

Quality Education News

Tel: 012-349-5006 ♦ Fax: 012-349-1232 ♦ www.saqi.co.za

Issue 23

August 2012



A quarterly publication issued by the South African Quality Institute in the interest of promoting educational excellence.

So, who is to blame?



We've recently seen the 'Blame Game' being played around the Limpopo school textbooks fiasco. In the media there are rantings that Angie Motshekga, Minister of Basic Education, is responsible and should therefore resign.

Then there are those who accuse Limpopo Department of Education officials of gross incompetence. 'Sack them!' is the cry. Education department officials blame certain principals who didn't place their book orders on time or made deliberate mistakes (for example, over-stocking) when ordering books. A further scapegoat is EduSolutions. Allegations of tenderpreneurship hang over the whole textbook contract.

It's naïve to call for the dismissal of the Minister of Basic Education. As David Silman commented in *The Star* (6 July 2012): 'She cannot personally drive a delivery truck or pack a box in a warehouse. That is the job of civil servants and service providers.' Silman's comment is fair. Yet in the same article he makes the correct observation that the Minister is ultimately responsible.

In a democratic society such as South Africa, the government of the day makes the appointments as to who will head the different ministries. Below the Minister are civil or public servants. Their task it is to implement government policy. Competent public servants ensure the smooth functioning of the respective departments. That's where things fall apart in South Africa. Across the country there are many malfunctioning departments.

It's easy to see reasons for such underperformance. Too many appointments are made on criteria such as cadre deployment, 'jobs for pals' and nepotism.

Angie Motshekga and her senior personnel are ultimately responsible for removing and/or transferring those who do so much damage to public education. They will encounter much opposition from those unions which put their members' interests ahead of what is in the best interests of the learners.

The Limpopo textbook fiasco was another painful reminder that there won't be Quality Education in our country until we insist on having Quality teachers and officials. May the Minister and her top officials deal decisively with those who daily damage young lives. Remove the incapable the incompetent and the indolent.

Richard Hayward

But everywhere you look in this country things are falling apart - in schools, hospitals, local government and parastatals. The reason is simple; we continue to appoint the wrong people to the wrong jobs for the wrong reasons. Failure begets more failure.

Only when merit becomes a yardstick in all we do will we stem this steady descent into mediocrity.

Barney Mthombothi, Editor, *Financial Mail* 22 June 2012



This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed to those schools benefiting from their participation in the MySchool programme. MySchool acts as a conduit which raises and delivers essential funding for education and social development on a sustainable basis. This enables members of the community to participate in the future development of our nation.



Organisational climate 101

One school gets thirty applications for a teaching post; a neighbouring school gets three. Why the difference? Many reasons are cited but a major one is the difference in organisational climate between the two schools. Organisational climate can be loosely described as the 'vibe' or 'feel' of a place. We've all been to places where there is a pleasant atmosphere and others where we don't want to stay a second longer than is needed.

Every business, place of work has its own unique organisational climate. If you've worked in more than one school or office in your career, you'll be able to rank-order them as places where you would most like to work. The National School Climate Centre in New York has defined school organisational climate as:

School climate refers to the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of students, parents and school personnel's experience of school life.

To help a school assess its own level of organisational climate, the Centre has designed a questionnaire. Learners, parents and staff are asked to answer questions around twelve climate dimensions. The dimensions are:

Dimensions	Major Indicators
Safety	
1 Rules and norms	Clearly stated rules about all forms of bullying; consistent rule enforcement by adults and learner leaders.
2 Sense of physical safety	Sense that everyone feels safe from physical harm from people within the school or entering it.
3 Sense of social-emotional security	Sense that everyone feels safe from physical and verbal abuse, teasing and exclusion.
Teaching and Learning	
4 Support for learning	Encouragement and constructive feedback; opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills; academic challenge and individual attention.
5 Social and civic learning	Effective conflict resolution and listening skills; emotional intelligence training, empathy, ethical decision-making and personal responsibility.
Interpersonal relationships	
6 Respect for diversity	Mutual respect for culture, gender, sexual orientation and racial differences between and amongst all groupings in the school.
7 Social support-adults	Caring and supportive relationships between adults and learners; high expectations of learners' abilities.
8 Social support-learners	Supportive peer relationships amongst learners including friendships for socialising and academic help.
Institutional environment	
9 School connectedness/engagement	Positive identification and broad participation in school life by all including their families.
10 Physical surroundings	Cleanliness, attractiveness of facilities; adequate resources and materials.
Staff only	
11 Leadership	Senior management team creates and communicates a clear vision; is accessible to and supportive of whole staff; staff development programmes.
12 Professional relationships	Positive attitudes and relationships amongst staff; staff learn and work well together.

(Acknowledgement and adaptation: National School Climate Centre, New York)

When a school has a low (that is, unhealthy) organisational climate rating, there are negative consequences. Cynicism and negativity amongst learners and staff are in the air. Parents adopt the same attitude too. There are incidents of extremely unpleasant high emotional drama. Absenteeism levels go up; academic and extramural achievements drop.

There are many positive results for a school with a healthy organisational climate. Results include:

- Academic and extra-curricular performances are high;
- Learners and teachers are happier;
- Conflict situations of unhealthy emotional intensity (for example: shouting) are minimal;
- Lower absenteeism rates;
- Good levels of staff retention;
- Learners and teachers are less alienated from each other;
- More committed, loyal and professionally satisfied staff.

