Trust is the key to leadership



By Matt Jarman
President

As a primary school leader for most of my career in country and metropolitan schools, I am often asked about the key lessons I have learned about leadership and how it applies to my current role.

There are a number of experiences that have shaped how I feel about leadership but at the top of the list is trust – you need to trust your staff and they need to be able to trust you.

Trust and staff, or member, buy-in comes with, in my experience, how you choose to lead. I think that applies to organisations like the State School Teachers' Union of Western Australia too.

Any organisation that wants to successfully represent a very diverse group of members should be clear what it stands for, offer only what it can deliver and be clear about its decision-making processes.

So, let's be clear what the SSTUWA stands for – we stand for a fully-funded public education system.

We stand for a culture of respect for everyone who works in public education – be they our members or not.

We stand for school leaders, teachers and lecturers to be safe at work, to not be harassed by students or parents either physically, verbally or online.

We stand for a work culture that has the solid structure of properly negotiated agreements that set the rules by which the workplace operates.

We stand for making difficult decisions, sometimes unpopular ones, that deliver the best outcomes for as many of our members as possible.

Above all we try to stand for integrity – to involve our members in the decision-making, to be guided by their views and to have a structure that allows members a voice.

We instigated a review into public education to identify the core issues that are having an impact on our public education system – a system that is under enormous strain from teacher shortages, a system which is bleeding experienced teachers, struggling to attract new leaders and that is cripplingly short of full funding.

The review attracted thoughtful submissions from every major peer group in the sector, as well as many individual educators, parents and former teachers and leaders.

The review panel will deliver its report in the coming weeks.

At the same time the SSTUWA, through a process that began in November last year at State Council Conference, has delivered a complex Log of Claims for both the schools and TAFE sector.

The schools log contains 98 different claims. Issues raised cover salaries, the work of teaching and leading, system support, attraction and retention, developing a safety culture in schools and general issues.

School members have just finished voting on that log and negotiations are getting underway. At the same time a TAFE Log of Claims with 52 different items to be addressed has also been developed and served upon the employers.

These processes take time, commitment and passion.

It is the fundamental role of unions – the very essence of representing members on the everyday issues they encounter and want to see addressed.

A union isn't a shopfront to draw in the unwary to part with fees that go to people in other states, a shadowy set-up that has no voting processes in place and no structure or oversight of their operations; one set up to pursue niche issues that have nothing to do with education.

You can't claim to represent your members when you exclude yourself from the negotiating table because of a setback or two, or when your absolute core aim is to take the teaching experience out of school leadership and impose a quasi-business model which could see anyone with a business degree trying to manage schools.

Education is more than ever in need of strong leadership and united representation.

You have to wonder what the true motives are of people who spend their time not spruiking their own solutions but instead denigrating the hard work of others.

As I learned in every school I worked in, it is a united effort that delivers success. It is proper consultation, it is management by consensus, a team effort that understands the value of each and every level of the system and every person on the team.

We won't get every decision right; we won't win every fight – but I am proud that the SSTUWA delivers suggestions and solutions. We will continue to do so.

Thank you to all members who took time to vote on the Schools Log of Claims 2023. With 97 per cent of voting members supporting the Log this will now be served on the employer.

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