

RSS Update

Gratitude and Leadership: Lessons from a Mentor

By Michael Allison, West II Regional Service Specialist (RSS)

I have been feeling reflective and grateful for my successful career as a principal and the mentors who have guided me along the way. I am not sure if the approaching holidays are making me sentimental or if my retirement is just becoming a reality. Over the past 36 years, I have had an array of mentors, but I want to thank Dr. Charles Reina, my friend, mentor and former superintendent, for his sage advice and wisdom that still resonates with me today. His words had a significant impact on my role as principal and how our administrative team interacted with our school community. His advice is beneficial to new and veteran principals as well.

Dr. Reina had two mantras he shared with our administration team weekly, if not more often. Even though our team attributed him with speaking these words, we had no idea where he got them from. However, they became the basis for how we operated as school leaders. The first was, "Say what you mean, mean what you say and don't say it mean!" Leadership regularly involves difficult conversations held under difficult circumstances that are often charged with emotions. Stay under control, do not sugarcoat your words, be clear with what you say, and address challenges honestly, objectively and with care and empathy.

"Eat the frog for breakfast!" was the second rule. He would ask me, "Michael, what do you think a frog tastes like? If you eat it now or later, is it going to taste any better? Get it done with and eat the frog!" Do not put off difficult tasks; get them out of the way and move forward with your day! Avoid dwelling on them, causing yourself more stress.

These simple bits of wisdom are not earth-shattering but sound practices to enhance our principals' toolkit, earn respect in all of our interactions and alleviate some of the stress that comes with being a school leader. Consider them and give them a try! Thank you, Dr. Reina!