urban admin may encounter a checkout clerk, a waiter, or an employee with whom there is no prior connection. These moments are fleeting and insubstantial. They are purchases or the acquisition of services and nothing more. For those moments, they are a parent, a customer, a sports fan or a citizen. The urban educator certainly faces other challenges related to the large and complex community that they serve, but those outside the school's periphery do not know them at large. Not so for the rural admin.

For better or worse the rural admin wears the multiple hats prominently. Educators never take off the professional hat but the rural educator wears theirs with a bright neon sign above it. They may be attending their daughter's soccer game as a parent or cheering on a volleyball team as a fan but they are still very much seen as a principal. The head gets crowded with so many hats. The other parents may well have students in the school or the rec league coach might also be the school basketball coach. For those in the job for some time, former pupils suddenly populate the world. The young woman fixing your transmission once sat in your office over a bullying concern. The man preparing your breakfast once took issue with the school's dress code policy or shared his feelings about his parent's divorce. The parent meeting with you on a Monday morning may be the same individual whose adolescent high-jinx contributed to a few of those grey hairs on your head. The job follows in an undeniable way. This is true even in the good moments.

A parent may well extend kind words or praise or even just fill a silence with casual conversation about school events. A conversation can be as superficial as how wonderful the school concert was the week before. This can lead to fatigue even if the moment is respectful and well-meaning. The point isn't that the interactions are difficult or challenging, but rather that

your principal hat is showing. This is to say nothing of those more heated moments. Unpopular decisions, misunderstandings, and disciplinary challenges can find themselves into non-school related events just as quickly. They may interrupt a casual walk or a dinner with a loved one. The principal may long for the moment when they can just be another bystander in the crowd and not 'on stage' constantly.

How then to forge the balance? To maintain a healthy work-life balance the principal must seek out those islands of facelessness. Whether the island is metaphorical or literal can be left up to the individual. Travel provides an opportunity to explore the new and the different away from the office. Taking full advantage of the summer or winter breaks to step away from it all and recharge the human battery is key. Disconnecting the phone and sitting in front of a fire can be a cathartic experience. A moment that is increasingly difficult to grasp in our technologically connected world. Setting agreed upon boundaries with colleagues and friends during these moments to limit the topics of conversation during non-work hours also provides a benefit. Taking that deliberate action to separate oneself and clear the mind of work related matters could improve performance in the education field.

Also, taking the time to reflect upon the benefits of a magnificent life can get clouded during those difficult days. Although being nameless may seem like a boon in some moments, there is also something comforting and welcoming about a community of neighbours. There is a value to living your life surrounded by those whose life you've impacted. It is special having the opportunity to see student life on a generational scale, and view large numbers of your students encountering the same learning opportunities they provided for their parents. Rural admins get the opportunity to see the story of a child on a longer timeline that reaches beyond high school. They get to observe the long-term trends from up close. It's a wonderful life, but it's one that's challenging to keep in balance. ■

AUTHOR BIO

Andrew J. Collins is a Vice-principal with Mountain View School Division in Manitoba. He is a married father of three who holds degrees from Brandon University (MEd), Brock University (BEd) and Queens University (BA).

Grappling with the emotional price tag of school leadership

By Dr. Jerome Cranston



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It has been recognized for decades that being a principal or a vice-principal is demanding and, at times, utterly exhausting work. Based on an analysis of the principalship, Goodwin, Cunningham and Eager concluded that over the last one-hundred years principals have increasingly been asked to do more and more as their leadership roles have evolved and expanded. The amalgamation of complex and, oftentimes, intertwined expectations held by teachers, parents and the public in general have left principals facing a formidable task and being expected to succeed on all fronts. In many regards, the scope of the work of the principal is so daunting now, compared to what it used to be, that even a knowledgeable, dedicated, personable school leader - the kind of person any teacher would love to work with - can find the work, at times, utterly bewildering. The principalship is officially overwhelming the principal.

