

It's the Principal of the Thing: Chapter Synopses

Introduction

The introduction of this book makes evident the importance of principals as the often ignored leaders crucial to the task of recapturing respect for our public schools. This foreword is a rallying cry for citizens, politicians and educators to focus on the principals' role in achieving public school success. It introduces the concept of the principal as a coach of teachers; a teacher of teachers working directly with them in the classroom. The introduction spells out, in plain language, the essence of the book's premise and the burdensome but necessary task facing America's principals. *It's the Principal of the Thing* is an editorial, not a dull research tome. Finally the preface affirms the reason the author wrote this book.

Chapter 1: Does Certification = Qualification?

Here the reader is introduced to Harry Latter, certified but not qualified to teach. Harry's reason for becoming a teacher is recounted as well as the hoops he jumped through to gain his teacher certification. His need for meaningful instructional assistance is addressed. The question posed is, who failed: his college preparation program, his college supervisor, his principal or Harry himself? Though Principal Higgins, Harry's boss at Whitewood School, is certified, his qualification is also suspect. Examples and dialogue guide the reader. Though new instructional and leadership techniques are emerging in numerous school districts across this nation, the chapter suggests they remain far too few to have the desired impact on America's schools.

Chapter 2: Change of Scenery

In this chapter Harry leaves Whitewood School for a school in a new district. The chapter highlights the obstacles he faces at Clarksdale School in Old River with his challenging new principal, Jennifer Myers. Dr. Myers is the antithesis of William "Bill" Higgins.

Chapter 3: The Maestro

Dr. Bernard Green, Superintendent of Schools in Old River, has established a new direction for the schools in Old River. His forceful leadership has improved teaching in the system. He relies on his principals, department heads and supervisory personnel to be instructional leaders and coaches of their classroom teachers. In Chapter 3, Bernard Green forcefully addresses his administrative team. He stresses the importance of operating their schools with one or two objectives that reflect their individual school's needs. But he underscores the requirement that every administrator who coaches teachers will write a district-wide coaching objective. See pages 30 & 31.

Chapter 4: Harry's New Year

Read about Harry's "cold shivers" as he hears his name called at the opening assembly for the new school year. Learn about his beginning, his description of his new job to his wife, her relief and his evening preparation following his first day at Clarksdale School.

Chapter 5: Management and Discipline

Harry's past accompanies him to his early days at Clarksdale. Jennifer, a pro, quickly realizes her first fears and confronts the situation without delay. As Harry's coach and partner, she leads Harry to recognize his early shortcomings. When he acknowledges "some" of his deficiencies in classroom management, Jennifer assists her "pupil" in an attempt to improve his organizational skills. The logic of classroom management is laid out in this chapter. There is extensive dialogue between Jennifer and Harry regarding ways to improve.

Chapter 6: Jennifer Myers

Jennifer is introduced to the "coaching" concept. This is followed by a logical and analogous comparison to professional coaches in other fields: from ballerinas to quarterbacks. The chapter covers Jennifer's research into several supervisory practices for coaching teachers and her fascination with a long-standing and somewhat forgotten theory developed by Benjamin Bloom in his Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. The chapter contains a graphic pyramid of the Taxonomy.

Chapter 7: Observation of Behavior Patterns

Read about Jack and Jill and Santa Claus. Be creative and describe other patterns of behavior e.g. Robert Barone from, *Everybody Loves Raymond*, and his unusual habit. When one describes someone to another, that person's behavior patterns are part of the description. See how many you can list in describing a good friend, an outstanding teacher or a celebrity. Chapter 7 shows, in some detail, how an expert stays on top of her game and how Dr. Myers coaches her teachers in a collegial partnership.

Chapter 8: Unanticipated Events

This chapter should be renamed: Unanticipated Events in a Principal's Daily Existence. The author presents, for the taxpayer, some of the events that make this job incredibly difficult. How does Jennifer deal with these situations especially when parents are distressed or displeased? See if she supports her staff whether right or wrong.

Chapter 9: The Litigation Invasion

With dissatisfaction so prevalent in today's society at every level, the schools become easy targets for taking out frustrations. Pressure is intense in the classroom, the nurse's room and the principal's office.

Chapter 10: The Cassidy Attack

Here is a slight variation on a real knotty situation that fell heavily on Jennifer Myers to the extent that it negatively affected the efficient running of the school even by one as talented as she. Circumstances very similar to those described here tied the hands Dr. Meyers for several months. Lawyers seeking work have found opportune employment in the public schools.

Chapter 11: Principal vs CEO

A well-known CEO acquaintance of the author, after reading, *It's the Principal of the Thing*, challenged the comparison. Read this chapter and see what you think.

Chapter 12: Harry's Lesson Plan Ordeal

Harry struggled with the lesson plan he was responsible for designing for Jennifer's scheduled observation in his classroom. Panic paralyzed him in spite of Jennifer's attempt at boosting his self-confidence.

Chapter 13: Lesson Plan Review

Jennifer and Harry review his lesson plan together following Harry's weekend attempt at designing a comprehensive and effective plan. Jennifer supports and assists her "partner". However, she is firm and insists on Harry's working the Taxonomy into the lesson in some fashion.

Chapter 14: Don't Just Drop In

A rationale is established in this chapter for observing a planned-in-advance lesson that will be thoroughly analyzed by teacher and coach together. Harry's lecturing "pattern" of instruction is a contributing factor to his student's boredom and bad behavior. How will Jennifer help him? Can she?

