

What's In **YOUR** Toolbox ?



Julie Molliver - unsplash.com

In my first position as a Principal, I would jokingly ask my Associate Superintendent about sending me the 'manual' for my role. He thought I was kidding. And I was, but only a little. Moving from the classroom to school administration requires the development of a new set of skills and tools that match your new responsibilities as a leader.

by

Read Jorgensen

*Principal, Northridge Elementary School
SD #61 (Greater Victoria)*

Learning your new role can be humbling. While on-the-job training can be effective, it can also be a cruel teacher. And as you are often the only administrator in your building, you learn in isolation. Fast forward from my first Principal posting: I am still learning and building my toolbox, with no manual in sight.

Over the years as an administrator and leader, I have collected a wide range of tools that have helped me. While Principals and Vice-Principals are experienced educators, your day is more about managing the people in your school than about leading the educational program. Several BCPVPA surveys tell us that much of your day

relates to people. You might deal with an employee disagreement, an angry parent, a recalcitrant student, an annoyed Assistant Superintendent, or an employee seeking advice on career advancement. Sometimes all before lunch.

**"Fast forward from my first
Principal posting: I am still
learning and building my toolbox,
with no manual in sight."**

To fill my toolbox and keep my skills sharp, I read articles about Organizational Behavior. Organizational Behavior – or OB – is the study of how people behave individually, in groups, and as whole organizations. While the topics in OB may not seem educationally relevant, I assure you that your day is filled with them. Employee motivation, influence, leadership, employee engagement and persuasive communication are embedded in many of your actions and decisions. Don't get me wrong, I still read a steady diet of educational topics, but OB theory and techniques are the tools I use every day in leading my school.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, when a great deal of industry was still dependent on manual labor, scientific management was developed to help increase efficiency. The prevailing thought was that organizations worked like a massive machine,

and a scientific approach could make the 'machine' function more profitably. Schools to this day are dependent on manual labor in a sense, and they function as a hierarchical organization governed by policy, procedures, and legislation. The machine model seems to live on and, theoretically, if everyone in your district functioned like a cog in a big machine, the organization should run without a hitch.

In 1924, Western Electric engaged Elton Mayo to investigate the effects of factory lighting on the output of a small group of workers. These workers built – by hand – components for telephones, and Mayo was looking for a connection between lighting and output. The confusing result of the Hawthorne Works study seemed to show that output increased regardless of the change in illumination. No matter how bright or dim, production temporarily improved. This unintended finding, dubbed the 'Hawthorne Effect', theorized that the human interaction encountered between the experimenters and factory workers – and not the lighting – positively affected the output. The Hawthorne studies were not very rigorous in design and have been revisited many times with varying explanations. But regardless of the interpretation, they seemed to be a turning point that ushered in the study of behavior in organizations.

The more you understand about OB, the more effective you become as a leader. Try not to think





of it – as in the Hawthorne studies – as simply increasing production, but rather as providing an opportunity to better understand the interpersonal subtleties in your school. The tools of OB can help you analyze situations and respond with greater confidence when managing the human dynamics in your school.

"The more you understand about OB, the more effective you become as a leader."

Let's look at an example about an employee who repeatedly leaves work right after school. We might conclude from their behavior that they are lazy, or not interested in being a good teacher, by attributing their actions to personality rather than a specific situation. When an employee leaves work early, there could be other extenuating circumstances – rather than personality –

influencing the employee. Through Fundamental Attribution Error, we can be quick to judge such actions as personal attributes rather than resulting from a situational cause. Before you say, "I would never do that", think about the last time you made an attributional error about your neighbor leaving out their empty garbage cans, or the driver of a slow-moving car blocking the road as you rush home from work.

Motivation is another important area in OB. We assume that money is the prime motivator for every employee: you work, you get paid. While money is an important motivator in showing up for work every day, studies will show that providing more money generally does not make someone work harder. More sophisticated motivators such as recognition, responsibility and opportunity for advancement are better at eliciting additional effort. Demotivation is also important to consider as it can be damaging to your organization and leadership. If you as a leader have an 'inner circle' or show

fickleness in how you treat employees, you could be demotivating performance in the workplace.