Research confirms what many who have worked in school-based administration already know; principals are feeling more and more burned out. This is, in part, a result of the emotional demands associated with their role as a school leader. In 2014, the U.S.-based School Leaders Network determined that the job of the principal has simply become too complex, too poorly constructed and overly isolating. The net result is that in some U.S. states 50% of newly hired principals are not retained beyond their third year of service. This constant administrative “churn” is unsettling in many ways. For one thing, it upsets the person earnestly wishing to fulfill this position, and additionally, leadership turnover causes ripples through the staff, the students, the families and all stakeholders. It is a less secure school overall that has a new person’s name on the principal’s door every two or three years.



“Being a principal requires self-awareness and the ability to self-regulate between the emotions one actually feels and the ones that are considered socially appropriate to display. Since the effort it takes to not show your real feelings all the time comes with the job, this work is part of the emotional labour of being a principal.”

Why is it so unsustainable? In 2015 Professor Philip Riley from the Australian Catholic University examined the health and well-being of 10,000 Australian principals and concluded that,

Principals experience high levels of emotional demands and emotional labour when compared to the general population. This is correlated with higher levels of burn out and stress symptoms (difficulty sleeping, somatic symptoms and cognitive stress, and depressive symptoms) and poor overall quality of life. (p. 12)

Closer to home, a comprehensive review of the research titled *The Future of Principals in Canada a National Study*, by the Alberta Teachers Association and supported by the Canadian Association of principals concluded that a key factor that deterred teachers from considering becoming a principal was the increased stress-level associated with the work. Citing a 2004 report by the Catholic Principal Council of Ontario, the authors of the ATA study stated that stress linked with depression and burnout has become a significant issue for many principals and

that this high level of stress is a significant barrier to those who might otherwise have considered becoming a principal.

These research findings when taken individually stand as a stark reminder of the social world and educational landscape that principals are ensconced in and are committed to support. When taken collectively, they are nothing less than alarming.

The public face of the principalship

The findings of these studies and others while bleak do offer some insight into how targeted professional development - especially approaches that are related to emotional self-awareness and wellness strategies - are critically important in order to develop and nurture the resilience that principals require these days. While there seems to be an abundance of well-branded and costly principal institutes, school leadership is not as easily enacted as the glossy brochures might suggest. Much of what is sold as in-service at alluring destinations is devoid of learning about the emotional labour that comes with being a principal.

Even on a bad day, and yes principals most certainly do have some, principals are expected to outwardly appear to be upbeat and enthusiastic to their colleagues and to the communities they serve. The professional face of the principal requires that real feelings be sublimated to some degree. No one wants to see the principal slogging through the hallways with a long face. However, a principal being demonstrably gleeful when “that colleague” who has harassed you all year long about not wanting to be on outdoor supervision discovers he left his headlights on all day and now cannot start his car is considered to be completely inappropriate; no matter how satisfying the moment feels. Being a principal requires self-awareness and the ability to self-regulate between the emotions one actually feels and the ones that are considered socially appropriate to display. Since the effort it takes to not show your real feelings all the time comes with the job, this work is part of the emotional labour of being a principal.

In short, in many situations in their daily lives principals are required to maintain a public face that requires them to suppress or deny certain feelings while mustering up the energy and courage to display others that are more socially accepted; they literally play a role that is better matched to one that their audiences expect to encounter. Over thirty-years ago, Hochschild proposed that those involved in service work, work that requires those who serve in the public-eye to assume and present a “public face”, need opportunities to explore the social interactions embedded in their specific roles as a way of better preparing for the social and emotional labour of performing the role well. It was suggested that dramaturgical processes that could help people dramatize a situation as a way of studying these dynamics might buffer against some of the negative effects such as being completely thrown off-balance by emotionally jarring human behaviour.