Chapter 15: Jennifer Enters Room 9

The nucleus of the coaching model is described in Chapter 15.

Chapter 16: Observation and Analysis

Here is an extensive description of objective data and its analysis by both, teacher and coach. Jennifer is faced with a major interruption as she begins her examination of the data she scripted in Harry's class. She resolves the crisis and returns to her preparation for the post-observation session with Harry. Harry's anxieties are described as he reads the carbon copy of the classroom data Jennifer left for him.

Chapter 17: Preparation of Summary

The purpose of the summary of a coaching cycle is to provide "the teacher pupil" and coach with documentation that can be used to prepare for the next observation. It is a critical piece of the cycle and is intended to further unite coach and teacher (pupil) in improving instruction.

Chapter 18: Teaching AND Learning

As important as teaching patterns are, learning patterns are equally important. A coach can collect valuable learning data by observing students' patterns and how they respond to learning opportunities in the classroom. Are Harry's students motivated to learn? Is Harry aware of this critical piece of the learning process? Is it time for Jennifer to shift gears? She is reluctant to do so: a dilemma she must resolve. A variety of patterns are described in this chapter in a variety of settings.

Chapter 19: Harry's Counterpart

In Chapter 19, Jennifer is partners with, and coach for Grace Linn, a superior teacher and "pupil". Note the dramatic changes in preparing, discussing, teaching, analyzing and summarizing as compared to Jennifer's work with Harry. Both Harry's and Grace's lessons are teacher directed lessons to make for an easier comparison for the reader.

Chapter 20: Signs of Failure

The opening paragraphs of this chapter reinforce the concept of behavior patterns displayed in societal settings and in classrooms. As the chapter unfolds, Superintendent Green applies pressure on Jennifer regarding the status of Mr. Harry Latter. This results in her continued quandary regarding Harry and spurs her to further action. She ponders the many efforts she has put into her *Harry problem* with few results.

Chapter 21: Man Overboard

Dr. Myers spends time researching and examining the qualities displayed by good teachers. She designs a list for Harry. The pressure to deliver weighs heavily on Harry. He is discouraged.

Chapter 22: Termination

Confronting Harry is critical. He begs. She thinks of him, his wife and family: a difficult time for all. This chapter reviews necessary steps required in a termination action when all else fails.

Chapter 23: Tenure

An analysis of tenure, its plusses and minuses, are presented in Chapter 23 along with issues related to pre and post tenure dismissal actions.

Chapter 24: Monitoring Student Standards

This is a brief description of monitoring student standards as they relate to a district's curriculum requirements for all students.

Chapter 25: Kids in Today's Pop Culture

This is for public consumption. It tells how teachers and principals are affected by the culture students are exposed to outside of school. The following is a quote from the two opening paragraphs of this chapter: *“Further complicating the skilled principals’ efforts to supervise teachers are the incredulous societal problems dropped at school for remediation and resolution. Schools are becoming treatment centers as they attempt to cope with a decaying society’s contemporary problems: disrespect, drugs, crime, child abuse, and pregnancy (yes, even in grammar school). A few hours in front of a T.V. reveal and expose society’s values: hedonism, narcissism, self-gratification, materialism, self-centered individualism and idolatry along with sex and addictions of all kinds. Society in general accepts this T.V. fare and even endorses what it outlawed only a few decades ago; the schools are recipients of the fallout.*

The void in disadvantaged children’s medical, physical, nutritional, familial and emotional needs has become America’s schools’ to fill. Schools are saddled with moral and sexual issues while forbidden to offer proper solutions. How can schools define “proper” to the satisfaction of all?”

Chapter 26: The Secret of Effective Schools

The most critical element of successful schools is the one most overlooked by critics and budget overseers of public school financing including politicians who believe that money is the means to improve public education. This book’s highest priority is to educate the public that, without skilled coaches, teacher and student growth is severely limited. Money must be redistributed in a bold new way to affect change; to bring 20th Century principals into the 21st Century.

Chapter 27: Reflections

Dr. Myers reflects on the changes brought about to Old River schools during Bernard Green’s term as superintendent. This chapter is a flashback to the Old River Board of Education’s appointment of Dr. Green as its superintendent and his commanding and positive effect on the students, teachers and administrators in the district.

Chapter 28: Training Old River’s Principals

The training of the Old River Principals begins with a brainstorming session. This is followed by an administrative meeting to share the initial thinking explored by Green and his central office staff and to get feedback from the larger group.

Chapter 29: Practicum

Chapter 28 extends Jennifer’s flashback in Chapter 27. Further it details one way for a school district to begin a collective training program for its administrators. This section focuses on planning for four separate workshops, each focusing on one segment of the coaching cycle.

Chapter 30: On-Site Training

As with any training program, to be effective workshops must reflect the district’s needs. One way to provide on-site training is described in this chapter.

Chapter 31: Testing Myths

To expect that all students will achieve success as measured by testing is absurd and unreasonable. Such an imprudent concept is debunked in this section of the book. With expert coaches affecting teacher improvement and student growth, positive results will follow.

Chapter 32: A Billion Here: A Billion There

When the book was written, an attempt was made to offer some understanding of what a billion is in real money and how billions have been spent without closing gaps. How does one explain trillions? Taxpayer money can be redistributed in a more effective way to achieve desired school results centered on a coaching approach.

Chapter 33: Remedies

There are 19 suggested remedies offered in this last chapter. Some may be challenged and new ones proffered but remedies must be employed to save our schools. *It's the Principal of the Thing.*