Build higher levels of job satisfaction

COLLEGIALITY, LEADERSHIP ARE KEY FACTORS FOR TEACHERS

By Anthony Armstrong

Teacher job satisfaction has dropped dramatically in just two years. In 2009, 59% of teachers were very satisfied with their jobs. In 2011, that number dropped to 44%, according to *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy,* (MetLife, 2011, p. 13). This represents the largest drop in teacher satisfaction since the annual *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* first started tracking teacher satisfaction in 1984, and the lowest level of teacher satisfaction in the past 24 years.

A recent research paper from The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education examines how working conditions predict teachers' job satisfaction and career plans. The study found that working conditions were the most important factor in teacher satisfaction: "Teachers who teach in favorable work environments report that they are more satisfied and less likely to plan to transfer or leave the profession than their peers in schools with less favorable conditions, even after controlling for student demographics and other school and teacher characteristics" (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012, p. 5).

The same study went on to make the link between teacher satisfaction and student achievement growth (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012, p. 5), so the importance of teacher satisfaction cannot be overstated.

One of the study's goals was to determine which factors within favorable working environments are most important for predicting teachers' job satisfaction. Interestingly, the conditions most important for teacher satisfaction were "the ones that shape the social context of teaching and learning" (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012, p. 27). While typical working condition requirements were important, such as safe facilities, adequate resources, and lesson preparation time, the study found that the three most important elements for teacher satisfaction are

1. Collegial relationships, or the extent to which teachers report having productive working relationships with their colleagues;
2. The principal's leadership, or the extent to which teachers report that their school leaders are supportive

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Taryl Hansen, director of teacher leadership for the Arizona K12 Center, creates an atmosphere of collegiality through games such as Jenga that offer what she calls equity of voice.

Design learning that drives satisfaction

> **"Theories, research, and models of human learning shape the underlying framework and assumptions educators use to plan and design professional learning."**
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> — *Standards for Professional Learning*, p. 40

Recently, *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents and the Economy* (2011) indicated that challenging economic times, ever-increasing demands, and dwindling resources have taken a toll on teachers, contributing to the largest decrease in teacher job satisfaction in more than 20 years. Findings concluded that, "teachers with low job satisfaction are less likely to say they are treated as a professional, compensated fairly, or have opportunities for professional development or collaboration with colleagues" (p. 22).

In his book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us,* Daniel Pink identifies three key elements of motivation that address internal drive and increase job satisfaction:

- **Autonomy:** People want to have control over their work.
- **Mastery:** People want to get better at what they do.
- **Purpose:** People want to be part of something that is bigger than they are.

When thinking of ways to create a new system for professional learning, consider how to embed these powerful motivators into learning designs.

AUTONOMY

Support learners in taking an active role in their learning by giving them the autonomy to choose when, where, and how they learn. Use technology to offer flexible learning opportunities, including web-based courses, blended learning, self-paced courses, and online communities. Develop a variety of learning tasks during face-to-face professional learning — including examining student work and curriculum development — and outside of the face-to-face professional learning environment — such as study groups, professional reading and discussion, and action research.

MASTERY

Align learning designs with intended outcomes and clear expectations to support mastery and move learners beyond comprehension of the necessary knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices. Schedule job-embedded learning opportunities for classroom observations, lesson study, and peer coaching.

PURPOSE

Share learners' successes, impact, and results of professional learning to provide a constant reminder of the overall purpose — improved student results. Facilitate professional learning teams where teachers analyze data, share lessons, demonstrate teaching practices, and celebrate successes.

These three concepts reinforce that how we design professional learning affects its quality and effectiveness. Consequently, they can also serve as signposts for creating a new operating system for professional learning.

As teacher leaders, learning, studying, and understanding theories and research about how people learn can heighten your level of awareness and inform your practices to motivate teachers to change their practice.

Knowing that learners' motivations influence decisions about professional learning will help you better identify and select the designs that best support changes in educator practice. It also acknowledges the significance and importance of your role to support educator effectiveness and student learning, as described in the Learning Designs standard.

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Approach professional learning as a researcher

As told to Valerie von Frank

Taking on the stance of a researcher is probably the most effective strategy a coach can use. Teachers like kids; they like to think about kids. The most engaging professional development we can do is through students, turning the discussion into trying to make sense of student thinking, of where that student can go next. It is a strategy that is, I think, underused, and it has incredible potential.

Engaging teachers in the power of "we" — not "me" and "you," but "we" together — has incredible power. That one shift alone creates community. It invites the teacher into trying to understand how students think, what is possible. It opens up almost a professional learning community between the teacher and myself. Together we are puzzling about students; we need to get clarity about where we want students to go.

Often the teacher and I have a different idea of what the end in mind should be. We explore that difference as we talk about it together, as we look at student work, as we listen to students and their thinking, as we understand what constitutes high-quality math programs and activities. As we put that together professionally, it helps teachers grow more than me coming in with a checklist to tell the teacher what to do. When you have "just-do-it" math programs, someone coming in from outside and saying

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"just do it," you will get teachers to adjust, teachers to perform up to a certain level, but it will be to a relatively low or average level.