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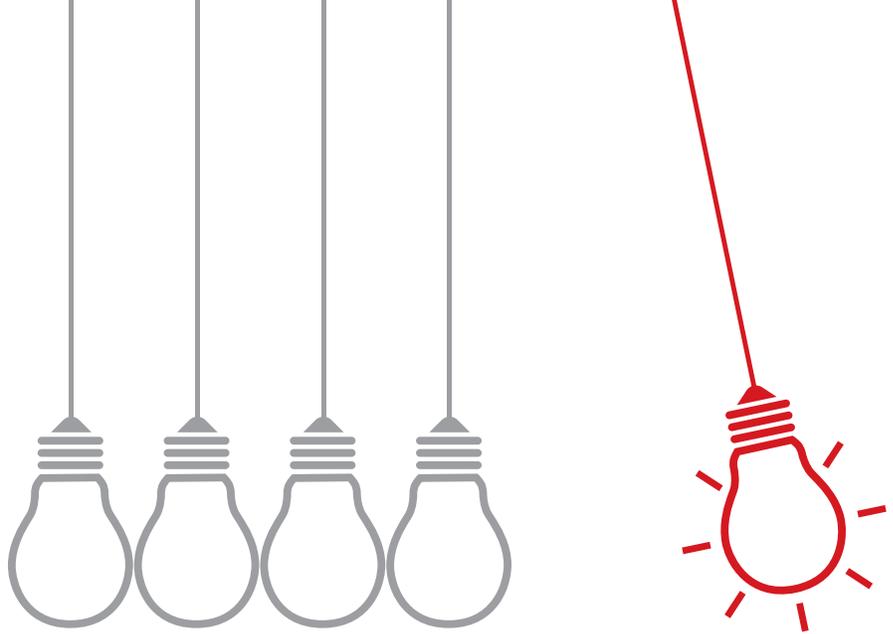
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Enacting school leadership

The advice that is given to aspiring principals to maintain work-life balance is well intentioned, but it does little to prepare them for the very real emotional exhaustion they will feel some days. After serving as a principal for eight years, then in central office administration for over five years and now as a researcher in educational administration, I feel confident in stating that if finding or maintaining balance was as simple as it sounds, every principal would have found it already.

Many research studies seem to point to the fact that articulated principal preparation opportunities that are grounded in the lived-reality of contemporary school leadership might serve as important levers that can moderate against some of the emotional costs associated with the work of leading a school. It is clear that a lack of well-designed principal preparation and systematic support contribute to the high levels of burnout and stress that principals endure. In response to the void of principal preparation that makes use of dramaturgical perspectives to not only understand but to experience the emotionally taxing work of being a principal, my colleague Kristin Kusanovich at Santa Clara University, and I developed the Drama in School Leadership project (referred to as DiSL).

DiSL, which is based in an ethnotheatre research paradigm invites workshop participants to immerse themselves in the real social roles - such as those of a principal, teacher, central office administrator and other staff members - that the adults committed to support student success play. Participants explore high-stakes scenarios in school leadership by taking on roles different from the ones they typically play as part of an ensemble in scripted and directed one-act plays in order to develop a felt understanding of school leadership. Instead of offering more of the traditional, desk-based case study approaches to understand the emotional investment required to lead a school or allowing participants to role-play in unscripted yet banal exercises that all too often devolve into the realm of the absurd, Drama in School Leadership methods focus instead on participants learning on their feet which unlocks a whole host of important understandings about the



human and therefore dramatic nature of educational leadership. My colleague is a performing artist with a background in pedagogy, education, choreography and theatre. By borrowing techniques from the theatre arts such as character and script analysis techniques, and applying them to principal preparation, we have been able to rethink how principals might be better prepared to maintain resiliency in the face of professional challenges that affect them at a personal level.

Nurturing resilient principals

I am not suggesting that we have developed a cure-all that will ameliorate all that emotionally ails principals. With the Drama in School Leadership, what we offer is an intervention that bridges the gap between the physical and emotional dimensions of being a principal. It is trite

to suggest that leading a school staff does not have a very real emotional impact on those who occupy the principal's office. Far too often, I have listened to so-called "experts" cajole principals to remain objective from the very real emotions they feel in making difficult decisions. I see no profit in continuing to promote an antiquated and rather brutish Cartesian-like division between what we think and what we feel. Principals need to learn how to develop the capacities and capabilities to adapt to a variety of situations and increase their professional competency in the face of adversity. Our research on our DiSL approach has demonstrated its potency to better connect the mind and body so that contemporary principals can have a more sophisticated understanding of the lay of the land before stepping into the very complicated dance of running a school.

