Five tips to build strong leadership



“Challenging, but Achievable” - this catchphrase, borrowed from Kylie Bice, education consultant and owner of Growing Up Greatness, is one that simply captures the nature of middle leadership.

Whether your title is head of department, head of learning area or program coordinator, the role can be extremely challenging. The big question is, how do we make it achievable?

Whether you were strategic in earning this role or found yourself stepping into it due to contextual circumstances, leading a team of teachers to engage students in the delivery of the curriculum or programs you are passionate about requires time, patience and outstanding communication skills.

With increasing workloads, what seems like ever-changing curriculum, a litany of compliance tasks and the responsibility of a (sometimes very large) team of professionals on your shoulders, it’s easy to see why middle leadership is such a challenging role to take on.

Many report feeling sandwiched between wanting to protect their staff from the data and compliance workload to balancing that with following the directions from their executive team, who experience their own workload pressures from the system itself.

So how do we achieve everything we (and our school) want to achieve as middle leaders? Here are five strategies good leaders use to make the job achievable.

Build your team

Whether you get to choose your staff or not, building your team focuses on providing clear guidelines around how you will work and how you want your team to operate. Always model the behaviour you expect.

Be respectful of individual needs, communicate your expectations clearly and explicitly and have compassion for those people as individuals who want to have a life beyond the school gates.

This should empower you to create a cohesive team who have each other's backs and work effectively together for the best outcomes for your students and contributes to positive mental health outcomes for the whole department. This way, you'll get the best out of your team.

Create a vision

A shared vision is needed to ensure you share the same professional values and employ a range of strategies to achieve your vision. Create it together, as a team. People are much more inclined to be on board with something they have ownership of.

Write your vision down. Display it in your collegiate office area and revisit it regularly throughout the year. Unpack the vision and set specific SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) goals which are included in your operational plan that will lead the team to success. Review, feedback and update the goals as you achieve them.

Utilise your staff

Utilise the expertise and passion of your colleagues. Everyone has experience and skills that can be harnessed to support the team, engage that difficult class, or work effectively with colleagues outside of your team. Use this to everyone's advantage.

Lead by example

As we do with our students, set the tone for your expectations and demonstrate them with your staff.

Communicate respectfully, behave professionally, actively listen and respond, set boundaries and limits on your working day by following the new Schools General Agreement 2023 and Award 1993, when registered, which will provide further clauses on workload reduction, and keep up to date with what's happening within the system, as well as your school.

Don't micro-manage

Micro-managing is endemic in the education system. It feels like we are all micro-managed to within an inch of our lives. But as middle leaders, you can choose the alternative – have faith in your staff.

Know what each person's strengths and weaknesses are and empower them to play to their strengths.

Teachers are professionals who know their content, have sound behaviour management skills, are excellent communicators and want the best for their students, so have faith in their abilities and trust them to do their job well.

If a member of your team needs additional support in one of the areas mentioned, then address that with the individual. Don't alter the way you want your team to function because of one person.



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