



Effective leaders are always learning

A real turning point in my leadership pathway happened more than 30 years ago when I attended my first Learning Forward conference. I knew I had found my professional home. I was among people who were interested in understanding andragogy, change research, CBAM, and leadership practices in fields outside education.

I remember thinking that our district staff development program needed a bolder vision and could accomplish so much more for our students. I returned home a certified learning omnivore, never to return to the state of “I don’t need to learn anything new.”

I proposed to the superintendent’s cabinet that we organize an advisory committee to develop a learning agenda for the school system. While they appeared accepting of my proposal, I often wondered if they secretly expected it to fail because of whom they assigned to it — seven principals who never volunteered for anything. They lived with the belief that “this too shall pass.” In my experience, they weren’t leaders who embraced change or undertook new challenges.

However, filled with my love of learning and certainty about what was right for our students, I was certain I would win them over. We began by

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Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org) is executive director of Learning Forward.

organizing our task and determining what we needed to learn to successfully achieve our goals. Everyone assumed responsibility for developing expertise in one or more areas. Over the course of 16 weeks, we developed the district’s first leadership plan.

Imagine the surprise of the superintendent’s cabinet when it was time to present the recommendations. Though I wouldn’t have anticipated the outcome when we started out, a team of committed and enthusiastic leaders presented the plan. The cabinet approved our plan, by and large, and the district ultimately implemented what we recommended.

That experience solidified for me the importance of investing as much energy into the learning of leaders as we had for our teachers.

Over the years, I have spoken and written many times about the importance of being a learning leader. As I continue to learn, I refine my views on what it means to be a learning leader. I offer three personal views that influence my work today.

Effective leaders succeed because they are always learning. There is no profession in which a leader can rest on what he or she already knows about the field. Students and educators alike will always have new needs and enter workplaces with new challenges. Advances through research and technology transform how professionals can best fulfill their commitments.



Without a continuous learning mindset, leaders won’t be able to keep up.

Great leaders model their commitment to their own learning. Leaders make their learning visible, and they learn in collaboration with those in like roles and with their staff members and teams. The people around them aren’t told but rather witness learning as a professional priority.

Successful leaders create learning cultures in their schools, systems, and organizations. Learning every day is an expectation in a learning culture, and leaders prioritize resources to ensure that every professional has what he or she needs to learn continuously.

What views do you hold about learning leaders? How do you live them each day as a leader? Your input will help me to refine these views going forward. I look forward to learning with you. ■