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What are needed are approaches that enable learners to not only think through a question such as: “what would I do if...?” but also allow them to experience what it feels like to be in the midst of the human dynamics of enacting a difficult leadership decision. We need to offer unique, intentional learning opportunities in this regard. A creative re-enactment offers principals the opportunity to participate in a intentionally emotional experience of thinking, doing and being that opens them up to a social reality of schools that might very well be different from how they perceive it when they read about it in a text or case. It has become clear that there is an increasing

need to shift attention towards exploring creative approaches that can better serve as avenues to prepare school leaders for the difficult work of dealing with interpersonal relationships and emotions that are critically important to understand.

Right now, you almost have to be superhuman to succeed in every facet of the principalship. A few things have become clearer to me in my years both as a school leader and as a professor of it. One of these is that we need to stop throwing principals into the deep-end of the pool of school leadership and hoping they will miraculously learn to swim. A second one

is that we who provide leadership training need to do much more to offer principals professional experiences that prepare them for the very real emotional burden of leadership. Opportunities that allow for creative encounters around the very real pushes and pulls of work and life, and yes, balance, are desperately needed. Can we afford to continue to watch promising principals thrash about in the unpredicted climate of the job until they are so utterly exhausted that they choose to call it quits, and leave the profession? Yes, a principal needs to be persistent, to work extremely hard, and to give it their all, but they should be able to be a human as well. ■

AUTHOR BIO

Dr. Jerome Cranston, Executive Director, Student Engagement & Success, Associate Professor Education, University of Manitoba.

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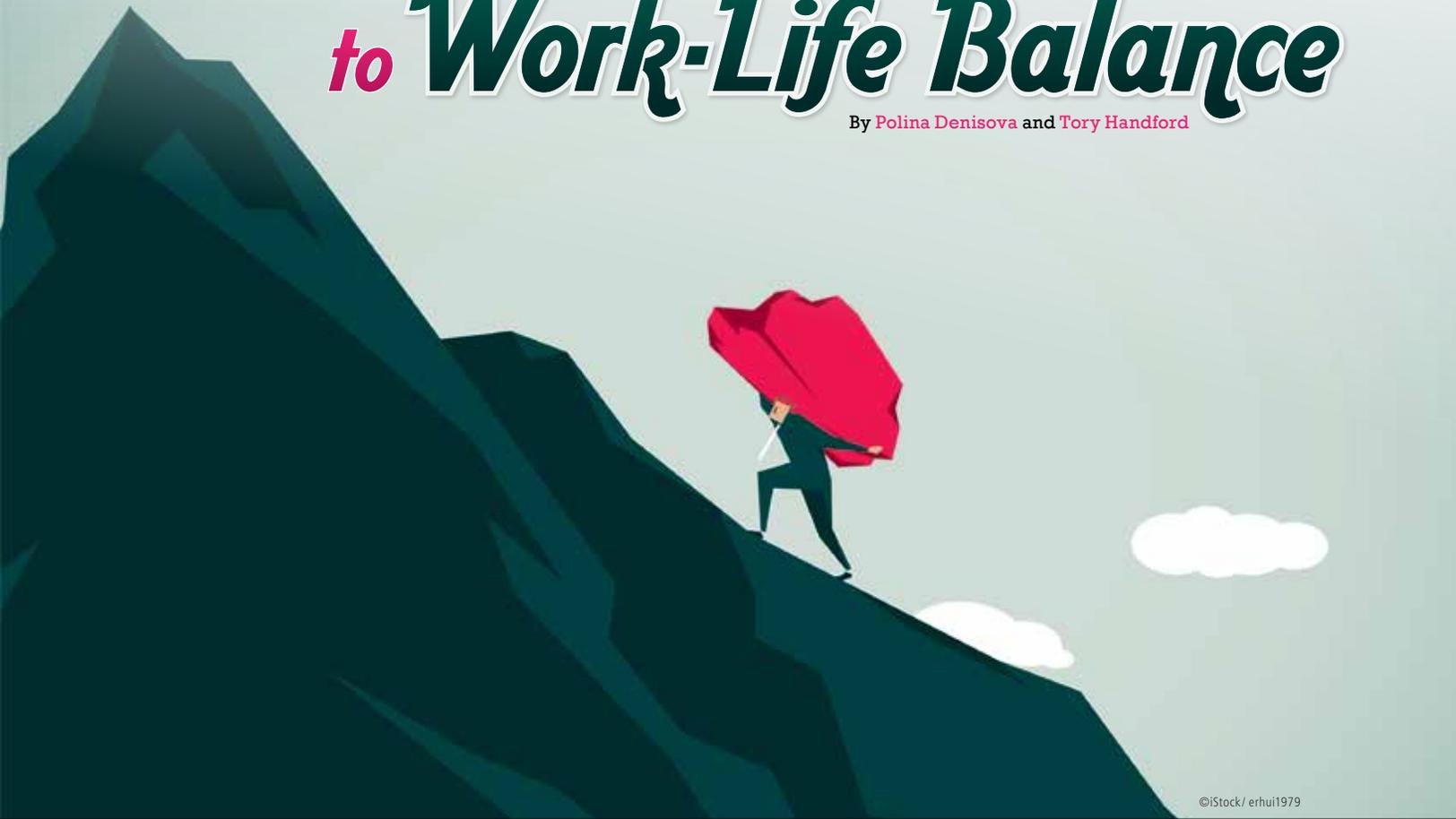
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Major Hindrances *on the Way* *to* Work-Life Balance