Being happy in the workplace



On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate your happiness level at your workplace? Ten tips to keep the happiness levels high in a school are:

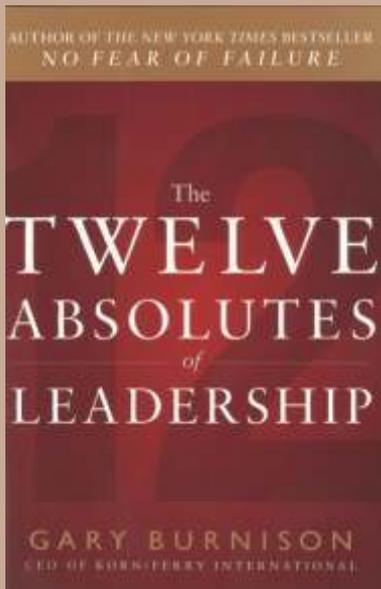
- 1. Fair pay for fair work:** In public schools the salary is determined by factors such as post level, teaching experience and qualifications. School leaders ensure that every staff member receives the correct salary at the end of every month. Where school funds permit it, properly audited 'top ups' are given to staff members who are putting in the extra work and time.
- 2. Safe working environment:** It's inexcusable but it happens: teachers' cars are stolen from school property; teachers are assaulted by trespassers. Ensure that the school has a security fence – and where needed – a guard at the gate.
- 3. Well-resourced working environment:** Teachers need to be able to teach in a pleasant working environment where there are enough desks, chairs and textbooks. Fans for summer and heaters for winter are available. Buildings and grounds are clean and well-maintained. The ideal is for every South African school to have at least a media centre (library), hall and sufficiently big playgrounds and sports fields.
- 4. Quality food at 'Value-for-money' prices:** The school day can be a long one. If possible, a tuck shop is available that serves healthy, nutritious, culture-conscious food at reasonable prices. Poor schools provide a daily meal for the learners.
- 5. Comfortable staffroom:** The school has a staffroom for members' exclusive use. There should be comfortable furniture and the necessary facilities to make tea, coffee and light refreshments.
- 6. Empowered staff:** Staff are empowered to make their own professional decisions. They are not 'micro-managed' by colleagues or by departmental officials.
- 7. Ask, 'What would make things better?'** Even the most empathic school leader does not know all the factors that can make for a happy school. Staff meetings are used to discuss how to make the school an even happier place.
- 8. Fight boredom:** Marking piles of exam papers and sets of books can be extremely boring. Staff think of ways to take the tedium out of tasks; share responsibilities and are open to teaching different Grades and subjects.
- 9. Praise contributions:** Staff are thanked for their contributions. The Thank You does not have to be in the form of money. It can be a compliment in the staffroom, a bouquet of flowers, a car-wash by grateful learners and a thousand other ways!
- 10. Encourage team identity:** The word 'we' rather than 'me' is used. A team culture in the tradition of the Three Musketeers is created: 'One for all and all for one.'

References:

Flanagan, N & Finger, J 2003. *The management bible*. Cape Town: Zebra Press.

Schwartz, T 2011. *Spot a truly great place to work*. Finweek, 13 October 2011, page 39.

Read at least this chapter



Estoril Books: R 310
Publisher: Mc Graw Hill



Gary Burnison is the Chief Executive Officer of an international company that recruits top people for organisations. In his book he identifies twelve essentials of leadership. No doubt his company probes those twelve areas when interviewing and making final recommendations about job candidates.

Each chapter deals with one of the twelve links in his model of the absolutes of leadership. The chapters have one-word headings such as: Communicate, Empower, Learn and Strategy. The author has very successfully linked theory with actual case studies of businesses. Any person in a leadership position will see similarities to their own situation.

Chapter Four has the one-word heading: 'People'. How often haven't you heard it said about the workplace or maybe you've made the remark yourself, "Today it was like a circus!" In the chapter, Burnison uses the world-famous Cirque du Soleil circus to illustrate his theories on people leadership.

Yes, a spectacular circus and an outstanding Quality school do have definite similarities! They are focussed on continuous improvement. Every year the circus strives to

put on a 'better, bigger and more brilliant' show than last year. Ditto a school. If the Grade Twelve exam results last year were superb, congratulations but there are new heights to strive for this year.

There's much real-world insightful observations to be found in the book. Burnison identifies what truly motivates people and what part the leader has to play:

... what creates engagement and generates happiness is the ability to experience progress on a daily basis. And let's face it: your people have got to want to work with you, the leader. People rarely leave careers; usually they leave jobs and bosses...just as an extraordinary teacher is most interested in how much the students learn, as a leader, you need to concentrate first on developing your team.

If you want to further develop your leadership knowledge and skills, the book will be an enriching read. Leadership theories are presented in an easy-to-grasp manner with practical tips on how to immediately apply them.



Elsabe Heyns has a good laugh at the Quality in Education workshop held for school leaders in the Postmasburg, Northern Cape area.



Laugh and learn

As every experienced teacher knows, a spoonful of laughter makes the subject matter go down. Presentations and workshops on leadership and management issues are done by SAQI. The focus is on the practices and principles of Total Quality Education (TQE). At inter-active courses the delegates and the presenter share professional experiences and lighter classroom moments. When requested, programmes are adapted to the specific needs of a school. Poor schools are sponsored. Please contact either Vanessa du Toit (012-349-5006; vanessa@saqi.co.za) or Richard Hayward (011-888-3262; rpdhayward@yahoo.com) for the details.

Free back numbers of Quality Education Newsletters can be downloaded on either www.myschool.co.za (click on 'Services') or www.saqi.co.za (click on 'Education').