Principals sometimes habitually punish their teachers' good performances and should consider the possibility that current rewards and punishment systems result in teacher behavior contrary to what is desired. Several examples of such good deeds being punished are offered and solutions recommended.

Introduction

When principals are asked why teachers do not do as desired they frequently reply: "Because teachers aren't motivated," "They don't want to," "They don't care," or "They're lazy" (Fournier, 1988). Administrators often indicate that the reasons for nonperformance reside within their teachers. However, principals who complain about lack of motivation in their staff or second guess why teachers do not do as expected might consider the possibility that the administrative reward and punishment systems are punishing desired actions while rewarding negative behaviors.

Let us consider how principals punish desirable teacher behavior. We have witnessed workers in school systems frequently punished for doing what is expected and have labeled this practice the "No good deed goes unpunished" effect. What well-intended principal, you ask, would punish teachers for good performance? The answer is that many do so routinely and without awareness of what they are doing.

Examples in which desired performance is punished are everywhere. Sometimes the source(s) of punishment are highly visible, and sometimes they are subtle. Here are a few examples:

- Teachers who do difficult work well are assigned more and more difficult work.
- Teachers who handle hard to control students are given all the "problem" students to work with (and perhaps problem parents, as well).
Teachers who complete assignments early are given additional assignments, or the assignments are changed at the last moment, sometimes after efficient workers have already completed the original assignment.

The time of teachers who arrive promptly for faculty meetings is wasted waiting for latecomers.

Teachers who make suggestions are assigned the extra work of carrying out their suggestions.

When teachers try to get students involved in extra activities, they are required to complete and submit multiple copies of paperwork in order to get approval.

In each of these examples teachers were acting desirably, and yet, from the teacher's perspective they probably felt that they were being punished. In time one could see why such teachers might be late with projects and late to meetings, not offer ideas or do shoddy work. Such behavior could lead the principal to wonder why teachers just do not do what they are supposed to. Principals who complain about lack of motivation in their staffs and disappointing performance might consider the possibility that their own administrative behavior is punishing their teachers and resulting in behavior contrary to what they want.

It is an axiom in the behavioral sciences that people do what they do because of what happens to them when they do it (Daniels, 1994). Based on the above example, it is clear that people will fail to perform to avoid what they perceive as aversive consequences. Actions are defined and controlled by their effects and principals will go a long way toward improving their leadership effectiveness if they will try to see situations through the eyes of their teachers and stop punishing positive behavior. At best those punishments should be replaced with rewards.

Reward desirable behavior, don't punish it.

If we believe that one of the keys to effective management and leadership is to influence behavior then we might consider a method that was identified 85 years ago and repeatedly has passed the test of time. This approach is based on the idea that behavior is mainly a function of its consequences and that people do what they do because of what happens to them when they do it. This is called the Law of Effect. It was explained in detail in 1913 by Edward Thorndike. It is just as applicable today.

The Law of Effect encourages principals to pay particular attention to the outcomes teachers receive for engaging in selected behaviors.
Yet, principals continue to do otherwise! To minimize inappropriate and sabotaging consequences, administrators should give positive consequences or re-enforce to those who perform. In fact, a re-enforcer is defined as something that increases the occurrence of preceding behaviors. Hence, punishment must be replaced with what is to be perceived as rewards by the teacher. Rewards increase behavior; punishments inhibit behavior. How long would you remain a principal if your paycheck was replaced with a beating?

Likewise, do not reward teachers for nonperformance or poor performance; there must be negative consequences to teachers under these circumstances. If nothing else, rewards must be withheld. By considering the Law of Effect administrators can better understand why teachers may not perform as expected and take corrective actions. Admittedly, this is a simple idea to be sure, but one not always easily put into practice when administering, or when accountability concerns are pressing.

When teacher performance is sub-par, administrators rarely believe that their own behaviors may be responsible in any way. Such near-sightedness seems to be a part of human nature and has been labeled the "fundamental attribution error" (Greenberg & Baron, 1997). This error in thinking is the tendency to blame others' performance difficulties on their personality characteristics and negative traits such as: lack of intelligence, laziness, carelessness, etc., while minimizing environmental and situational influences, including the impact principals have on teachers' performance.

Substituting Rewards for Punishments

Let us see how we can replace punishments for good performance with rewards in the examples given previously. In the first two examples we had the common situation where persons who do good work are given more and more to do. Instead of punishing them with more work, it would make sense to give the problem slower payoff for either attention or less work on the next project. Administrative options might include: we cannot show favoritism, the work won't get

66
done, etc. Each of these objections requires a specific administrative response. Yes, such action will probably take more administration time and effort at the moment, but like raising a child it is usually a situation of "pay me now or pay me more later." If problem teachers are dealt with immediately, directly, and personally they can be shown that there are payoffs for compliance, instead of noncompliance and that noncompliance will not work. Hence, long term administrative workload will diminish. Too often not only is the efficient performer punished, the shirker is rewarded. Both must change.

The third example was teachers who complete work early being punished by being given additional work or by having the assignment changed. The former complication may be remedied in much the same way as noted above for the earlier examples. However, we must make sure we are consistent in our assignments and that they are well conceived and accurately conveyed from the start to avoid last minute adjustments that negatively affect efficient workers. Before making a work assignment it is a good idea to be certain it is truly needed and is workable. We must not confuse activity with results, giving work for work's sake. Again, we see that this requires special attention on the part of the person or persons in charge. If last minute changes are necessary, it would be best to consider options beyond simply reallocation to the same teachers. This may be done by dividing the task among several or different staff members if possible, or simply doing it oneself.

Note, this is applicable where the need to redo work is caused by changing assignments and not because of inadequate or sloppy performance by teachers.

Regarding the example of waiting to start meetings for the arrival of late teachers, the remedy is straightforward. Start and stop meetings promptly. Do not waste every one's time waiting or rehashing missed material with late arrivals. Bring them up to speed outside the meeting, preferably at a time that is convenient for those who arrived late, such as during a lunch period or after school. Explain why it must be done at that time. This not only rewards those who are punctual, it also penalizes tardiness, minimizing the chances of it continuing.

The next example noted how it is often easy to assign tasks to those who conceive them. Take into account who might be best suited to act on such suggestions. If they legitimately involve suggesting teachers, make sure they have adequate help and resources to minimize the process. Also, find some means to reward the suggestion process.

The last example noted the cost in time and effort to teachers trying to comply with requests that they get students more involved with varied activities. When asking a favor, make sure to streamline the requirements to do the favor. Do not exact obstacles or people will ask why they should bother. Make it as easy as
possible to comply, not difficult, and let those involved know that you are trying to facilitate their help. Then, reward them for doing so.

In conclusion, principals have considerable influence over the behaviors of their teachers if they are willing to exert it. However, action must be taken in a thoughtful, well-planned, and consistent fashion, one that treats everyone equitably, so that good performance is not punished and that EVERY GOOD DEED GOES REWARDED.
References