By Polina Denisova and Tory Handford



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Long hours, conflicting demands, work in “emotionally ‘hot’ climates” (Leithwood & Beatty, 2009, p. 91) - all this and more can lead to the exhaustion that is part of the overwhelming demands on today’s school principal. For some, this becomes the challenge of the job, that on good days we embrace. Others, though, it leads to tiredness and a feeling of too few resources and too many agendas...which can result in burnout and a desire to quit altogether.

This report on research identifies what helps school leaders stay in the profession and what undermines their resilience. The study happened in two stages. First, we sent a survey to all principals and vice-principals in a school district in the interior of British Columbia to measure their level of resilience. The results were optimistic: the twenty school leaders who agreed to participate were slightly more resilient as a group than the general American population (82.85 points versus 80.4 points reported by Connor & Davidson, 2003.) At the second stage we asked survey participants to meet in person and discuss both the challenges and the joys of a school leader’s life. Nine interviews occurred.

Work-life balance appeared in all the conversations. The importance of work-life balance is supported by extensive research: many studies show how crucial it is not to let work take over free time, especially for people in socially demanding fields (Brennan, 2017; Kim & Windsor, 2015.) We discussed what made it difficult for the participants to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The obstacles can be broadly divided into two categories: those caused by circumstances, including the nature of the job, and those which are mostly under personal control. One finding of interest was that the men we interviewed understood work-life balance as making time for their hobbies, while the women confessed they did not have enough time to care for their families.

“The importance of work-life balance is supported by extensive research: many studies show how crucial it is not to let work take over free time, especially for people in socially demanding fields.”

The job of a school leader is full of distractions: parents calling and dropping by, emergencies at the playground and in classroom, and all kinds of other unexpected disruptions of a workday. One vice-principal quipped, “I wish I could put a ‘Do not disturb’ sign on my door! As soon as people find out I’m at the office, they are here.” School leaders found that since it was difficult to plan their day, they resorted to working evenings or early mornings from home in order to address the daily demands.

Ironically, together with the inability to plan, they also spoke about hours and hours spent on planning. As one experienced principal told us, “I have to plan for the week, and then I share it with the staff. They have to be prepared, though, for that plan not to work.”

The other common concern related to the unavoidable changes affecting the life of the whole school. Events such as the recent introduction of the new curriculum in the province, merging of schools due to insufficient funding, and changes in relation to staffing were among those cited most frequently. In addition to dealing with matters at hand, principals and vice-principals helped others adjust and deal with stress brought by change.

