



ADVISOR SPOTLIGHT

Beverly Hutton

FUTURE LEADERS NEED OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN AND GROW

Beverly Hutton is chief programs officer at the National Association of Secondary School Principals and an advisor to *The Learning Professional*.

What is your professional learning focus?

I am always thinking about how to grow the leadership pipeline, from teacher leaders to assistant principals to principals and up. We need to strengthen the whole pathway to leadership, and, to do that, educators need opportunities to learn and develop at every stage.

In districts, professional development staff tend to work mostly with teacher leaders around building teachers' capacity. But we need to also build those teacher leaders up for the future. How many districts include teacher leaders on horizontal leadership teams? They should include them so those future leaders can learn and grow into new roles.

You have said that supporting assistant principals is key to school success. Why?

I was an assistant principal for half of my career in schools, and it was my favorite role because I got to create, ideate, and implement with the principal, but I had a little bit more freedom. But assistant principals are often underused. They are credentialed principals, so you're wasting your time if you're using them for menial tasks. And as future lead principals, they should be learning how to take the next step.

Lead principals have a responsibility to nurture, mentor, and prepare assistant principals. You do that through job-embedded opportunities to lead. That's what people did for me, and what I did for others when I was a principal. This is why the leadership pipeline is so important to me. I know how important it is to have a solid assistant principal experience, because otherwise, people become principals and they say, "Now what?" They have to run double time to catch up to their new responsibilities and expectations.

What is one powerful professional learning experience you had as an assistant principal?

In my last assistant principalship, the principal and I would often sit and ideate about an issue. I learned so much from that. In one of those conversations, we talked about how parents were not coming to our monthly parent meetings, and we thought about what would engage them.

Our school was a career and technical education school with many wonderful programs, but I realized the parents only knew about the career majors of their own children. I decided to feature one or two of the career majors at every meeting, and since we were holding the meetings at a time of day when people were hungry, I featured our culinary arts program every time.

The parents and community members were so engaged that we ended up having great



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conversations that led to partnerships with higher education, resulting in several dual enrollment opportunities for students. Reflecting with the principal helped me learn what our community needed. And the principal gave me the freedom and autonomy to run with it.

What are some of the biggest challenges school leaders are facing today?

Social and emotional support is a big need for school leaders, not only for their students and staff but also for themselves because they are dealing with a lot of stress. One of the biggest challenges is balancing work and family. School leaders deal with one crisis after another, and it's not easy to balance the competing priorities.

School leaders often sacrifice their

family lives. They miss out with their children, and their spouses often pick up a lot of it. Since the pandemic, many are realizing that they were not giving the time to their personal and family relationships that they thought they were. COVID-19 has forced us to recognize that we can't go on like this. It's why we're not as well as we could be.

What advice do you have for education leaders navigating those challenges?

I encourage principals and assistant principals to be more intentional about your time. Time runs over all of us, but we can be more intentional about our days. We can create more time for our work, our learning, and our personal lives by looking at all the moments we could repurpose from other things.

I've come to love this Zoom

world we live in now because there are so many ways we can use it for collaboration. But too many of us are having back-to-back meetings all day long. We're not making time for our work during the day, so we work into the evening to get our work done, which is not wise.

In education, we used to say it was a badge of honor to work 80 hours a week, but now that seems silly and unhealthy. I ask my staff not to schedule five or six meetings a day, to put 30 minutes between meetings, and to consider scheduling lunch into their calendars.

Some people really struggle with that, but it's important that the opportunity is there. And if you do it as a leader, it shows people that you care about them and you are modeling the behavior you are expecting. ■

The Learning Principal: Becoming a Learning Leader

by Kay Psencik, Frederick Brown,
and Stephanie Hirsh

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