In the stance of a researcher, I use the word "wonder" a lot: "I wonder if all the students had that understanding or if it was just one student?" In conversations, certain patterns occur. We can fall into generalities. It's helpful to be specific. When a teacher says, "The students don't bring in their homework," I say, "Which students?" and "Why aren't they bringing their homework?" Then we can target the issue. Or we can shift up, to more generality. A teacher might be talking about a specific student, and after a while, it might be helpful to say, "What does that imply about all English language learners?" It helps the teacher pull ideas together and summarize an understanding.

I believe in modified lesson studies and showing teachers what rich thinking and questioning look like with their own students. I also follow an 80/20 rule, trying to spend 80% of the time on the things that benefit students the most. It might sound obvious, but when we look at how we

are allocating time, it is often different from what we would wish. If a teacher is spending time on collecting library books, for example, she may be able to make that into a student math lesson on graphing.

It's important as a coach to say that I'm working on things also, to set up the situation so *we* are learning together. That collaboration is an honest way to approach our work. The truth is, nobody knows everything. The real truth is that every student is

different; every classroom is different; every situation is different. Just as we want students to think, reason, solve problems, and communicate, teachers need to be free and be supported in thinking, reasoning, solving problems, and communicating. That's just good learning, how people learn best.

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and create school environments conducive to learning; and

3. School culture, or the extent to which school environments are characterized by mutual trust, respect, openness, and commitment to student achievement. (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012, p. 25)

While a large portion of these elements requires principal and district-level support, teacher leaders have the ability to affect collegial relationships and create a culture of "trust, respect, openness, and commitment to student achievement" (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012, p. 6) through learning communities that provide teachers with safe learning environments and give teachers the ability to contribute to the learning.

CREATE A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

For Susan Schmidt, a course facilitator for the Boston Teacher Leadership certificate program, strong collegial relationships start with creating a safe learning environment through trust and confidentiality. "Trust grows from being able to act without fear of judgment," said Schmidt. "Everyone has had different experiences with their teacher preparation and teaching careers, so it is important to listen to each other and find the common ground upon which to connect."

Bryk, Camburn, and Louis (1999) found social trust to be "[b]y far the strongest facilitator of professional community" in learning communities (as cited in Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, p. 74).

Building trust, Schmidt said, goes hand-in-hand with

confidentiality. "People have to trust that when they share their experiences at a particular school, the comment is kept confidential and not repeated inappropriately." Because teachers have had different, and sometimes negative, experiences with learning environments that were not confidential, Schmidt creates norms for collegial interactions and steers the conversations away from negative critiquing and towards a focus on problem-solving.

Taryl Hansen, director of teacher leadership for the Arizona K12 Center, agrees that a safe learning environment is critical because it allows teachers to be vulnerable as they undergo reflective learning. "When teachers share aspects of their practice, they reveal part of their identity. It is the heart and soul of who they are," said Hansen. "When they step into a collaborative circle of highly qualified colleagues with whom they can challenge themselves, they hold a proverbial mirror up to their practice and can be vulnerable enough to tackle their own misconceptions about themselves and their students. In order to think about ways they can improve and feel good about their strengths, they need to be vulnerable enough to share with people things about their practice they need to change."

Hansen helps create an atmosphere of collegiality through games that offer what she calls equity of voice. "Teachers who aren't contributing to the conversations feel put on spot if they are called out," explained Hansen. "Games probe deeper into the learning by helping them feel safe and comfortable in not always knowing what is going to come out of their mouth."

For example, Hansen will use the popular building blocks game Jenga to drill deeper into topics. She numbers the building blocks in the game and assigns a sentence stem and topic to that number. When a teacher draws a building block with the number, he or she would have to complete a sentence stem, such as "Because I know_____, I do_____, which impacts student learning by ____." As the players continue to take turns, they must think of new ways to fill in the sentence stem, so the activity requires increasing amounts of complex and critical thinking. Eventually, players will start to collaborate with each other to generate new ideas for completing the sentence stem, said Hansen. "The sentence stem gives them a safety net," she explains. "It grounds their conversations and makes them feel competent and confident as they talk about things that made a distinct difference in classroom. It reminds them of how skillful they are and gives everyone a safe way to contribute and share something outside of the box. They feel their perspectives will be valued and not criticized, so it gives teachers an environment of respect. They hear one another and can go deeper. They know others can help them, so they feel safe to explore what's not working."

Teacher satisfaction: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The recent *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* provides insight into the role of professional learning in teacher satisfaction.

72% of teachers with low job satisfaction (vs. **86%** with high) reported that their school or district provides adequate opportunities for professional development.

44% of teachers with low job satisfaction (vs. **27%** with high) reported that time to collaborate with other teachers has decreased during the past 12 months.