Some of the obstacles to work-life balance were circumstantial; others were personal choices. For example, omnipresent technology, viewed by some as unavoidable, others saw as a convenient way of communication at work. Once home, they turned their phones to silent and did not check the mailbox until the next morning. Similarly, concerns about student achievement were pervasive, but approached differently. Several participants shared their constant worry about the matter, while others identified that academic excellence is not always possible and expressed some satisfaction with solid gains, even though more gains were considered ideal.

Other struggles with “leaving work at work” were of a more personal nature. We met three self-professed workaholics who “live, eat, and breathe” their job. The way participants talked about their work provided insights into why they may not feel like picking up a hobby or relaxing after a busy day.

For all, their job was a calling, a way to make the world a better place:

- “I feel this is what I am meant to do”
- “If you want a functioning democracy, you’d better have an educated society”
- “As a principal, you are not just responsible for the learning of your students, but also for the learning of the staff and the community”
- “It’s not teaching subject matter... It is more like life-coaching”

When people put that much meaning into what they do, they might feel compelled to “keep calm and carry on”. Some answered emails and calls ‘24/7’; others said their job was the main topic for conversations at home. This was especially true for school leaders whose family members also work in education: “My husband and I constantly talk about work at home; there is nothing else to talk about.”

A proactive approach to work-related issues frequently included things like intervening in situations with positive outreach to parents and loading supports for teachers to understand and adjust to the new curriculum, well before the school district acted. In these and many other ways, school leaders took responsibilities that were beyond their job description. They established after-hours meeting routines with parents, started evening classes for teachers, and went out of their ways to make sure student’s voices were heard and their needs met. There seems to be an intrinsic conflict between the typical personality of a school leader and the well-regulated, moderate approach to work and life. To lead a school, one has to be ready to put in extra hours, as well as the heart and soul, into what they do.

What can help principals and vice-principals stay in a positive work situation and keep their enthusiasm alive? Participants answered this question differently. They thanked their family members who ‘forced’ them take time off and their garage bands who do not take ‘no’ for an answer. They said they learned how to stay organized and not take things personally. They discovered other things they hold dear: religion, friends, their gardens, or their dreams to see the world. Once again, we will use a quote by one of the participants: “After all, we need to teach children it’s not only about work. And we know it’s best to teach by example.” ■

AUTHOR BIO

Tory Handford is an Assistant Professor at Thompson Rivers University and is the Director of the Executive Program for Leadership in Education. Tory’s career has included teacher, vice-principal, education officer, Ontario Ministry of Education (leadership) and program officer, Ontario College of Teachers (Standards of Practice and Accreditation).

AUTHOR BIO

Polina Denisova is a recent MEd graduate from Thompson Rivers University (Leadership Stream of the program). Polina has a Master’s degree in German languages and literature (Moscow, Russia) and 5 years teaching experience. For her Master’s thesis she chose to explore resilience in school leaders.

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Passion, Creativity and Gratitude

By E.D. Woodford, MA, B.Éd, DHMP

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Before a milestone birthday I awoke from an enlightening dream. I had a dream I was a librarian. A librarian? This was a different idea than my current position of principal. For a couple of weeks I didn't speak about this dream. But when I did finally mention it to a valued mentor, she said, "This is telling you something. Listen to your intuition." Listening to my intuition is not something I did in the first few decades of my life, but it's something I have found to be wise in recent years, especially as my intuition leads me to the notion of work-life balance.

Being a principal can be stressful and time consuming. Dealing with students, staff, parents, community, and the priorities and expectations of education can all crunch into work-life balance. With only 168 hours in a week, the job of principal can easily take up 1/3 or more of the time and demand of us to become multi-tasking experts. While I won't advocate for every principal to become a librarian, I will highlight some ideas that have helped me make the most of the hours in my week and improve not only my positivity, but my work-life balance: passion, creativity and gratitude.



“The feeling that we get from imbalance better acknowledges that balance can be defined as harmony, equilibrium, and stability and even further defined with happiness. If one’s happiness is out of balance, perhaps work-life balance is out of balance.”

