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SETTING THE STAGE

From Teacher Credibility to Leader Credibility

Marco Caresquero was standing at the front of the room, having just explained that many of the students at their school reported feeling anonymous. According to the data from a recent survey, 48% of the students believed that their teachers did not know their names. Sixty-four percent said that the teachers did not make an effort to get to know them; 56% said that they were treated with respect by the teachers. More than 70% of the students indicated that they did not believe that anyone at school cared if they were absent, yet 82% of them reported feeling proud of their school and 93% said that their parents cared about their education. As Mr. Caresquero reviewed the data, he showed pictures of students, the slides showing face after face of a young person who attended the school.

Mr. Caresquero suggested that they develop a mentoring program, noting, “I know that the overall effect size of mentoring is not very strong. There are some studies, and one meta-analysis with 73 studies, that are more promising, but I understand that this may not impact academic achievement. But stay with me. In the past, we’ve talked a lot about students’ sense of belonging and their well-being, and we know that when students have a strong sense of belonging, the effect size is good. What if we could create a mentoring

program that improves belonging rather than focusing the mentoring sessions on tutoring or intervention?”

The principal continued: “Here’s my challenge for the entire staff—classified, paraprofessionals, and certificated—as well as for administration. We each accept responsibility for eight students. We meet with them at least weekly, but maybe more often. We talk with them as caring adults. We ask them about their classes and how they are doing, but the focus is on getting to know each student beyond the surface. And when we do, we start to broker relationships with our mentees and other staff at our school.”

Projecting the next slide, Mr. Caresquero said, “Here’s my challenge. It’s an ‘ABC.’” The slide listed three goals:

- A. **Accept** the challenge of getting to know a small group of students.
- B. **Believe** in them. Help them believe they can excel in school.
- C. **Commit** to focusing on these students throughout the school year.

“I have lists of students, randomly generated, for anyone who is willing to take on this challenge,” Mr. Caresquero added. “I don’t have all the logistics figured out, and I’m open to recommendations about the best way that we can make this happen for our students—I just believe that they need us. They need to know that we care and that we see them. If you accept the challenge, please pick up one of the lists at the back of the room as we say goodbye today.”

What do you think happened at the end of the meeting? Were the lists of names ignored and left on the back table? Did the staff enthusiastically add this additional job responsibility to their already busy week? Did they pick up a list of names, knowing that they wouldn’t really do anything with it but because the principal might be watching? Did they speak out, saying that this was not their responsibility and that they wouldn’t do it?

Any of these results could have happened. And this range of responsiveness occurs all the time in reaction to initiative and ideas. The question is, why is it more likely that one school will take such a task on and another won't? Our answer is, in a large part, based on leader credibility: some leaders have developed credibility with teachers and staff members while others have not. Leader credibility influences the climate of the school and the ways in which work is accomplished. In some places, significant amounts of cynicism exist. In other places, fear and mistrust are prevalent. And in other places, there is a spirit of collaboration and a belief that leaders know what they are doing and have the best interests of educators, staff, and students at heart. In other words, the leader is credible and creates a climate in which staff members know that they can learn from this person.

We have to ask: if people choose not to follow you, are you a leader? People choose not to follow when they

- Do not trust the leader
- Question the competence of the leader
- Sense a lack of passion and confidence from the leader
- Do not feel close to, or relatedness with, the leader
- Are not sure where the organization is going and how they fit into the future



PAUSE AND PONDER

► Think about two leaders in your professional life, one with strong credibility and one without. Did you choose to follow the one without strong credibility? Were any of the factors on the bulleted list in play for you? What did you notice about the leader who was credible?

FIGURE 1.1 TRUSTWORTHINESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

| TRUSTWORTHINESS | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|----------|-------------|----------|---------|
| ITEM # | SURVEY ITEM | 3 ALWAYS | 2 SOMETIMES | 1 RARELY | 0 NEVER |
| 1. | I make intentional efforts to empathize with teachers and staff by asking how they are feeling and showing care and concern for them as individuals. | | | | |
| 2. | I ensure staff and other key team members know that I became a school leader to learn with and from them and that I enjoy my job most when they achieve. | | | | |
| 3. | I believe in the abilities and motivations of the staff and students. | | | | |
| 4. | I follow through on promises and statements I make to teachers, students, and parents. | | | | |
| 5. | I ensure that I provide accurate, credible information to all educational partners in the school community. | | | | |

| TRUSTWORTHINESS | | | | | |
|--|--|----------|-------------|----------|---------|
| ITEM # | SURVEY ITEM | 3 ALWAYS | 2 SOMETIMES | 1 RARELY | 0 NEVER |
| 6. | I create a risk-free climate where teachers and students can learn from mistakes and respect each other in learning. | | | | |
| Mean for Trustworthiness <i>(Total divided by 6)</i> | | | | | |



REAL REFLECTION

Which of the indicators of trustworthiness are strengths for you?

Which of the indicators present growth opportunities?

What conclusions are you drawing about your trustworthiness?

Whom can you enlist to support you in strengthening your trustworthiness and thus building your credibility?

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