33% of teachers with low job satisfaction (vs. **20%** with high) reported that there has been a decrease in professional development opportunities during the past 12 months.

Source: MetLife. (2011). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Teachers, parents and the economy.* New York: Author. Available at www.metlife.com/teachersurvey.

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PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS TO CONTRIBUTE

Safe learning environments are not enough, though. Teachers need to have opportunities to contribute to the learning, whether it is through sharing with other teachers or joining and influencing conversations about the learning.

"It's not enough to just collaborate," said Hansen. "Teachers must have a sense that the collaboration is meaningful and applicable. Teachers become advocates for their profession by taking what they learn and modeling it for others. They must walk away inspired and eager to share what they have learned."

According to 2009's *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success,* teachers with high job satisfaction were more likely to work in schools with higher levels of collaboration (MetLife, 2009, p. 39). Positive relationships have been established between student achievement and norms of interaction that give teachers the opportunity to contribute to the learning of their colleagues, including "teachers' readiness to discuss classroom practice, their mutual observation and critique of teaching, their shared efforts to design and prepare curriculum, and their joint participation in the business of instructional improvement" (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005, p. 69).

In addition to contributing to the learning of their colleagues, opportunities to contribute to the professional learning plan, school governance, decision making, and education policies have also been shown to increase teacher satisfaction (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012, p. 25). Developing teacher leadership has been shown to be important in sustaining teacher satisfaction as well. "Researchers have found teachers to have a greater level of satisfaction when they hold roles that enable them to participate in decision-making processes around schoolwide policies," with a correlation between the amount of teacher input on schoolwide policies and increased teacher retention (Berg & Souvanna, 2012, p.7).

Schmidt encourages teachers to start with contributions within their realm of influence. "Teachers are often not decision makers for what happens at the school or district level," said Schmidt, "but what is in their control are their students and their classrooms. Teachers have access to student and classroom data. They can work together, looking at instruction, monitoring progress, measuring results, and communicating those results to the principal. This expands their spheres of influence."

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Teacher satisfaction: COLLABORATION

👨👩👨👩👨👩👨👩 **86%** of teachers with high job satisfaction (vs. **72%** with low) are likely to strongly agree that the teachers in a school share responsibility for the achievement of all students.

👨👩👨👩👨👩 **56%** of teachers with high job satisfaction (vs. **44%** with low) are likely to strongly agree that other teachers contribute to their success in the classroom.

👨👩👨👩👨👩 **59%** of teachers with high job satisfaction (vs. **40%** with low) are likely to strongly agree that the teachers, principals and other school professionals at their school trust each other.

Source: MetLife. (2009). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Collaborating for Student Success.* New York: Author. Available at www.metlife.com/teachersurvey.

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Learning Forward BELIEF

Schools' most complex problems are best solved by educators collaborating and learning together.

CULTURE OF TRUST **Build collaboration and collegiality**

A culture of trust is essential for building collaboration around professional learning (Roy & Hord, 2003). The following actions contribute to building a culture of trust (Roy, 2007). Complete this self-analysis to discover how you can reinforce these actions in your own practice.

1	**Build teacher trust in your decisions.** How can you demonstrate that your educational decisions put the interests of students above personal and political interests?

2	**Keep your word.** How consistently do teachers see that you do what you say and that you follow through with promised actions?

3	**Show your respect for teacher competence and intentions.** How can you show teachers you believe in their abilities and that they operate with the best interest of students in mind?

4	**Address incompetence fairly and firmly.** How can you better respond to personnel issues related to incompetence?

5	**Demonstrate your own competence.** How can you communicate a strong vision for professional learning and clearly define expectations that are upheld for all faculty members?

Sources: Roy, P. (2007, February). Trust is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality. *The Learning Principal.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.

COLLEGIAL VISIT **Bring structure to classroom observation**

The observing teacher should record her observations on the note-taking guide. The coach or visit facilitator is encouraged to do the same.

Maintain a predetermined focus while completing this form in order to avoid getting hung up on unrelated details.

Teacher's name:	Date of visit:

What is the focus of your visit?

What are students doing?	What is the teacher doing?

What questions do you have as a result of this visit?

What are your next steps?

Teacher satisfaction: PARENT ENGAGEMENT

The newest *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* found that more parent engagement is associated with higher teacher job satisfaction.

95% of teachers with high job satisfaction (vs. **87%** of teachers with low) agree that their school helps all parents understand what they can do at home to support a student's success in school.

86% of teachers with high job satisfaction (vs. **67%** of teachers with low) agree that their school involves families with their children on homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.

82% of teachers with high job satisfaction (vs. **67%** of teachers with low) rate their professional development as excellent or good in preparing and supporting them to engage parents effectively.

Source: MetLife. (2011). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Teachers, parents and the economy.* New York: Author. Available at www.metlife.com/teachersurvey.

METLIFE SURVEY SERIES

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