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What is balance in the work-life balance equation? The dictionary may define balance as equal or appropriate proportions of elements. The feeling that we get from imbalance better acknowledges that balance can be defined as harmony, equilibrium, and stability and even further defined with happiness. If one’s happiness is out of balance, perhaps work-life balance is out of balance.

Personalized-learning, inquiry projects and even the Maker movement are demanding that education be innovative and create a learning community where students follow their passion. Following passion is becoming increasingly important in not only my own life, but also the lives of others, and most certainly the lives of students

in education. In essence, devising ways to incorporate passion into personal life like we are incorporating it in education can cultivate work-life balance.

While I won’t be a librarian any time soon, the idea is planted. Books are my passion. Indigenous research, writing and art are my passions. Teaching adults is another passion. A personal leave from my principal job allows the opportunity where I can put over 100 post-secondary courses I have taken to use by creating and instructing post-secondary courses and living a creative life through writing and artistic endeavours. All of these realizations are directly related to my leadership journey as a principal, results of the experience of limited work-life balance, and the closing in

feeling when educators feel there is not enough time in the day let alone the week or even school year. Ultimately, finding my passions has positively affected my work-life balance and even led to another idea, the idea of creativity.

Creativity has long been my method of nourishing my soul. Finding the time to be creative was lost to me while pushing the limits of my education career. Re-finding creativity has been an immense part of my leadership journey. Noticeably, creativity is a 21st century hot topic in education, yet there’s little mention of it when we talk about work-life balance as principals or educators. Given this point, I wonder, how do we cultivate creativity in not only our own lives and our students’ lives, but in the lives of others? Can creativity be a key in finding work-life balance in education?

Like most principals, putting energy into a 50-hour workweek, the thought of finding the time to put creativity into work-life balance may sound daunting. However, creativity can be accomplished in as little as 10 minutes each day and yet the effects of it can be positive on work-life balance. But what can a person achieve in 10 minutes? Create creative moments daily; take a photo each day, set aside 10 minutes for morning pages or evening pages, make a to-do list of creative goals (one day you might accomplish them!), start a creative vision board, plant a garden, go for a walk, read about creativity, go for coffee, try out a new recipe, or eat dessert. You can have your principal job and thrive on the creative moments that you organize into your work-life balance.

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“Focusing on what you love and following your intuition to seek passion, creativity, and gratitude in your life is the kindest thing to do for oneself when feeling the stress and time crunch, or the incessant multi-tasking of being a principal.”

Finally, the last idea that has brought positivity and balance to my work-life balance is the idea of gratitude. Gratitude is something that I have been striving to practice, to make a habit in my life. To acknowledge people with large or small acts of gratitude that is meaningful in any way has encouraged an implementation of acts of gratitude into my life and leadership journey. Making someone a homemade gift as an act of gratitude brings joy to others and myself. And the idea of creating gifts of gratitude with the sole reason to indicate to someone that I am grateful for them in my life has had a positive effect on my work-life balance. Expressing gratitude has made me more aware, mindful and allows me to honour others. “Gratitude is the open door to the power, the wisdom, the creativity of the universe. You open the door through gratitude” (Chopra, 2010).

It is a powerful admission when a principal or educator realizes they are struggling with work-life balance. Instead of shaming, we can embrace the need to make changes and allow people the time to find the clarity and purpose needed to re-instill work-life balance. A person can have an education, a house, a good job and yet feel that something is missing. The affirmation that work-life balance is obtainable and encouraged by peers in education can refocus the stigmatism of speaking up about the need for work-life balance. Lastly, focusing on what you love and following your intuition to seek passion, creativity, and gratitude in your life is the kindest thing to do for oneself when feeling the stress and time crunch, or the incessant multi-tasking of being a principal. ■

AUTHOR BIO

E.D. Woodford is a Prairie principal (on leave) and a Sessional Instructor at UPEI in education. When not indulging in Indigenous research, she is engaged in work-life balance through art and writing as a family project.

Contact | Erin Dionne Woodford | PO Box 321 | Herbert, SK

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A Leadership Journey - Mixed media Canvas

A mixed media canvas as the result of my struggle to find work-life balance as a principal.

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