



SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Four Suggestions to Help You Lead by Relationships and Realize Your Vision

By *Dr. Scott Taylor*

May 2, 2013

Abraham Lincoln inspired me, like so many others, to **lead by relationships**. Donald T. Phillips (*Lincoln on Leadership* (<http://www.amazon.com/Lincoln-Leadership-Executive-Strategies-Tough/dp/0446394599>)) and Doris Kearns Goodwin (*Team of Rivals*

(http://www.amazon.com/Team-Rivals-Political-Abraham-Lincoln/dp/0743270754/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1367270923&sr=1-1&keywords=Team+of+Rivals)

) describe that president as a kind, gentle and genuinely personable man for whom many subordinates deeply cared. He got close to his cabinet, his personal secretaries and his generals, and wasn't afraid to let them into his personal world.

But Lincoln never gave up his ideals. He made his vision clear to all and assertively redirected anyone he thought might take the country off his prescribed course. As a school administrator, it took me a while to lead in "the Lincoln way" (I have a very steep learning curve). I've been practicing educational leadership for 16 years in some of the highest performing schools in the country, but only recently recognized the importance of garnering the admiration of my faculty and administration team by developing deep personal and professional relationships with everyone. Like my favorite American president, I have tried hard to be nurturing, personable and caring while being clear and firm in the pursuit of my vision.

The key to building relationships that will strengthen an educational leader's vision is being highly accessible and spending quality time talking and listening to teachers and support staff. This might seem like old news to veteran educators, but with email and social networking as the prevailing ways of communication, it is worth reminding leaders that there is no substitute for pressing the flesh.

Here are my four suggestions toward becoming a more effective leader.

1. Make the Rounds

Be a presence in schools each day. I make a point to start my morning in the hallways and then conduct my walks before the day gets ahead of me. Start the day in the office, and you're likely to end the day in the office (save for that weekly administration team meeting). An educational leader's work clock runs at least seven hours. How much time can one possibly spend in meetings and doing office paperwork? Just by cutting one to two hours out of my office day to spend a few minutes in each classroom and hallway of my small school district, I've learned more about the little (but often very important) things going on than I would have learned from email, phone calls or hearsay. Besides learning about the evolving culture of my schools, walking the hallways every day and being highly accessible has been key to showing everyone that I care about the school district at every level.

2. Open, Relaxed Conversation

Invite a **school leader's cabinet** to an early takeout dinner once per month. A conglomeration of parents and teachers sitting around Chinese food can lead to the same open, relaxed conversations we might have on the town soccer fields. A wonderful way to learn about what's really happening in the local community is to break bread (or egg rolls) in a casual setting on a regular basis.

3. Town Hall Accessibility

Hold **vision town halls** during which you share your short-, mid- and long-term goals in a conversation-style gathering. The meeting could be held in a classroom to set the context. You want to make it absolutely clear that your vision is all about children.

4. Establish a Satellite Office

I have a second, smaller office in another school district location. I took this cue from another American president, Woodrow Wilson, who heavily promoted a change in the way government operated by making frequent visits to Capitol Hill. He set up shop in the building's President's Room as often as three times per week to help him complete his work in the presence Congressional legislators. Wilson used the **power of personality** to engage the people on whom he depended to enact his proposals, and his satellite White House allowed for this engagement to happen naturally.

I once asked a very successful school district superintendent if it is possible for school leaders to be too visible. He told me that relationships are key to showing everyone that you care about them, their successes and their challenges. Relationships are key, he reminded me, to engendering trust and respect for the vision that you believe

will help your school district "go world class."

FILED UNDER

School Leadership

Professional Development

Teaching Strategies

All Grades

GEORGE LUCAS EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

©2018 George Lucas Educational Foundation. All Rights Reserved.

Edutopia® and Lucas Education Research™ are trademarks or registered trademarks of the George Lucas Educational Foundation in the U.S. and other countries.