



BOOK REVIEW:

The Teacher's Principal: How School Leaders Can Support and Motivate their Teachers

By Dr. Susan M. Sibert and Ken Kerchenske



DR. SUSAN SIBERT



KEN KERCHENSKE

Many teachers throughout our commonwealth are frustrated. The love and joy of teaching has been overshadowed by bureaucracy, fallout from the global pandemic, time spent on non-teaching duties and a host of societal issues reflected in our schools. The book, *The Teacher's Principal: How School Leaders Can Support and Motivate their Teachers*, by Jen Schwanke (ASCD, 2022) offers insight for principals to support good teachers and help those struggling to remain dedicated to students and their achievement.

Everyone has bad days, but how teachers behave and perform over time is the focus principals should note before acting. Schwanke suggests that principals identify both negative and positive teacher characteristics through the 3 P's – purpose, priority, and patterns – and describes specific actions principals can take to support and motivate teachers in their school. Patterns are seen as regular habits and routines and fuel drive with purpose. Schwanke defines teacher priorities as commitment to student learning. For instance, a principal who has a teacher who is dependable, involved in extra curricular activities and reviews student records, should be noticed, complemented and reinforced for these behaviors. On the other hand, a principal may supervise a teacher who is detached, presenting as irritated or annoyed and fails to communicate with parents. In that case, Schwanke suggests actions like showing empathy, changing job responsibilities (even temporarily) and modeling solutions.

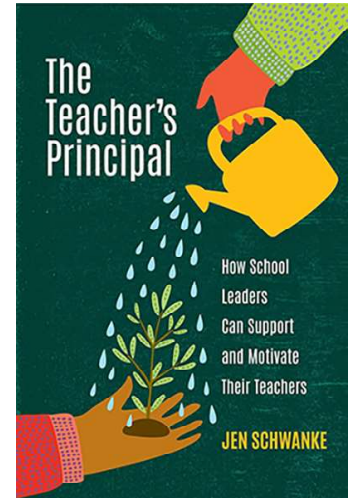
Negative teacher behaviors challenge principals because they impact student achievement. Some behaviors are short-lived, but when patterns are formed, students are often impacted. The author presents a number of typical scenarios and how principals might take action. One scenario addressed a teacher's behavior of sabotaging leadership or regularly correcting mistakes. In some cases, direct conversations about the behavior are best. In other cases, ignoring the behavior can extinguish it. The assistant principal described in the book asked for support from the

principal, who met with the teacher and addressed the behavior head-on. In fact, Schwanke suggests that principals go to the source of the problem and address negative concerns directly and individually.

The best parts of this book (in our opinion) are the descriptions of specific issues that typically arise for principals, and then suggestions on how to address each situation.

For example, throughout the book, the author uses vignettes to present ideas on how to deal with teachers who are not engaged in professional development, are overwhelmed with the responsibilities of teaching or balancing work with personal obligations and even teachers who remain on the job long after they have lost the dedication to the profession. Within the nine chapters are vignettes describing common scenarios and how the principal addressed each, showing successes as well as leadership failures. Schwanke has principals consider their own patterns and practices. An example is debunking the idea of principal visibility. Principals can ask themselves: Are you visible or available to your teachers? She recommends principals hold office hours, rather than an open-door policy to allow the principal time to complete their tasks, but still commit to a designated time to be available to teachers who need to know the principal is accessible. Another idea is being willing to eliminate unnecessary tasks or assist teachers to prioritize the most important work, especially when all the work seems important to student success.

Lastly, the focus of this plainly written, 152-page book (that could be read in a day or in two evenings) is principal actions in relation to good and great teachers, who are sometimes short-changed when school leaders focus time and energy on problems and negative situations. Truly listening and considering teacher feedback is one of the most important things principals can do to show support.



This book has multiple purposes. It could be read by a principal at any stage of a leadership career to improve practice. We also see this book as being a good study for all members of a leadership team to read as part of a professional learning group. The publisher, ASCD, offers an online study guide ([https://www.ascd.org/books/the-teachers-principal?chapter=an-ascd-study-guide-for-the-teachers-principal-how-school-leaders-can-support-and-motivate-](https://www.ascd.org/books/the-teachers-principal?chapter=an-ascd-study-guide-for-the-teachers-principal-how-school-leaders-can-support-and-motivate-their-teachers)

[their-teachers](https://www.ascd.org/books/the-teachers-principal?chapter=an-ascd-study-guide-for-the-teachers-principal-how-school-leaders-can-support-and-motivate-their-teachers)). Our teachers need support now more than ever. This book contains practical information to assist school leaders to provide that vital support. ■

REFERENCE:

Schwanke, J. (2022). *The Teacher's Principal: How School Leaders Can Support and Motivate their Teachers*. ASCD.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: Dr. Susan M. Sibert is the Professor and Coordinator of the Principal Certification Program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, Pennsylvania. She may be contacted at smsibert@iup.edu

Ken Kerchenske is the Superintendent of Schools, Cambria Heights School District, Patton, Pennsylvania. He may be contacted at kkerchenske@chsd1.org



FALL 2023 PD CALENDAR

There is no cost associated with the **Power Hour*** sessions (4-5 PM), but registration is required to have access to the Zoom webinars. The three-hour (9 AM-12 PM) **Grow 180**** sessions are new and take a “deep dive” into specific topics. **The cost is \$199 for Members; and \$299 for Non-Members.** See below for details and links to register.

NOVEMBER:

Nothing But “Net” Working - POWER HOUR* - 11/8/2023 at 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Presenters: Regional Service Specialists (RSS)

Session Description: *Networking is a comfortable way to set each other up for success.* We need your input in order to best plan for the PA Principals Association networking sessions, so they are meaningful for YOU.

Register: <https://ppa13.wildapricot.org/event-5393859>

Fierce Feedback - POWER HOUR* - 11/14/2023 at 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Presenters: Dr. Michael S. Snell and Regional Service Specialists (RSS)

Session Description: Do you have trouble providing honest feedback to teachers and colleagues? This session will focus on how to deliver straight-forward feedback, which is necessary for school leaders.

Register: <https://ppa13.wildapricot.org/event-5394003>

Personalized Learning - GROW 180** - 11/15/2023 at 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Presenter: Dr. Michael S. Snell

Session Description: In this session, we will define personalized learning and discuss the “why” of working to meet students individual learning needs. We will work together to identify areas to begin your journey such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, student work, technology and structures.

Register: <https://ppa13.wildapricot.org/event-5394013>

DECEMBER:

Improving Leadership Through Simulations - POWER HOUR* - 12/5/2023 at 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Presenters: Dr. Michael S. Snell and Regional Service Specialists (RSS)

Session Description: Join us for this fast paced, one-hour simulation focusing on decisions school leaders face. This session will also hone your people skills, provide practice for having tough conversations and address issues that are a part of a school leader’s day. **Register:** <https://ppa13.wildapricot.org/event-5394047>