My favorite topics in OB center around leadership and leadership behavior. What is leadership really (as opposed to having 'power of position', or a high level of task, or subject proficiency), and how do people demonstrate leadership? What does bad leadership look like, and why do some leaders excel in certain situations but not others? Should leaders be judged by what they accomplish or by the success of those they lead? In a recent column in BCPVPA's eNews (Sept. 26, 2020), I explored the difference between leadership using Mission Command or Command and Control. Although these sound like military concepts, I am sure that you have encountered them both. If you have ever described your boss (or maybe yourself) as a 'control freak', or if you have been frustrated when

"Should leaders be judged by what they accomplish, or by the success of those they lead?"

someone won't clearly communicate the 'end goal', you have experienced the downside of Command and Control or Mission Command leadership.

We are school leaders, managers, and administrators in a people-centric business. Our days are filled with dozens of personal interactions that require skill in analyzing and interpreting human behavior. Understanding elements of Organizational Behavior can help you be a better manager, leader, and administrator as you navigate, adapt and lead the complex interpersonal landscape in your school and district.

Look for Read Jorgensen's **Leadership Skills in Under 5 Minutes** in BCPVPA's eNews.

This monthly column is published on the last Friday of each month, and explores

OB topics that you can add to your leadership toolbox, all in under 5 minutes.

Stay on top of your professional health



The BCPVPA is pleased to offer its members the Early Intervention Program (EIP) by humanworks

Here to help you gain greater clarity and control of your professional health

BCPVPA EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAM

The EIP offers an excellent opportunity to be proactive in managing your health and well-being. It is designed to provide you with quick and easily accessible resources and counsel on how to best navigate your health-related concerns so that you can remain at work.

Questions about the EIP?

Visit the FAQ section on the BCPVPA or humanworks websites or contact:

humanworks

EMAIL: admin@humanworks.ca

PHONE: 604-734-4130

www.humanworks.ca

It was an interesting Summer, a time where I have felt uncomfortable, sad and angry, and not because of COVID-19. I have been sickened to learn about so many people – George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Jacob Blake in the US; Chantel Moore, Rodney Levi and Ejaz Ahmed Choudry in Canada – being killed by police. I attended a rally in my community, and I have done a lot of reading about racism and anti-racism in these past months. I know that my perspective is limited, I may make mistakes and need further education, but I want to start a dialogue. I recognize that I work within an imperfect system, and that trying to change that system may be a challenge.

I may sound somewhat negative about the public education system, but that is not the case. I am grateful to connect with parents, teachers, education assistants and senior leadership as we discuss racism. I am proud to work in a system that – while flawed – will “get us out of this mess” to paraphrase the words of Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Murray Sinclair. While we still have miles to go, our curricular documents integrate Indigenous Ways of Knowing into all aspects of our curriculum; students in BC can take English 12 First Peoples as an equivalent to English 12; and my own 10-year-old son knows more words in Hul’qumi’num than I do. I see all of this work as part of the long road towards reconciliation and I am grateful to work in a school district where we can speak openly about racism.

Here are some lessons that I am learning.

Lesson 1: Awareness

As a person, and a Principal, I acknowledge that I have grown up with the privilege of white skin, and have much to learn about the injustices that many Canadians experience because of their cultural heritage or the colour of their skin. I recognize that there are lived experiences within my own community that I cannot see because of my privilege.

With the publication of the *Calls to Action* by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the *Final Report on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, and the ongoing news reports of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) who continue to be murdered and incarcerated in high numbers in Canada, it is obvious that there are inequities and systemic barriers that negatively impact the children in my province and country. As an educator, I must acknowledge that the education system is part of those inequalities, and that systemic barriers continue to exist for children and families. The education system was founded on colonialism, and there are structures that linger and perpetuate the inequity that we see reflected in these publications and reports.

My BIPOC friends have taught me two important things:

- 1) **That it’s not about me:** the discomfort I feel is nothing in comparison to the discomfort that they have felt at times growing up in Canada.
- 2) **That it’s a time to listen and learn,** not to publicly express my own outrage and guilt which may have some unintended consequences for those who are more vulnerable.

Considering those points, I am conflicted about whether I should be writing about what I am learning, but my purpose is to underscore what those of us with privilege can do to better support the children and families experiencing barriers within the system and in our communities. I do so with an acute awareness of my privilege. As Desmond Cole, Tanya Talaga and others have stated, there are two Canadas. It’s important for us – as educators – to be aware of this.

Lesson 2: Denial

When I bring up the topic of racism with others, I often hear the phrase, “Well, at least Canada isn’t