

Motivation begins from within

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This article is aimed at all Heads of School who are doing their utmost to create a warm and conducive culture which helps the school move forward in times of constant change. It is written as part of the initiatives being undertaken by *The Malta Society for Educational Administration and Management* to disseminate work in the area of educational management and leadership. The *Education 2000* Editorial Board is happy to support such an initiative at a time when the concepts of management and leadership need to be clearly understood and lived.

We all enjoy the company of cheerful, enthusiastic and growth-oriented individuals. We gravitate to them and try to emulate them. Such people often share six characteristics which leaders require if they want to be motivators of people rather than demotivators. These characteristics are: knowing yourself, liking yourself, taking control, flexibility, accepting reality, and living fully. Let us examine each of these leadership characteristics.

1 Know yourself

Knowing yourself implies knowing your values, the values you uphold, the values you project, the values you live. It means being able to answer the perennial question, "Who am I, and what aspects of life mean most to me at this point in life?" Only after answering this question can individuals order their priorities and live by their values. When that happens they gain self-respect and feel good about themselves and what they do.

Heads of School who know themselves recognise not only their strengths but also their weaknesses. Knowing their abilities and deficiencies allows them to be comfortable in delegating responsibilities to those who are more capable in identified areas.

Knowing yourself also means building enough self-confidence to believe in oneself, in what you are worth and what you can give.



2 Like yourself

We often tend to ignore this characteristic as we engage ourselves in addressing organisational needs. People who like themselves focus on their strengths rather than their weaknesses. They think positively. They set high standards for themselves. They set achievable goals and celebrate their success. Such people express their satisfaction openly. They assert themselves, openly expressing their thoughts and taking control of their decisions rather than letting others control them.

Leaders who possess this quality can establish a positive climate in their schools by empowering others, by valuing diversity, by focusing on individual and collective strengths, by setting high standards, by rewarding improvement, by celebrating success and establishing a set of values that everyone identifies with and lives.

3 Taking control

Self-confident people take charge, make decisions, and take responsibility for the consequences. I know of many a Head who, even in the highly centralised system we had in the past, were willing to risk and take the road not taken by others, since they were convinced that was the best thing to do. They are the ones who do not blame themselves or others when things go wrong. That is often the easy way out. These Heads are doers and therefore do their best to focus on the problem so as to solve it. Taking control here is not of the coercive type. Rather they try to exert their influence by clearly delineating rules, expectations, and consequences. By empowering others, they send out clear messages (to those who want to hear!) that they believe in others and want to create opportunities for them to take the initiative necessary to bring about improvement.

4 Being flexible

Flexibility is a key ingredient in any job or facet of life. The flexible person knows and appreciates that every issue/ problem has several solutions. They understand the need to



be willing to listen to alternative views, to modify their behaviour, to change their perceptions, to try out different alternatives. Your way cannot be the only way forward. Such a perspective and style of management can only spell disaster.

The flexible person acknowledges changes in oneself as a sign of growth. Such a perspective does not only pay lip service to the concept of lifelong learning we are so used to hearing about, it helps to create a lifelong need to learn. Such people are willing to immerse themselves into new situations, in working with others to challenge the status quo. They are individuals who revel in new insights.

Flexible, growth-oriented Heads model growth for their members of staff and create a climate that encourages one and all to seek growth opportunities within and outside the school. Such Heads of School go out of their way to see that their staff have the necessary facilities, structures and opportunities required for personal and collective growth to take place. They are excited when staff bring forth new ideas, when they share their successes and failures, when they ask for help, when they provide constructive criticism. They are the ones who express this excitement throughout the school and all this helps to create a warm climate where everyone knows that they are important and can contribute to the welfare and development of their school.

5 Accept reality

These are indeed hard times, especially for us who grew up in a different era with the things that confront us being so different from the ones we were brought up in. Yet, those Heads that have accepted that reality is different take pride in their accomplishments. By accepting the fact that children have changed, being influenced as they are by so many social influences, good and not so good, they relate to them differently than those who expect the youngsters to act as they did ten or twenty years ago.

Realistic Heads also acknowledge that the teaching community in the schools themselves has changed and that education now involves a more complex set of issues and relationships than we have ever addressed or experienced.

Realistic Heads communicate honestly and truthfully with their staff, encouraging them to face reality and providing them with support in confronting difficult issues of a personal and professional nature.

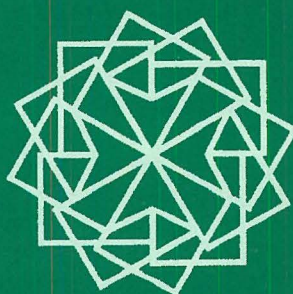
6 Living fully

The best educators live fully. They do not live and die for education. They write, read, travel, visit museums, go to the theatre, do voluntary work, enjoy a social and athletic life. They have varied interests and lead exciting lives. As I write this I am pinching myself as I appreciate how difficult at times this is for us who are immersed in the field of education, how difficult it is to stop and spend time with family and friends. Our work is so challenging that we often give it top priority over everyone and everything else. This should not be.

It is important for Heads to enrich their school environment with their out-of-school experiences and to encourage staff members to do the same. If, and where educators bring their own backgrounds, interests, etc. to the school, quality education often results. Education is more than books and teaching in the classroom. Education is life, life is education.

Needless to say leaders cannot model qualities they do not possess. They must motivate themselves to become upbeat and growth-oriented individuals if they expect to find or nurture those traits in others. But, those Heads who succeed in developing the motivational characteristics described here will be rewarded with school climates where not only they but their staff know themselves, like themselves, exercise control, are flexible, accept reality and live life to the full.

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The Malta Society for Educational Administration and Management aims at promoting good practice, professional development and research in educational administration and management. Anyone interested in learning more about the Society can get in touch with the President (Tel. 32902404; email: cbez1@educ.um.edu.mt) or the Secretary, Mr Carmel Busutil (Tel. 433411; email: busutil@global.net.mt)



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